

School of Economics and Management  
Department of Business Administration

FEKN90

Business Administration-

*Degree Project Master of Science in Business and Economics*

Spring term of 2013

# **THE EMPLOYER BRAND AS A SYMBOLIC RESOURCE**

**Generation Y and 'consumption' of the employer brand**

**Authors:**

Linnea Löow and Lina Bredberg

**Supervisor:**

Magnus Nilsson

## **ABSTRACT**

The postmodern western society has influenced the labour market, which is now said to become increasingly similar to the contemporary consumer market. Furthermore, a new generation, Generation Y, has emerged on the labour market and contributes to this development. The changing labour market has forced companies to find new ways to develop a strong employer brand in order to attract, motivate and retain competent employees. The strategy to accomplish this has during the last decades resulted in an entire research field, referred to as employer branding.

Previous research on employer branding has to a large extent focused on the possible gains of the employer. This master thesis wishes to instead highlight the position and viewpoint of the employees and the possible advantages gained from the employer brand. By attempting to look upon employees as strategic ‘consumers’ of the employer brand, the authors wish to reach a deeper understanding of the outcomes of employer branding. In order to accomplish this, a qualitative case study at Siemens Sweden has been conducted, using semi-structured interviews.

The results of the collected empirical data provided interesting but ambiguous answers. While identifying with the employer brand, the employees did not demonstrate ‘consumption’ of the employer brand as a symbolic resource in their identity creation. The reasons for why employees tended to identify with the employer brand while still being unwilling or unable to use it as a symbolic resource when creating their social identity were as follows: 1) the fact that work task and profession preceded the employer brand, 2) insufficient public familiarity with the employer brand and the impact of a construed external image, 3) the ‘value’ incorporated in economic compensation, 4) the employees lack of choice.

## THE EMPLOYER BRAND AS A SYMBOLIC RESOURCE

**Title:** The Employer Brand as a Symbolic Resource – Generation Y and ‘consumption’ of the employer brand

**Level:** Degree Project Master of Science in Business and Economics

**Author:** Lina Bredberg and Linnea Lööv

**Supervisor:** Magnus Nilsson

**Date:** 2013 – May

**Aim:** This master thesis aims to consider the degree to which knowledge from existing literature on consumer research, generation Y and the social psychology field can add to and complement our understanding of how employer branding and in particular the employer brand is used by individuals in the construction of their social identity.

**Method:** This master thesis is a qualitative case study conducted at Siemens Sweden, taking on an abductive research approach. Primary data has been collected through semi-structured depth-interviews where projective techniques have been used. The method for analysis follows ‘The Miles and Huberman framework’ and the empirical findings will be reported in chapter four.

**Result & Conclusions:** The analysis of the results implies that Gen Y employees at Siemens Sweden identify with their employer brand since the psychological contract was perceived as being upheld. However, it was not possible to confirm that employees of Gen Y use their employer brand as a symbolic resource when creating their social identity. Four potential explanations for why this was not possible to conclude were outlined: work tasks precede the employer brand, lack of public familiarity, an experienced ‘low’ initial wage rate and how this impacts the employer brand’s image and lastly the employees’ perceived lack of employment-choice which resulted in that they do not find themselves in a position of ‘choosing’ among employers.

**Suggestions for future research:** The results from this study implies further research on *when* and *why* the employer brand precedes work tasks and profession as a symbolic resource in employees’ social identity creation. Further research on what impact trainee-programs have on employees’ identification with the employer brand is also requested.

**Contribution of the thesis:** This master thesis indicates a more nuanced picture of the employee as a ‘consumer of the employer brand’ than what has previously been suggested by theory. The research highlights the importance of the employment experience as an end itself and therefore promotes the concept of the employee as a ‘hedonist consumer of the employer brand’ rather than a ‘communicator’ of the symbols attached to the employer brand.

**Key words:** Employer Branding, Identity Creation, Generation Y, The Postmodern Consumer and the ‘consumption of the employer brand’.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

To begin with, we would like to thank our supervisor Magnus Nilsson for his excellent guidance during the spring of 2013. Our tutorial sessions have been most beneficial and stimulating for our learning process.

We would also like to thank the Talent Acquisition Manager, Cecilia Lundgren, at Siemens Sweden for her time and warm welcoming at the company. It was through her efforts that we got introduced to the respondents and she provided important insights of how employer branding can be applied in practice.

Furthermore, we are very grateful to all of the respondents at Siemens who were willing to sit down and share their thoughts and opinions with us. Their experiences enriched us with a broad understanding of the contexts surrounding employer branding activities and the role of the employee.

Lastly, we would like to thank our friends and family who have put up with us during this process. We could not have finished this thesis without their constant support and encouragement. Linnea's parents in particular, who provided us with housing, transport and coaching during our interviews in Upplands Väsby. A special thanks and dedication also goes to Lina's grandmother who was always very supportive about her granddaughter's education but unfortunately passed away before this thesis was completed.

May, 2013

---

Lina Bredberg

---

Linnea Lööw

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>ABSTRACT .....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>7</b>
1.1 OUTLINE .....	7
1.2 INTRODUCTION .....	8
1.3 PROBLEM DISCUSSION .....	10
1.4 OBJECTIVE .....	11
1.5 RESEARCH QUESTION .....	12
1.5.1 PRIMARY RESEARCH QUESTION .....	12
1.5.2 SECONDARY RESEARCH QUESTION .....	12
1.6 DEFINITION OF IDENTITY .....	12
<b>CHAPTER 2: METHODOLOGY.....</b>	<b>14</b>
2.1 SCIENTIFIC STARTING POINT .....	14
2.2 ABDUCTIVE RESEARCH APPROACH .....	15
2.3 CHOICE OF METHOD.....	16
2.3.1 RESEARCH STRATEGY: A QUALITATIVE CASE STUDY .....	16
2.3.2 SEMI-STRUCTURED DEPTH-INTERVIEWS .....	16
2.4 CHOICE OF PROJECTIVE TECHNIQUES .....	18
2.5 CHOICE OF CASE STUDY COMPANY .....	19
2.5.1 SIEMENS' EMPLOYER BRAND.....	20
2.6 CHOICE OF RESPONDENTS .....	21
2.7 ANALYSIS OF EMPIRICS.....	22
2.8 RESEARCH EXECUTION .....	22
<b>CHAPTER 3: PREVIOUS RESEARCH ON CENTRAL CONCEPTS.....</b>	<b>24</b>
3.1 CONSUMPTION.....	24
3.2 THE POSTMODERN CONSUMER .....	27
3.2.1 CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR AND THE CONSUMPTION OF BRANDS.....	29
3.2.2 FUNCTIONAL AND SYMBOLIC VALUES.....	30
3.3 THE POSTMODERN EMPLOYEE.....	30
3.3.1 GENERATION Y AND THE FUTURE LABOUR MARKET .....	30
3.4 EMPLOYER BRANDING .....	33
3.4.1 THE EMPLOYER BRAND.....	35
3.4.2 THE PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTRACT .....	37
3.4.3 'EMPLOYER BRAND' IDENTIFICATION.....	40
3.5 LINKS BETWEEN THE THEORETICAL ORIENTATIONS .....	43

## THE EMPLOYER BRAND AS A SYMBOLIC RESOURCE

3.5.1 THE EMPLOYEE – A CONSUMER OR COMMODITY? .....	44
<b>CHAPTER 4: ANALYSIS OF EMPIRICAL FINDINGS .....</b>	<b>46</b>
<b>4.1. EMPLOYER BRAND IDENTIFICATION.....</b>	<b>46</b>
<b>4.2 THE EMPLOYER BRAND AS A SYMBOLIC RESOURCE .....</b>	<b>52</b>
<b>4.3 SUMMARY .....</b>	<b>58</b>
<b>CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION .....</b>	<b>59</b>
<b>5.1 CLOSING DISCUSSION.....</b>	<b>59</b>
<b>5.2 MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS.....</b>	<b>61</b>
<b>5.3 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH .....</b>	<b>62</b>
<b>LIST OF REFERENCES .....</b>	<b>63</b>
<b>ELECTRONIC SOURCES .....</b>	<b>67</b>
<b>APPENDIX .....</b>	<b>68</b>
<b>1. INTERVIEW TEMPLATE, SIEMENS .....</b>	<b>68</b>
<b>2. PICTURES USED IN THE INTERVIEWS .....</b>	<b>71</b>
<b>3. ARTICLE .....</b>	<b>76</b>

# **CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION**

## **1.1 OUTLINE**

### **CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION**

This chapter presents an introduction and background to the research field, followed by a problem discussion. Thereafter, the objective is specified, which evolves into the two research questions of the master thesis. As a final note, a definition of the term 'identity' is presented.



### **CHAPTER 2 - METHODOLOGY**

The scientific starting point and the research approach is first presented, followed by a method discussion. Further on, the choice of case study company and respondents is presented, followed by a description of how the analysis and research execution were conducted.



### **CHAPTER 3 - PREVIOUS RESEARCH ON CENTRAL CONCEPTS**

Theory relevant for the case study is presented, commencing with a description of the field of consumption and the postmodern consumer. In the following section, the postmodern employee and generation Y is explored and lastly, the concept of employer branding is presented. Links are thereafter drawn between the theoretical fields and a separation is made between the consumer and the employee in order to conclude on the theoretical basis to the concept of 'consumption of the employer brand'.



### **CHAPTER 4 - ANALYSIS OF EMPIRICAL FINDINGS**

The two research questions of the master thesis are presented and analysed. The analysis begins by examining the employer brand identification, and then continues by elaborating on whether generation Y employees 'consume' the employer brand as a symbolic resource in their social identity creation. Lastly a short summary of the analysis and results are presented.



### **CHAPTER 5 - CLOSING DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

The master thesis is concluded by providing a closing discussion and presenting some managerial implications along with recommendations for future research.

## 1.2 INTRODUCTION

Employees are today viewed as a vital resource for an organisation's competitiveness in the labour market. This since employee skills and knowledge are proved to relate strongly to the company's overall performance (Barrow and Mosley, 2005). The last century's large technological development has led to a fundamental shift regarding the 'main tasks' of employees. According to the National Bureau of Economic Research, 32 percent of the market value of the top 500 US firms in 1982 consisted of intangible assets, which would correspond to the intellectual and human capital that an organisation creates and possesses. By 2001 it had increased to more than 85 percent (Barrow and Mosley, 2005, p.26). In other words, we have moved from a business environment in which many people possessed the same knowledge, to a more complex working culture where the workforce is more individually skilled. As companies become increasingly dependent on individual knowledge, the competition for employees with specialised skills, so called 'talents', has intensified (Barrow and Mosley, 2005). In addition, younger professionals are said to start planning their career earlier and know exactly what they want out of their employment (Parment and Dyhre, 2009). Thus, in order to attract, motivate and retain competent employees, these factors among others, have forced companies to find new ways to develop an attractive employer brand (Barrow and Mosley, 2005). The strategy to accomplish this has during the last decades come to be an entire research field, referred to as employer branding (Falonious, 2010).

During the last twenty years, the subject of employer branding has gained solid ground and interest within the business world (Barrow and Mosley, 2005). Backhaus and Tikoo state in their article '*Conceptualizing and researching employer branding*' from 2004 that a Google search on the term 'employer branding' yielded over 3000 hits. When making the same Google search today in 2013, the term 'employer branding' produces over 4 000 000 hits. This gives an indication of how widely spread the concept has become since it was first introduced by Ambler and Barrow in 1996.

It has been heavily argued that organisational identification is meant to contribute to higher productivity since it promotes employees' willingness to share the organisation's goals (Ashforth and Mael, 1989). Furthermore, companies with a strong employer brand can potentially reduce the cost of employee acquisition, and improve employee-employer relations that are very beneficial since brand-related relationships influence the perception of performance. Strong employer brand identification can also increase loyalty and employee retention, and could lower salaries for comparable staff to firms with weaker employer brands (Ritson, 2002 cited by Berthon, Ewing and Lian Hah, 2005). The creation of a unique employer brand that employees identify with has also been argued to be a central part of the employer branding activities (Backhaus and Tikoo, 2004). The focus of previous research concerning organisational identity has been to investigate what advantages and opportunities companies as employers can obtain through the practice of employer branding. In other words, much has been written on how



## THE EMPLOYER BRAND AS A SYMBOLIC RESOURCE

companies can work strategically with their employer brand to attain and keep the right employees within the organisation. However, this master thesis aspires to instead highlight the position and viewpoint of the employee. Employer brands do not only make out an advantage for the employers, they could also be of advantage for the employee. By attempting to look upon the employee as a potential strategic ‘consumer’ of the employer brand, this master thesis hopes to contribute with a deeper understanding of employer branding.

Theory states that there has been shift from the modern society focused around production, to the postmodern western society, which places consumption at the centre. Simultaneously, the structures of the labour market have started to change. While individuals in the modern society created an identity mainly through their profession, the postmodern individual is said to rely more on consumption when it comes to identity creation (Bauman, 1998). The shift of focus from ‘production’ to ‘consumption’ has had an important effect on how people look upon employment. A new generation called generation Y (Gen Y) is now emerging on the labour market and has been formed by the postmodern western society devoted to consumption (Parment and Dyhre, 2009). They are said to look upon work and employment more as a lifestyle and a part of their identity creation, than as a duty and a must (Parment and Dyhre, 2009). Although it might seem contradictory to label Gen Y first as individuals who create an identity from consumption and then as a generation that wishes their employment to function as a part of the identity, both suggestions may actually be true.

The labour market of the postmodern western society is characterized by changeability and is heavily impacted by globalisation. It is no longer possible to count on a lifelong employment and following that, generation Y have been forced to take on a more flexible approach to employment (Bauman, 1998). For Gen Y, the main objective of the employment experience is said to be as a mean to self-fulfilment, and as far as possible, a way to make life meaningful (Pihl, 2011). Having grown up in a postmodern society filled with brands and symbols, Gen Y finds it natural to use brands as a way of signalling belongingness to a certain group while at the same time differentiating themselves from other groups (Parment, 2008). There is a large amount of research done within the field of consumer research that focus on how individuals use brands as symbolic resources when trying to construct an social identity for themselves (Elliot and Wattanasuwan, 1998). The brands become a way of communicating the self to the individual’s social context and thereby tell a story about who the individual is, or at least wishes to be (Elliot and Wattanasuwan, 1998). In accordance with this, Barthes (1972) stated that consumption apart from just satisfying a need also contains social, cultural and symbolic structures, which lift consumption to a higher level of importance for an individual. When recognising that brands involve an emotional meaning beyond functionality, consumption becomes a symbolic act (Elliot and Wattanasuwan, 1998). It has been suggested that individuals in Gen Y define themselves by the employer brand that they wish to work for, more than they identify with what work task they actually will perform (Parment and Dyhre, 2009). Building on this, Parment and Dyhre (2009) introduces the idea of Gen Y individuals starting to treat employment in a similar way as they

treat consumer goods, in order to create and signal their desired identity. This suggested new attitude towards the employment experience has resulted in many organisations starting to apply traditional marketing strategies on Human Resources, an approach that has come to be referred to as ‘employer branding’. The idea of Gen Y treating employment and employer brands in a similar manner as consumers treat consumer brands, indicates that the two different theoretical standpoints described above are both true. That is, Gen Y creates their identity through consumption and simultaneously considers employment to function as a part of their identity. If Gen Y builds an identity from consumption and are said to ‘consume the employment experience’, the idea of Gen Y creating a social identity from the employer brand may be considered possible.

### **1.3 PROBLEM DISCUSSION**

The concept of employer branding has, as stated above, gained a lot of attention within the world of business and companies are spending an increasing amount of money on their employer brand. However, Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) state that the academic interest has not reached the same level, even though the interest of practitioners indicates the value of the subject. There has been more literature published on the subject of employer branding since Backhaus and Tikoo was published in 2004 but nevertheless, the literature is still mainly directed towards practitioners, meaning that the content tends to hold more practical relevance than academic significance. In other words, the content emphasises how employer branding can be implemented in an organisation and what advantages there are for the company, rather than what theoretical implications the subject might have and what advantages there are for the employee. This opens up for further research on employer branding in relation to other theoretical research areas, for example on if and how employer brands influences individuals’ identity creation.

Existing research integrating employees with the theory of employer branding has generally been focused around the ‘psychological contract’, the employee organisational relationship and the impact organisational identity together with brand associations have on employer branding and the attractiveness of the employer brand (Backhaus and Tikoo, 2004; Edwards, 2010). Employer branding is stated to have an impact on the organisational culture and organisational identity, which in turn contributes to employer brand loyalty from the employees’ side (Backhaus and Tikoo, 2004). Furthermore, it has been proved that postmodern consumers use brands not only to fulfil functional needs, but as symbolic resources in order to subscribe to certain ‘social groups’, thereby a ‘construction of the self’ is achieved (Elliot and Wattanasuwan, 1998). The usage of brands as symbolic resources has in previous consumer research been linked to social psychology and identity research, with studies on how individuals create an identity from the brands, which he or she consume. Connected to the literature of employer branding, identity research has been applied on organisational identification, when employees identify with his or her employer organisation. The notion of symbolic benefits attached to the employer brand has also been

## THE EMPLOYER BRAND AS A SYMBOLIC RESOURCE

observed in previous research (Hirschman 1980 mentioned in Backhaus and Tikoo 2004) and much of the strength of branding is stated to lie within the power of the symbolism of the brand. A brand is said to convey meaning beyond tangible benefits (Hirschman 1980 mentioned in Backhaus and Tikoo 2004). However, this emphasis on intangible aspects such as the organisational identity and the symbolic aspects, also implies a lack of research examining the notion of social-identity, linked to specific profession and work tasks and the impact this may have on the attractiveness of the employer brand (Backhaus and Tikoo, 2004). This leaves room for complementary research on companies that offers complex work tasks and specific professions, and thereby requires specific knowledge and skills.

To conclude, few empirical studies have looked upon how the employees perceive and use the employer brands, or on how employees may build a social identity using both the functional and symbolic content and attributes of the employer brand. With a labour market that is said to become increasingly comparable to the consumer market and a generation (Y) who looks at employment as a lifestyle and identity, could it be that people in this Gen Y 'consume' employer brands in a similar way as they use consumer brands in a symbolic manner? The notion of employer branding could be seen as a proof that organisations are trying to emulate the practices of consumer marketing on the labour market, which might suggest the possibility of employees using employer brands as symbolic resources in their social identity creation.

### **1.4 OBJECTIVE**

This master thesis considers the degree to which knowledge from existing literature and theory (concerning consumer research, generation Y and the social psychology field), can contribute to the concept of 'consumption of employer brands'.

With knowledge from these theory fields and through a theoretical starting point in consumer research and the symbolic use of brands, the authors empirically investigate whether there correspondingly exists a symbolic use of employer brands.

Together with the results collected from a case study of semi-structured depth-interviews at Siemens Sweden, the authors aspire to add some additional theoretical insights to and complement the understanding of the employer branding field.

## 1.5 RESEARCH QUESTION

### 1.5.1 PRIMARY RESEARCH QUESTION

- Can Gen Y employees be said to ‘consume’ the employer brand as a symbolic resource in their social identity creation?
  - If yes, how is this manifested?
  - If no, why is this not the case?

### 1.5.2 SECONDARY RESEARCH QUESTION

Consumption theory and social psychology states that it is impossible to separate the development of a self-identity from the creation of a collective social identity (Jenkins, 1996 mentioned in Elliott and Wattanasuwan, 1998). When examining if Gen Y employees are said to ‘consume’ the employer brand as a tool in the symbolic construction of the social identity, the inseparability between the self-identity and the social identity indicates the importance to also investigate the employer brand identification between the employee and the employer brand. This leads on to a secondary research question.

- Can it be verified that employees’ identify with the employer brand?

## 1.6 DEFINITION OF IDENTITY

To facilitate the understanding of the ideas and concepts brought up in this master thesis, it is necessary to further clarify the term ‘identity’. Researchers have stated that identity can be divided into two subareas: self-identity and social identity (Jacobson, 1994). One frequently used definition of the two terms, which will be used throughout this master thesis, comes from Jacobson, (1994) who defines personal- or self identity as the human’s perception about herself as a unique creature while the social identity is defined as the own self-perception *in relation to others*, in other words, the different social categories that the individual self and the surroundings place the individual in. The self-identity regards personal attributes and interpersonal relationships. The social identity on the other hand concerns the aspect of identity that is derived from a shared category membership, based on intergroup-comparisons. (Onorato and Turner, 2002, mentioned in Baray, Postmes and Jetten 2009 pp.627-628)

Having studied literature on the concept of identity, it has been recognised that the relation between self- and social identity is very complex and much debated among researchers within the psychology field. Some emphasise the difference between the terms, while others focus on the similarities. Throughout this master thesis, the concepts are recognised to incorporate separate contents, as explained in Jacobson’s definition. Nevertheless, that does not mean that the two are not still closely intertwined. As Jenkins (1996, mentioned in Elliot and Wattanasuwan, 1998)

## THE EMPLOYER BRAND AS A SYMBOLIC RESOURCE

states, it is not possible to separate the development of a self-identity from the creation of a collective social identity. This is because the self-identity can only be validated through interaction with others and the self is embedded in different social practices. In other words, an individual does always, to a certain extent, think about how one is perceived by the surrounding context. So, even the 'unique' features of an individual need a context in order to incorporate meaning. In conclusion, self-identity and social identity are not the exact same thing but they may overlap and thereby influence each other.

## **CHAPTER 2: METHODOLOGY**

### **2.1 SCIENTIFIC STARTING POINT**

To begin with, the epistemological and ontological commitments of the master thesis can be said to give directions of whether a quantitative or qualitative research approach should be chosen. However it is important to note that the connection between the epistemological and ontological commitment and the research approach is not deterministic (Bryman and Bell, 2011). The ontological stand point attends to the question of whether it is possible to consider social entities as objective entities with a reality external to social actors or if they in addition, should be considered as social constructions built from actions and perceptions of social actors (Bryman and Bell, 2011, pp. 22-23). This master thesis takes on a constructivist ontological view on how the world should be thought of, admitting the pre-existence and importance of the objective reality, but simultaneously stressing the active role of individuals in the construction of the social reality. The constructivist approach of the thesis embodies a view of social reality as something in constant transformation and as part of the individual's creation (Bryman and Bell, 2011, pp. 22-23).

Moreover, epistemology treats the question of what is regarded as acceptable knowledge within a discipline (Bryman and Bell, 2011). In other words, epistemology is what normally is referred to as 'the theory of knowledge'. The general epistemological approach of this master thesis takes on an interpretative stance, in the meaning that natural science is not considered adequate to supply legitimate knowledge of the social world. There is instead a preference for an emphasis on the understanding of the ways in which individuals interpret their social world (Bryman and Bell, 2011).

The characteristics and the nature of the research question and epistemology of the master thesis imply a qualitative study and all quantitative research methods were therefore excluded. Research interviews are acknowledged as one of the routine methods of obtaining knowledge of individuals, groups and organisations in qualitative studies (Alvesson, 2010). The epistemological practices of the master thesis have to some extent been inspired by 'reflexive pragmatism', which is a critical approach to research interviews, introduced by Alvesson in 2010. Alvesson (2010) recognises the problematic nature of interviewing as a research method. Interviewing and interview interpretation can be problematic due to the impact of interviewee power, impression management and rationality. Alvesson (2010) argues for a critical consciousness and pragmatic approach to interviews, an approach that has been attempted to be upheld in this master thesis. However, even if interviewing is considered to have several disadvantages, as a research method it still functions as a valid tool for attaining knowledge. As Alvesson (2010) states, interviewing is in some cases the best methodological alternative among several bad alternatives, so one might have to disregard the disadvantages and make the best of the situation at hand.

## 2.2 ABDUCTIVE RESEARCH APPROACH

The research strategy of this master thesis takes on a research approach similar to the abductive approach, which is commonly referred to as the ‘golden mean’ of the deductive and the inductive approaches. However, abduction is more complex than that and will be further explained below. Drawn to their extremes, the inductive approach refers to research that generates new theory based on what is found through empirics and observations. The deductive approach on the other hand, suggests that the researcher proceed from existing theory and what is known about a particular domain, testing it in reality in order to develop it (Bryman and Bell, 2011).

The choice of a research approach similar to abduction follows the arguments put forward by Timmermans and Tavory (2012) who reject the impact of the inductive and the deductive approaches. Induction is not believed to be able to link new findings to existing theoretical frameworks (Timmermans and Tavory, 2012, p. 173) and deduction is said to help finding only what was already expected to be found (Timmermans and Tavory, 2012, p.174). Instead, the authors promote the abductive approach, assuming professional positioning and in-depth knowledge of multiple existing theorisations throughout every step of the research. A research strategy similar to abduction, builds on Timmermans and Tavory’s (2012) view that abduction is necessary both for finding out what is missing in an area of study and to stimulate insights about innovative or original theoretical contributions, in other words a conjunction of the inductive and deductive.

As a research strategy, abduction has a logical form distinct from induction and deduction. Abduction is explained as the form of reasoning through which we perceive a phenomenon as related to other observations. For example, a phenomenon could be seen as similar to other phenomena already experienced and explained in other situations (Timmermans and Tavory, 2012, p. 171). This is exemplified and further discussed in chapter two, where similarities between the consumer- and the labour market are outlined. Building on theories of abduction by Timmermans and Tavory (2012), the research strategy of this master thesis attempt to imitate the process of forming an explanatory hypothesis based on the grounds of multiple existing theories.

Furthermore, when taking on a research approach similar to abduction, the certain positions that researchers can occupy needs to be acknowledged. Researchers are suggested to always occupy certain positions in society (as parents, academics, middle-class etc.) and these positions colour the vision in a way that give researchers only partial access to the field being studied and shape the way in which the respondents interact with them (Timmermans and Tavory, 2012). This means that the ‘surprising observation’ of the study can depend largely on researchers cultivated positions and their way of perceiving the world, something which has been taken into consideration when analysing the results of this study.

## **2.3 CHOICE OF METHOD**

### **2.3.1 RESEARCH STRATEGY: A QUALITATIVE CASE STUDY**

When it comes to employer branding and identifying the employee's perception of a company's employer brand, the preferred research method among companies and researchers seems to be qualitative (Falonius, 2010, p. 69). The master thesis at hand is a qualitative case study of Siemens Sweden. An important advantage with qualitative studies is that there is an opportunity for the researcher to ask follow-up questions and to penetrate deeper into the issue of the investigation. The disadvantage is that the results cannot be generalised since they are individual and unique for each respondent (Falonius, 2010).

The research strategy consists of a qualitative, basic case-study research design. A detailed and intensive analysis of Siemens Sweden as the single organisation but on two different geographic locations and companies has been conducted. Siemens Sweden is seen as an object of interest in its own-right, and the authors of the thesis strive to provide an in-depth illustration of the case in order to reach the objective of the thesis. This is in line with what in methodology literature has been called the 'ideographic approach' (Bryman and Bell, 2011, p. 60). When adopting a qualitative research approach, there are several reasons for why a case study is especially appropriate. To begin with, a case study makes it possible to observe a phenomenon in its real context. Furthermore, when trying to understand and explain complex research questions that have to do with groups, organisations or specific events, a case study can provide deeper information than other methods (Backman, 2008). The research in this thesis will build on what Yin (2003, mentioned in Bryman and Bell, 2011, p. 62) would call 'The critical case'. The research has a hypothesis and the case has been chosen on the grounds that it will allow for a better understanding of the circumstances in which the hypothesis will and will not hold (Bryman and Bell, 2011, p.62).

### **2.3.2 SEMI-STRUCTURED DEPTH-INTERVIEWS**

The collecting of empirics for the master thesis was conducted through semi-structured depth-interviews (Bryman and Bell, 2011) with respondents from Siemens Sweden. In total, 14 depth-interviews were made and a sense of saturation was attained. Semi-structured depth-interviews were preferred over other interview methods such as structured telephone interviews since the character of the information intended to be collected can be considered sensitive. The information needed is closely connected to how the respondents perceive themselves, their employer, the employer brand and their social identity. Further, the research area of the thesis calls for deeper insights and a rich understanding of the respondent's feelings and values; therefore both direct questioning and projective techniques were used during the interviews. Since the authors aim to get an understanding of if, and how employees use the employer brand in their social-identity creation, projective techniques were used since they can be classified as a structured indirect way



## THE EMPLOYER BRAND AS A SYMBOLIC RESOURCE

of finding out ‘the whys’ of different situations (Webb, 1992, mentioned in Donoghue, 2000, p.1). The use of projective techniques will be further elaborated below in the following section. Moreover, the interview method required personal contact between the researcher and the respondent. The possibility to scrutinise the respondents’ body language together with the opportunity to ask open-ended questions and follow-up questions are complementing reasons to why alternative interview methods were dismissed.

Multiple interviewers were used since it enable the authors to have one person whose only focus is to take notes about what is being said and done. In other words there were two interviewers, one that was more active and another who was more passive. The use of multiple interviewers contributed to make the atmosphere more relaxed, an advantage since the subjects discussed in the interviews were of a personal nature. On the other hand, two interviewers can also be perceived as a bit intimidating to some individuals and they might therefore adopt a defensive position that could obstruct the interview (Bryman and Bell, 2011). The interviews were conducted in a conference room at Siemens’s office location. The respondent were therefore in a, for them, rather familiar environment but disturbance or distraction by for example their computer or other colleagues were avoided. The interview design was influenced by the studied literature and aimed at collecting data for treating the research question of the master thesis. The interview template is found in appendices and extracts from the interviews together with results of the analysis are found in chapter four, *Analysis of Empirical Findings*.

Apart from the in-depth interviews, company- and organisational documents have been used as sources of data. The research of these data consists of analysing existing documents such as strategic policy documents including Siemens existing company values and their brand platform. Participatory observation at a career fair together with company representatives also contributed with data for the research.

In order to test the validity of the method and the quality of measures the ‘research design criteria’ (Bryman and Bell, 2011) are used as an evaluation tool. The criterion most influential for a qualitative case study and heavily discussed by many researchers is the criteria of external- and internal validity and the criteria of reliability. It has been questioned how a single case possibly can be representative so that it might yield findings that can be applied more generally on other cases. The answer will always be that they cannot and it is never possible to identify a ‘typical’ case that can be used to represent a certain category of similar cases (Bryman and Bell, 2011, p.61). Following this, the result would be that no qualitative case study method would ever meet the demands for reliability and validity. However, a second position exists, proposing alternative criteria for evaluating qualitative research. These criteria are trustworthiness and authenticity, which together can be said to correspond to internal- and external validity and reliability (Bryman and Bell, 2011, p. 395). The master thesis at hand aspires to uphold the trustworthiness and authenticity of the process so that the result can be considered reliable and valid.

When conducting in-depth interviews, there is always a risk of bias, it is not unusual for the interviewee to be somewhat influenced by the interviewer (Bryman and Bell, 2011). Another risk that has been taken into account is the possibility of a misunderstanding on the behalf of the interviewee due to the way in which the question has been asked. To avoid that the interviewee might be confused, the interviewers have tried to not use confusing terms in an ambiguous way. Following that, the interviewers have also tried to be consistent in the way in which the questions were asked and recorded, in order to minimize the risk of intra-interviewer variability. The danger of intra-interviewer variability has also been avoided since only one interviewer was responsible for asking the interview questions (Bryman and Bell, 2011).

When having open-ended questions, which are a part of semi-structured interviews, the answers need to be examined and then categorised in order for the respondents' answers to be correctly aggregated with other respondents' answers. By doing this categorisation, variability due to error has hopefully been avoided (Bryman and Bell, 2011).

## 2.4 CHOICE OF PROJECTIVE TECHNIQUES

Projective techniques suit this research well since it is not used as a tool of measure. Instead, projective techniques are an excellent instrument when it comes to uncover feelings, beliefs, attitudes and motivation that may be difficult for individuals to express in a direct way (Donoghue, 2000). Often, respondents are not aware of their underlying motives, values and attitudes and therefore cannot communicate that information about themselves even if they wanted to. Additionally, respondents can be hesitant when it comes to sharing feelings with strangers, as the researcher is in an interview-situation (Donoghue, 2000). Since this thesis investigates how employees feel about their employer's brand and how they might use that brand in their social identity creation, projective techniques are viewed as the most appropriate method. It gives the authors the best conditions for uncovering the respondents' inner perspectives in a way they feel comfortable with. According to Kline (1983, mentioned in Donoghue, 2000), projective techniques can help the researcher understand the innermost feelings and thoughts of an individual and therefore better comprehend his or her personality.

Haire (1950) explained the existence of motives lying below the level of verbalisation since they are socially unacceptable, difficult to verbalise convincingly or not known by the respondent himself. It is possible to identify and assess such motives by approaching them indirectly with for example projective techniques (Haire, 1950, p. 656). In other words, projective techniques are the best way to avoid respondents giving the answers they believe is socially correct. Most individuals are by nature polite and therefore try to answer according to what they think that the researcher wants to hear (Donoghue, 2000). In this case, the risk when asking direct questions would be that the employees just repeat what they have heard the company says about the employer brand and do not answer what they actually think that the employer brand stands for.

## THE EMPLOYER BRAND AS A SYMBOLIC RESOURCE

Furthermore, people can be influenced by motives of which they are, perhaps, vaguely aware of, but which they find difficult to put into words. In addition, a motive could also be unconscious to the respondent. An employee may for example see the employer brand as related to things, people or values in his life, and yet he or she might be unable, in response to a direct question, to describe these aspects of the employer brand (Haire, 1950). Projective techniques is one possible strategy to evade this problem. By asking the subjects to describe and talk about a third party, as has been done during this research, and thereby discuss that person's feelings or actions, the subject projects his or her feelings on a third party, which makes the situation less sensitive (Donoghue, 2000).

When it comes to research concerning consumer brands, one useful and frequently applied technique is 'word association'. To attain a deeper understanding of the brand personality with its image and attributes, it is necessary for the interview subject to associate the brand with a person or a personality type (Green 1994, mentioned in Donoghue 2000). Hence, to find out what understanding of the Siemens employer brand the employees have, association techniques have been used during the interviews.

Regarding projective techniques as an interview method, the most important disadvantage is the complexity of the data collected. Therefore, the researchers must possess the right knowledge to be able to interpret this data (Burns and Lennon, 1993, mentioned in Donoghue, 2000). The authors of this master thesis have tried to handle this problem by attaining a broad knowledge of both the literature and methodology. Moreover, when analysing the results from research done with projective techniques, the qualitative approach allows for introspection. In other words, there is a need to look for subjective meanings and therefore also interpretations by the researchers (Donoghue, 2000).

## 2.5 CHOICE OF CASE STUDY COMPANY

Literature has suggested that the selection of cases should be based on the anticipation of the opportunity to learn (Stake 1995, mentioned in Bryman and Bell, 2011). This has been taken into consideration during the choice of case company for this master thesis and the researchers had the possibility to get in contact with a case company with high potential to provide additional insights and knowledge about employer branding and the symbolic use of employer brands.

As discussed earlier in the problem discussion, most of the previous research on employer branding has not considered how aspects such as a specific profession or work tasks might impact the attractiveness of the employer brand. This was one important motive for the choice of case company since Siemens Sweden is an organisation heavily characterised by industrial technology and employs mainly engineers with specific knowledge and skills.

### **2.5.1 SIEMENS' EMPLOYER BRAND**

Siemens is a multinational industrial organisation, active in 190 different countries. With the world's largest environmental portfolio, Siemens offers innovative and high-tech solutions in four sectors; infrastructure and cities, industry, energy and healthcare. The company's turnover is EUR 73.5 billion and about 40 per cent of it comes from the environment portfolio. Siemens profiles themselves as a 'green' and 'sustainable' organisation and has existed on the Swedish market since 1893. In Sweden, Siemens employs approximately 4,700 employees at more than 40 locations. The headquarters is located in Upplands Väsby and last business year, the turnover was about 18 billion SEK ([www.siemens.com](http://www.siemens.com)).

The fact that Siemens could be seen as a well-established brand for both consumers and employees has impacted the authors' choice of conducting the case study at the company. Since the research of the thesis investigates whether the employer brand is an important factor when choosing an employer and if the employer brand constitutes any symbolic value to the employee, the choice of a large and well-known organisation and employer brand was considered to facilitate the empirical study. The respondents contributed with more conscious responses regarding why they had chosen Siemens as their employer and what importance the company's employer brand has in their identity creation. As an employer, Siemens has actively worked with employer branding for two decades. According to Universum's, (a consultant company specialised in developing employer brands) ranking of Nordic's most attractive employers in 2012, Siemens was listed as number one within the field of engineering ([www.universeumglobal.com](http://www.universeumglobal.com)). With the changing nature of the industry, Siemens employer brand has changed over the years. Today Siemens aims for an employer brand characterised by a very strong environmental profile, which makes it interesting to examine whether the company's employer brand attributes are consistent with the attributes that the employees ascribe to their self-identity. As will be further explained in the theory chapter, a shared ideological agenda between the employee and the employer brand is said to contribute significantly to the employee's identification with the employer brand (Edwards, 2010). Siemens' pronounced profile towards environmental issues makes the company suitable for studying whether an employer brand's distinctive profile is reflected in the identity of the employees and vice versa and if these shared ideological standpoints are used by employees as a symbolic resource in their creation of a social identity. Since the research has been conducted at two locations and separate companies within Siemens, and the two sites possess certain characteristics that separates them and influences the results from the research, a developed explanation of them is necessary.

The first company where research was conducted were at the headquarters 'Siemens AB', located in Upplands Väsby outside Stockholm. The second company is 'Siemens Industrial Turbomachinery AB' (SIT AB), which is located in Finspång, northern Östergötland. Finspång has been an industrial production site for almost a century, but has only been part of Siemens since 2003 when the site was acquired from Alstom S.A. Before that, several other companies

## THE EMPLOYER BRAND AS A SYMBOLIC RESOURCE

had owned the site. Siemens AB develops, markets and sells innovative and high-tech solutions in all of Siemens four sectors: infrastructure, industry, energy, and healthcare. SIT AB is active only within the energy sector, focusing on turbomachinery since they develop, manufacture and market gas turbines for the world market and delivers power plants and turbines ([www.siemens.com](http://www.siemens.com)). The respondents at Siemens AB are economists, engineers and taxation lawyers and together represent all of Siemens four sectors, while all of the respondents at SIT AB are engineers specialised in turbomachinery within the energy sector. The fact that Siemens AB operates in all four sectors impacted the respondents' answers regarding the employer brand. Siemens AB is a sales unit, something that made the employees more inclined to 'live the employer brand' in comparison to their colleagues at SIT AB who are more focused around the technology which they are working with. The employees at Siemens AB were inclined to have a broader perception of Siemens that include all four sectors, while the employees at SIT AB were more inclined to relate to their specific sector rather than Siemens as an employer brand.

Since Siemens markets the employer brand embracing all companies and sectors, the environmental profile overshadows both Siemens AB and SIT AB. Both companies also market their employer brand with a globalised employment experience, and highlight the relational aspects and the fact that the company takes well care of its employees.

## 2.6 CHOICE OF RESPONDENTS

Due to the qualitative nature of the case study research, the respondents were not been selected in a statistically guaranteed way. In order to confirm with the nature of the research question and contribute with new insights about the future workforce of Gen Y, the respondents were selected on the following criteria; age, years within the company and geographic location. As a result, the respondents all come from one employer brand, Siemens, but from two different geographic locations and companies in Sweden, Siemens AB and SIT AB. This meant that the respondents had varying professions and were represented by economists, taxation lawyers, and engineers operating within the sectors; infrastructure and cities, healthcare and energy. All the respondents were generation Y (born 1978-1995) and have been employed at either Siemens AB or SIT AB for at least six months. In addition, none of the respondents had been employed at Siemens for longer than five years. The selection process was handled by the Talent Acquisition Manager at Siemens, then controlled by and passed on to the authors of this master thesis.

In order to obtain information about the companies' vision and the actual and desired profile of Siemens' employer brand, one interview was also conducted with the Talent Acquisition Manager at Siemens.

## 2.7 ANALYSIS OF EMPIRICS

Backman (2008, p.60) refers to Cresswell (2005), who highlights the moment of analysis in qualitative research as the most difficult one. There are not as many fixed rules for a qualitative analysis as there are for quantitative analysis. Due to the complexity of the data collected, qualitative data analysis can be rather time consuming (Bryman and Bell, 2011). Following this, it is of importance to make up an analysis structure- and plan before commencing the collection of empirics.

The method for analysis in this master thesis is inspired by ‘The Miles and Huberman framework’, which is an often-used structure in qualitative data analysis. An important characteristic of this framework is that data collection and analysis occur in parallel, constantly referring back to each other. The Miles and Huberman framework contains three main components, data reduction, data display and drawing and verifying conclusions (Punch, 2005). Data reduction and data display helps facilitate the drawing and verifying of conclusions but as stated above, these activities happens simultaneously (Punch, 2005).

The reduction of data occurred repeatedly throughout the whole process of analysis, making up an important key activity. In qualitative analysis, there are two main objectives of the data reduction: reducing the data without losing important information and making sure that the data is not stripped from its context (Punch, 2005). With ‘data display’, Miles and Huberman refer to the process of organising, compressing and assembling information. The display of data was in this case made through networks where the data in form of informative and characterising quotes were linked together (Punch, 2005).

The Miles and Huberman framework presents three main operations, which are crucial for the main components described above. They are as following: coding, memoing and developing propositions (Punch, 2005). When using coding, as was done throughout the analysis of this master thesis, the data collected is broken down to pieces and then labelled, compiled and organised (Bryman and Bell, 2011). The process of coding was especially important in the beginning of the analysis but also continued throughout the process. The second operation, memoing also happened throughout the whole process of analysis. The ideas, which come up when coding, were recorded by the researchers and became so called memos (Punch, 2005).

## 2.8 RESEARCH EXECUTION

In November 2012, a first research proposal was sent to the Talent Acquisition Manager, Cecilia Lundgren, at Siemens. After establishing a contact, a meeting with the Talent Acquisition Manager took place in January 2013 at Siemens Sweden’s headquarters. Discussions were held between the authors of the thesis and Siemens Sweden about a possible research project. Since Siemens already has an established employer branding strategy within their organisation they

## THE EMPLOYER BRAND AS A SYMBOLIC RESOURCE

therefore held an interest in the company's future competence provision. The thesis project was formulated in cooperation between the two parties and it was agreed that there would be two outcomes of the process: one report to Siemens Sweden concerning their employer branding strategy, the outcome of their work with employer branding and their Employee Value Proposition and one master thesis more focused around the theoretical contribution to the field of employer branding.

The literature review of previous theories and research was performed in Lund during January and February 2012. Literature on consumer research, employer branding, social psychology and management/HR were studied in order to provide new insights on how these areas of research could be connected in order to deepen the understanding of the employer branding field. The findings from the literature review are described in chapter three. Research about Siemens' employer branding was also conducted, primarily by receiving data from Siemens.

The Talent Acquisition Manager functioned as the Siemens representative during the process and helped set up a schedule for the interviews, which commenced with employees from Siemens AB in mid-march 2013. In addition, the authors were introduced to Siemens' employer branding program through an interview with the Talent Acquisition Manager. The authors continued to conduct interviews at Siemens AB and SIT AB in Finspång during the remaining weeks of March and the beginning of April.

The interviews with the employees were designed to study the respondents' perception of the company's employer brand and if/how they used the employer brand in the construction of their social identity. Therefore, as stated above, projective techniques were used and showed to provide a satisfying result, where the 'word association' were particularly useful. The interviews were thereafter transcribed and analysed and the results of the interviews are presented in chapter four. The authors of the master thesis freely translated all quotations from the interviews.

## **CHAPTER 3: PREVIOUS RESEARCH ON CENTRAL CONCEPTS**

The following chapter will present three research areas that together provide a foundation for the research question of this master thesis. The research areas, which will be presented below are: consumer theory, theories on generation Y and employer branding.

To begin with, a short description of what comprises the concept of ‘consumption’ in this master thesis will be presented. This also functions as the theoretical foundation to the concept of ‘consumption of the employer brand. Secondly, a presentation and description of the postmodern consumer and the ‘symbolic use of brands’ is laid out and in relation to that, a short explanation of identity creation is displayed. Thirdly, existing theory on generation Y and their characteristics is outlined in relation to existing theory concerning earlier generations. Lastly, the field of employer branding is presented, including subjects such as the employer brand, functional and symbolic benefits, the psychological contract and organisational- and employer brand identity.

After presenting the theoretical fields, an explanation is provided as for how the field of employer branding can be seen as evidence to consumption’s entrance on the labour market and the rise of the concept of ‘consumption of the employer brand. This concept lays the basis for the primary research question of this master thesis.

### **3.1 CONSUMPTION**

Consumption is not a new phenomenon and producers and consumers have always existed. The rise of consumption over the last few centuries and its development into an increasingly important component of our lives has led to that consumption today has begun to appear as a foundational characteristic of society (Corrigan, 1997). It has been claimed that consumption and not production is the central motor of the contemporary western society, where the postmodern perspective of consumerism and the ‘consumer society’ brought new insights to the notion of consumption (Corrigan, 1997). Building on the theories of Bauman (1998), the postmodern perspective on the consumer will be further elaborated in the following section.

Due to the nature of the empirical findings, this master thesis will primarily build on the concepts of Gabriel and Lang (1996) who provides two key types of consumers, ‘consumer as hedonist’ and ‘consumer as communicator’. This theory was shown to help make sense of the empirical findings since it corresponded to data collected. A ‘consumer as communicator’ consumes ‘*to express social differences as well as personal meanings and feelings*’; the value from consumption is therefore derived from the result of the consumption, such as the signs that objects of consumption communicate (Gabriel and Lang, 1996, p. 47). The ‘consumer as



## THE EMPLOYER BRAND AS A SYMBOLIC RESOURCE

hedonist' on the other hand, shows that there is value in the process of consumption itself and the feelings derived from it. The concept of Gabriel and Lang (1996) could be linked with well-established ideas regarding the historic view on consumption. Gabriel and Lang's 'consumer as a communicator' can be linked to McCracken's (1988) discussion about consumption as a way to attain social distinction in a society marked by social competition and Baudrillard's (1968) 'system of objects', while 'consumer as a hedonist' is linked to Campbell's (1987) presentation of consumption as an end in itself. Thus, the 'consumer as a communicator' is much in line with the concept of the postmodern consumer, which will be further elaborated on in the following sections. The 'consumer as a hedonist' on the other hand, presents an additional approach to consumption.

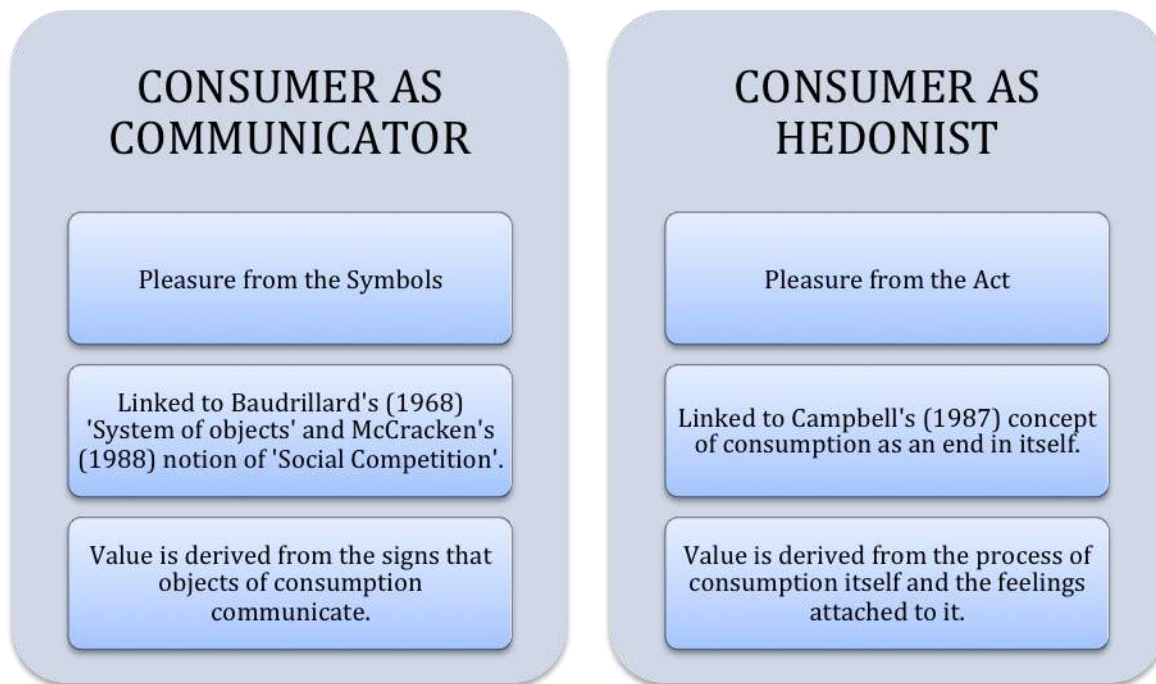


Figure 1. Figure based on the concept of the 'consumer as communicator' and the 'consumer as hedonist' (from Gabriel and Lang, 1996)

McCracken (1988, mentioned in Corrigan, 1997) draws attention back to the sixteenth century and Elizabeth the first. He maintains that her insistence of nobles attending at court inevitably led to competition among them in order to get noticed. Modes of consumption then became the ideal way of catching attention and 'distinction' could be indicated through the types of goods consumed (McCracken 1088, mentioned in Corrigan, 1997). In the eighteenth century more than just courtiers were engaged in social competition and so the consumption of goods became a way to 'distinct' between social classes and status (McCracken 1988, mentioned in Corrigan, 1997). This can also be linked to Baudrillard (1968) and his 'system of signs', meaning that we no longer consume products but rather signs and indeed the 'system of signs' (Baudrillard, 1968, mentioned in Slater, 1997). According to Baudrillard, we now secure social place and identity

## THE EMPLOYER BRAND AS A SYMBOLIC RESOURCE

merely through the commodity sign rather than through our position in social structures such as class (Baudrillard, 1968, mentioned in Slater, 1997). Douglas (1974) describes the meaning of goods as follows:

*“The meaning of goods... arises from their ability to act as markers of social status, symbols or badges indicating membership of, or aspiration to, high status groups”*(Douglas, 1974, cited in Slater, 1997, p. 153).

Campbell (1983, 1987) argues that the industrial revolution inevitably entailed a simultaneous revolution in production and consumption. Weber (1976, [1904], mentioned in Corrigan, 1997) provided evidence of the role of ascetic Protestantism in the development of an ethic that led to production and accumulation as a duty to God. While Weber, presented production as an end itself, Campbell wanted to know if it is possible to argue that consumption also could become an ethic, an end in itself, and if so in what manner (Corrigan, 1997). He tried to approach consumption in the same manner as Weber approached production, by exploring the possibility that there might be an ethic of consumption based on particular sorts of ideas of the person. Campbell (1987) established that just as the protestant ethic provided the spirit of production, romanticism with its cult of the expressive individual, was central in providing the spirit of consumption (Corrigan, 1997). Campbell (1983) further contrasts between traditional and modern consumption by stating that:

*“The crucial feature of the role of the modern consumer is the primary obligation to want to want under all circumstances and at all times irrespective of what goods and services are actually acquired or consumed.”* (Campbell, 1983, p. 282)

Campbell (1983) argues that the fixity of traditional societies meant that one could learn the actual patterns and proper modes of consumption relatively easily, but in modern societies a general orientation to consuming is required (Corrigan, 1997). It is not so much that we desire particular things, although of course we might sometimes, it is rather that we ‘want to want’, we ‘desire to desire’, and we want new things in an endless pattern of discontent (Corrigan, 1997). Consumption is seen as based upon a strong sense of duty, an obligation to engage in ‘want satisfaction’ as an end in itself (Campbell, 1983, p. 284). Thus, there is support of an ethic underlying consumption just as Weber stated it was an ethic underlying production. If production can be linked to the Protestant ethic, consumption can be linked to the Romantic ethic. ‘The Romantic’ was duty-bound to rebel against constraints, for only without constraints could individuals freely experience all the world had to offer (Corrigan, 1997). This of course included all sorts of pleasurable experiences (Corrigan, 1997). As Campbell remarks:

*“What the romantics did was to redefine the doctrine of individualism and the associated idea of improvement or advancement. Instead of individuals improving themselves in this world through hard work, discipline and self-denial they substituted the idea of*

## THE EMPLOYER BRAND AS A SYMBOLIC RESOURCE

*individuals 'expressing' or 'realising' themselves through exposure to powerful feeling and by means of many and varied intense experiences.*" (Campbell, 1983, p. 287)

Campbell made it possible to see how a Romantic theory of the experiencing self linked to the ethical doctrine of 'self-development', could help legitimate a modern consumer orientation (Corrigan, 1997). Campbell (1987, p. 60) also remarks that there are in fact two contrasting models of human action: satisfying needs and pursuing pleasures. When satisfying needs there exists some sort of imbalance that must be righted, while pursuing pleasures aims to experience greater stimulation (Campbell, 1987). Campbell provides an explanation of how pleasure seeking operates and contrasts traditional- with modern forms of *hedonism*. In general, 'traditional hedonism' is characterised by the search for pleasures tied to quite specific practices, such as eating, drinking, sex etc. (Campbell, 1987). A different, more 'modern hedonism' strategy is to look for pleasurable aspects in *all* experiences, experience of life itself seems to become the source of pleasure (Campbell, 1987). Campbell (1987, p.60) means that 'modern hedonism' sees pleasure as derived from emotions that accompany different experiences (such as the employment experience itself). Campbell's (1987) concept may help to explain the employment experience as judged by its capacity to generate pleasurable experience (Bauman, 1998).

### 3.2 THE POSTMODERN CONSUMER

As stated, the last century contributed with a fundamental shift in the structure of the western society, whereas the emphasis is said to have shifted from production to consumption (Bauman, 1998). Even though consumption, as stated above, is not a new phenomenon there are certain traits to today's western society that are new. The concept of mass-consumption has evolved and while the individual of the modern society indulged in production, the postmodern individual's main task is to consume (Bauman, 2007). Bauman's consumption society involves the creation of an identity through consumption. In other words, what and how individuals consume will form them as persons (Bauman, 2007).

It was the modern society that introduced the notion of individuals themselves being responsible for the construction of their identities (Bauman, 1998). Earlier, peoples' identities were mainly decided by feudal structures and individuals belonged either to the nobility, clergy, burghers or peasants. The modern society inclined people to instead start creating their identity through their work and employment (Bauman, 1998). The contemporary western society, as stated above, is however formed around consumption. Due to the notion that it is no longer possible to count on a lifelong employment experience or profession, a pressure on individuals to adopt a more 'flexible identity' has arisen. Therefore, the western society has turned to consumption in regards to identity-creation. Consumption gives individuals the possibility to rapidly change and transform their identity depending on the context in which they find themselves (Bauman, 1998).

## THE EMPLOYER BRAND AS A SYMBOLIC RESOURCE

The theories of Bauman (1998) are in line with the work of Appadurai (1990), who stated that the age of postmodernism might truly be called the age of symbols and spectacle. Appadurai (1990) demonstrated that the 'spectacularisation' of consumer culture has become global and reinforces the dominance of consumption over production. In the postmodern society, production is considered neither the most meaningful activity nor the domain of creation of value as it was in during modernity. Instead, consumption is described as the moment in the process where *symbolic exchanges*, which determine and reproduce the social code, occur. However, the insights about the postmodern individual as a consumer lead researchers to conclude that production never cease, since at every moment of consumption, something is also being produced. What is produced in consumption could be an object, the person, or in general the image and the symbol. The consumer becomes a consumer of symbols, since that is how objects are presented to him or her (Fuat Firat and Venkatesh, 1995).

Fuat Firat, (1997) describes this notion of the transforming consumers and further discuss that the nature of the consumption experience has transformed during the last decades. The modern consumer is described as engaging in consumption as an activity of necessity. They instead found meaningfulness in their lives through work. Thereby Fuat Firat (1997) makes a clear distinction between consumption and work (production) and maintains that the modern consumer made consumption choices and bought products solely for functional reasons defined by certain given needs. The contemporary (i.e. postmodern) consumer on the other hand, is said to be 'disappointed' with the outcomes of the modern western society. The meaningfulness of work showed not to be enough and the postmodern consumer thereby lost faith in the 'modern society' (Fuat Firat, 1997). This made individuals turn to consumption, seeking meaningful experiences in the consumption activities rather than work. Thus, the roles had changed; work instead came to be seen as a necessity in order to accomplish one's consumption goals and consumption thereby became necessary for the construction of meaningful life-experiences. To conclude, the postmodern consumer is about the construction and production of an identity through consumption, you being what you consume (Fuat Firat, 1997).

In the postmodern condition, individuals are considered as having no independent identity other than the one which they create for themselves and the notion that 'you are what you appear' (Best, 2003) is prominent. By returning to the theories of Bauman (1989) who also stated that we live in a time where we as individuals feel that invisibility is 'equal to death', the necessity of symbols becomes even more evident. It has also been suggested that consumers use brands as a protection against the 'threats of postmodernity', which are said to be fragmentation, loss of meaning and loss of individuality (Elliot and Wattanasuwan, 1998). Fragmentation derives from the fact that individuals no longer automatically inherit an identity through history, they live in an increasingly changing world where brands can seem to offer a welcomed continuity. Therefore, the consistency of the brand becomes an important part of its added value (Feldwick, 1991 mentioned in Elliot and Wattanasuwan, 1998).

### 3.2.1 CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR AND THE CONSUMPTION OF BRANDS

The theory of how consumers use brands to construct their identity has during the last decades received much attention within the marketing field (Schembri and Merrilees, 2010). In this section of the chapter, focus lies on brands directed towards consumers, so called consumer brands where symbols and signs become an important social tool for communicating the self to others. In other words, that consumption of brands contributes to consumers' construction of their social identity. Several relevant areas of theory and disciplinary perspectives exist that support this assertion (Schembri and Merrilees, 2010).

In 1972 Barthes discussed the 'symbolic code of consumption' and maintained that there was a dual aspect to it: consumption fulfils a need but it is also embedded with social, cultural and symbolic structures. The function of consumer goods satisfying material needs, cannot be separated from the symbolic meanings of commodities (Fuat Firat and Venkatesh, 1995). The culture of consumption as a framework, in which consumer behaviours can be studied and understood, was put forward by Douglas and Isherwood (1979, mentioned in Corrigan 1997). Douglas and Isherwood showed how, in various domains of consumption, these activities became highly symbolic acts, invested with meanings derived from cultural frameworks. Goods are explained as tools for conveying messages among groups and individuals (Fuat Firat and Venkatesh, 1995). Bauman (2007) looks upon consumption as a mean to invest in one's social membership. In fact, he sees consumption as an investment in everything that is significant to the individual's social value and social self-respect. Bauman (2007) further links consumption to the social impression that an individual leave in his or her social environment. Fuat Firat and Venkatesh (1995) continue their reasoning by presenting that:

*“Once we have acknowledged the role of culture and the symbolic modes, practices, and behaviours as the basis of understanding consumption, we have to look for cultural spaces where such practices occur. Instead of evaluating cultural practices as part of a metanarrative or of a grand scheme of social behaviour, we need to turn to everyday life as the site for expressions of cultural symbolism.”* (Fuat Firat and Venkatesh, 1995 p. 249.)

The consumer behaviour literature has given increased attention to the construction of identity through narratives. That is, consumers using brands as symbols to tell a *story* which reflect themselves and their identity. Elliot and Wattanasuwan (1998) describe this by stating that consumers use brands as *symbolic resources* to communicate their identity to others. This is the reason for why marketing strategists try to create so called brand personalities, helping consumers to use the brand to create a story about themselves and thereby position themselves as they wish to do in their social life. It has been proved that consumers assign personality characteristics to brands and relate to brands as if they were human characters (Levy, 1985

mentioned in Elliott and Wattanasuwan, 1998). Narratives function as a crucial way for people to make sense of the world and ourselves. If we do not interpret objects, actions or behaviour, we cannot understand our social world. The narratives are formed through consumers' brand experiences, as for example advertisements, sponsoring and rituals (Elliot and Wattanasuwan, 1998).

### 3.2.2 FUNCTIONAL AND SYMBOLIC VALUES

The recognition that consumers also take *symbolic* values and not just *functional* values into consideration when making consumption choices is a central idea to postmodernism (Elliot and Wattanasuwan, 1998). The symbolic meaning of products is used both in constructing the social world (*social-symbolism*) and self-identity (*self-symbolism*). Postmodernism considers the self as something that is actively created, partially through consumption (Elliott and Wattanasuwan, 1998). It is not possible to separate the development of a self-identity from the creation of a collective social identity. This is because the self-identity can only be validated through interaction with others and the self is embedded in different social practices (Jenkins, 1996 mentioned in Elliott and Wattanasuwan, 1998). As stated above, consumers use brands as tools for a symbolic construction of the self. According to McCracken (1993, mentioned in Elliot and Wattanasuwan, 1998), symbolic consumption is an important way of communicating for example social status, age, gender and authenticity. The meaning of these brands and what they symbolise can only be interpreted through interaction between individuals in a social context.

The reason for *why* individuals want to communicate for example social status through the use of certain brands is anchored in the social context. Reed (2002) is one of several researchers who have suggested that the social identity approach could be useful when studying consumption. The social identity approach (Tajfel, 1981) suggests that the group, which an individual belongs to, is an important source of pride and self-esteem. In order to show his or hers belongingness to a certain group and attain a social identity by dissociate from other groups, an individual uses brands as signals (Featherstone, 2007 [1991] mentioned in Campbell, 2005).

## 3.3 THE POSTMODERN EMPLOYEE

### 3.3.1 GENERATION Y AND THE FUTURE LABOUR MARKET

The 'postmodern society' has inevitably had an influence on its population. This section will present the main features and characteristics of employees formed by the postmodern western society. First, a definition of the term 'generation' is in order. Oxford Dictionaries defines generation as:

*"The average period, generally considered to be about thirty years, in which children*

## THE EMPLOYER BRAND AS A SYMBOLIC RESOURCE

*grow up, become adults, and have children of their own*" (www.oxforddictionaries.com)

A generation is also defined by the distinctive habits or founding acts that differentiates them from their predecessors (Pauget and Dammak, 2012). In addition, the individuals of a generation are formed by the environment in which they grew up and the culture they share with other persons (Pilcher, 1993: Schewe, Debevec, Madden, Diamond, Parment and Murphy 2013). This means that the characteristics of a generation might alter between different countries and cultures.

The current western labour market contains three generations, each of them shaped by their time and certain events of world importance (Pauget and Dammak, 2012). Cultural circumstances and economic conditions have made an impression on each generation and since they vary in size, their impact on society differs (Pauget and Dammak, 2012). Most importantly, these generations differ in their attitudes, their knowledge and their behaviour. The three generations referred to are, *Boomers*, born between 1945 and 1964, *Generation X*, born between 1965 and 1977 and *Generation Y*, the focus of this chapter and born between 1978 and 1995 (Pauget and Dammak, 2012).

**The baby boomers** made the term 'generation' unavoidable after the 1960s. They were born after the Second World War, and are much more numerous than the previous generation (the so-called silent generation) (Pauget and Dammak, 2012). Those who were young in the sixties and early seventies lived during a privileged period due to the particularly strong economic growth at that time. Since they grew up in a world where economic growth was the norm and the concept of consumption grew stronger, they were the first generation to be both healthier and wealthier than the previous generation. Baby Boomers are said to be the first real 'materialists' and the discoverers of mass consumption (Pauget and Dammak, 2012).

**Generation X** is the generation characterised by change. Generation X has often been badly treated in the literature and has been described as the 'cynical and pragmatic generation'. Their cynicism may have come from seeing the national ideals and Europe experience great difficulties, a large economic crisis and the spreading of the AIDS virus (Pauget et Dammak, 2012). Generation X are said to have a generally liberal view of what parents, family, and social institutions are for. They liberated themselves from a bourgeois and predictable lifestyle and became more and more liberal and secular in their values (Parment, 2008).

During the last decade, a large amount of literature on the so-called **Generation Y** (Gen Y) has been published. The Harvard Business Review alone devoted ten articles during the year of 2008-2009 on the subject (Pauget and Dammak, 2012). Gen Y comes from Generation whY since they are said to be unusually questioning as individuals (Pihl, 2011). The term Generation Y was first used in 1993 in an article in *Ad Age*, a well-reputed magazine about marketing and media, which described Gen Y as individuals born between 1984 and 1994 (Parment, 2008, p.21). The popularity of the subject has however resulted in several different definitions of Gen Y

## THE EMPLOYER BRAND AS A SYMBOLIC RESOURCE

circulating, which can make the term somewhat confusing. Today, one of the most occurring definitions refers to individuals born between the year of 1978 and 1995 (Pauget and Dammak, 2012) which is the definition used throughout this thesis. The emphasis of the following section will be on Gen Y and how this generation relates to brands, work and employment.

Gen Y is the first generation to have grown up in a society filled to the brim with brands and mass communication. In addition, the channels for advertising and other types of communication have also multiplied. Gen Y has been raised in a world where individuals are said to profile and brand themselves, a quite new phenomenon. This has had an effect on how the generation looks upon themselves as individuals and they are said to be very conscious about how they are perceived by others (Pihl, 2011). They have a deep desire for originality and are stated to use brands as a way of differentiating themselves or to show off a group membership. In contrast to older generations, Gen Y does not find brands to be something dramatic or disturbing, instead brands are seen as a natural part of daily life. This attitude comes naturally from having grown up in a brand filled society and members of Gen Y are used to judging brands in different situations, which is implied to also apply for employer brands (Parment and Dyhre, 2009). Moreover, the individuals of this generation do not find it strange to pay for symbolic value when buying a product or a service, they are in fact willing to pay for the symbolic gains a certain brand can deliver (Parment, 2008).

Regarding work life, Pihl (2011) argues that Gen Y believes that the main function of employment is a way to self-fulfilment and life meaningfulness. To an increasing extent, work is seen as something you do for self-fulfilment and not as a right or duty. The job is supposed to be fun, a lifestyle and an identity (Parment and Dyhre, 2009). Thus, Gen Y is said to 'choose' an employer in line with their needs and are in general said to be less loyal to employers than what previous generations are. The individuals of Gen Y often act out of own profit and are in a constant construction of building their personal brand, both professionally and personally. An important source of security for Gen Y is the individual's own network, this because Gen Y feel that their social network is likely to last longer than their relationship with the current employer (Parment and Dyhre, 2009). But on the other hand, the network also has an impact on what employer the individual chooses to work for. What the people around Gen Y feel about an employer brand can have an important impact on that choice (Pihl, 2011). An increased number of individuals define themselves by the companies that they would like to work for and not by what they actually do (Parment and Dyhre, 2009).

Along with the arrival of a 'branded society', Gen Y has also experienced a world of more choices during their upbringing (Parment and Dyhre, 2009). Deregulation and globalisation has lead to a life with more opportunities for the individual, as mentioned earlier in the section on the postmodernism consumer. This has had an impact on Gen Y and they therefore experience a 'freedom of choice' concerning which employer to work for. Gen Y are said to be able to chose the employer best fitted for them, which resulted in the suggestion that Gen Y are less loyal than



previous generations. As the labour market becomes more and more alike the consumer market, individuals no longer see the choice of an employer as a lifelong decision (Parment and Dyhre, 2009). In general, Gen Y wants to feel that they can sympathize with the employer and that they share the values and ideological goals of the company. If the employer has a good reputation and a well-known brand as well, that makes it even better (Pihl, 2011). The fact that many individuals in this generation grew up with a relatively high living standard has also had an influence on Gen Y's feeling that they can choose among employers. They have not had to experience work as a duty or must to satisfy their consumption needs. Following this, Gen Y could be said to go beyond the functional values of everyday life and strive instead for emotional experiences (Parment and Dyhre, 2009). If Gen Y is seen as less loyal than previous generations, it makes it even more important for employers to deliver a good 'employment experience'. This since individuals who leave the organisation might come back at a later stage in their careers and they will also spread the word about the company as an employer to their network. As stated above, Gen Y has been said to have a somewhat different attitude towards the work life. A person's employment and career are now seen as an essential part of his or her lifestyle and as self-fulfilment pushes duty and loyalty at side, it is possible to consider employment as a sort of consumption (Parment, 2008).

To conclude the section on 'the postmodern employee' and Gen Y, it should be noted that, as mentioned previously in the problem discussion, much of the literature published on Gen Y is mainly directed towards practitioners (Backhaus and Tikoo, 2004). 'Management-handbooks' can be seen to have a tendency to use and emphasise ideas on the subject of Gen Y to the extent that they are inclined to become clichés. It is important to attend to the fact that these ideas are sometimes no more than generalisations. Generalisations are not sprung out of nowhere but it is essential for marketers not to think too narrowly when drawing up strategies on targeting Gen Y (Schewe et.al. 2013). Levain and Tissier (2012) have also acknowledged the necessity of critical reflection on the literature on Gen Y and emphasise that Gen Y has multiple dimensions and is not that generalizable as asserted in previous Gen Y literature.

### 3.4 EMPLOYER BRANDING

Companies and organisations have two specific stakeholders towards whom they direct their branding activities, customers and employees. Definitions of the term 'brand' are either directed to one of these key stakeholders, or both. The Marketing Accountability Standards board defines brands directed towards customers as a:

*"Name, term, design, symbol, or any other feature that identifies one seller's good or service as a distinct from those of other sellers"* ([www.marketingpower.com](http://www.marketingpower.com)).

The Marketing Accountability Standards board also introduces a complementary definition:

## THE EMPLOYER BRAND AS A SYMBOLIC RESOURCE

*“A brand often includes an explicit logo, fonts, colour schemes, symbols, sound, which may be developed to represent implicit values, ideas and even a personality”* ([www.marketingpower.com](http://www.marketingpower.com)).

The majority of the definitions holds a customer focus, which means that few definitions are oriented towards consumers and employees simultaneously, or employees exclusively (De Chernatony & Dall Olmo Riley, 1998). The master thesis at hand holds an internal perspective and thus use definitions of the brand based on the beliefs of the employees of an organisation, the so called *employer brand*. The internal marketing concept specifies that an organisation's employees are its first and primary market (Berthon et al, 2005). ‘Employer branding’ is one component of internal marketing that is still considered underdeveloped (Berthon et al, 2005) even though ‘employer branding’ as a concept was first recognised in the 1990s (Ambler and Barrow, 1996) and is today a fairly established concept in marketing, communications and HR. The concept consists of branding activities directed towards the employees and has been described as:

*“The sum of a company's efforts to communicate to existing and prospective staff that it is a desirable place to work”* (Loyd, 2002 referred to by Berthon et al., 2005, p.152).

As a research area, employer branding has traditionally been found within the marketing sphere but has now become a popular subject in HR practitioner books (Edwards, 2010, p. 6). Employer branding activities together with the employer brand help the organisation to attract, motivate and retain competent employees, which are considered as the link to an organisation's performance, survival and development. The attractiveness should be communicated to both existing and potential employees and get them to identify with the employer brand (Backhaus & Tikoo 2004).

Berthon et al. (2005, p. 152) stated that internal branding is about *“how to align employees' values and behaviour with a brand's desired values”*. However, internal branding is also important when it comes to the process of corporate brand building, which is the brand communicated towards consumers. This since the labour market and the consumer market are said to become more similar, and since it becomes increasingly difficult for companies to stay competitive in consumer markets unless they are attractive employers (Parment and Dyhre, 2009). The employees' behaviour can either reinforce a brand's advertised values or, if their behaviour is inconsistent with the company's values, undermine the credibility of the advertised message. As Coca-Cola's renowned former chief marketing officer, Sergio Zyman (cited in Berthon et.al 2002, p.204) said *‘Before you can even think of selling your brand to consumers, you have to sell it to you employees’*. Hence, how a brand is positioned in the minds of consumers is heavily dependent on a company's employees (Berthon et. al., 2005, p.152.).

As was previously mentioned in the introduction, the typical contemporary western employer now consists of intellectual and human capital that the organisation creates and possesses (Barrow and Mosley, 2005). The transition from a business environment where many people

possessed the same knowledge, to a more complex working culture where the workforce has become more individually skilled, has made companies more dependent on individual knowledge (Barrow and Mosley, 2005). This contributes to the intense competition for so-called ‘talents’ with specialised skills on the labour market. Many companies are also looking for other qualities and skills of their employees than purely knowledge-based qualifications, which put pressure on the companies’ employer branding strategies. Another factor forcing companies to become proficient with employer branding is that Gen Y are starting to plan their careers earlier and know what they are looking for (Parment and Dyhre, 2009). Research has suggested that factors such as the employer’s responsibilities, its vision and values are at least as important issues for many talented young people as the salary (Falonious, 2010). These trends in the working environment have lead to researchers recognising that relationships increasingly are becoming the dominant form of economic activity and planning in modern society (McNeil, 1974 cited in Rousseau 1989, p. 123), which supports the enforcement of nonexplicit agreements such as the ‘psychological contract’ as will be further explained in following sections. All these factors combined means that more companies and organisations develop a plan for employer branding – a strategy that is directly linked to the overall brand (McNeil, 1974 cited in Rousseau 1989).

### 3.4.1 THE EMPLOYER BRAND

The Employer Brand was termed for the first time in 1996 by Ambler and Barrow in the Journal of Brand Management. The authors defined the Employer Brand as:

*“The package of functional, economic and psychological benefits provided by employment and identified with the employing company.”* (Berthon et al, 2005, p.154).

Ambler and Barrow’s definition is still accurate, even if several authors have contributed with a contemporary reworking of it. Ruch stated in 2002 that the employer brand is *“the company’s image as seen through the eyes of its associates and potential hires”* and is intimately linked to the *“employment experience”* of *“what it is like to work at a company, including tangibles such as salary and intangibles such as company culture and values”* (Ruch 2002, cited in Martin, Beaumont, Doig and Pate, 2004, pp. 78-79). Ruch’s contemporary reworking contributes with a more detailed definition of the employer brand. First, it includes the notion of both associates and potential hires, which was not expressed in the definition by Ambler and Barrow (1996). Further, it gives examples of what could be understood as ‘functional/economic’ and ‘psychological’ benefits, referring back to the terms used by Ambler and Barrow (1996).

As has been noted throughout the master thesis, the concept of *functional* and *symbolic* benefits are used in connection to several concepts related to branding towards consumers and employer branding. Different researchers and authors use different terms, as can be seen in the quote from Ambler and Barrow (1996) above, who use the terms ‘functional and psychological’ benefits. From here on the terms ‘functional’ and ‘symbolic’ will be used in order to keep consistency and

## THE EMPLOYER BRAND AS A SYMBOLIC RESOURCE

comprehension.

Lievens, Van Hove and Anseel (2007) have in their research confirmed that ‘symbolic’ aspects of the employer brand would help describe the employer in terms of “*subjective, abstract and intangible attributes*” linked to the employer’s image (Lievens et al 2007, p. 48) and that the ‘functional’ aspects of the employer brand would describe the “*objective, physical and tangible attributes*” of the employment offering. The functional and symbolic benefits of the employer brand are communicated through the Employer Value Proposition (EVP) as a compelling employment image or proposition (Martin et al, 2005). The main task of the EVP is to answer the question "Why should a talented person choose to accept employment in this particular company?" (Falonious, 2010, p. 26). At its simplest, a brand is no more than a badge of identity and a promise of performance. It lets you know you where something is from and it carries a guarantee that what has been promised on the behalf of the brand will be delivered (Barrow and Mosley, 2005). Even when brands promise something intangible or symbolic (such as style, knowledge etc.) this tends to be underpinned by some form of tangible functionality (Barrow and Mosley, 2005). These are the functional benefits and performance guarantees and in employer brands they consist of for example payment for services rendered, a safe working environment, the provision of the equipment necessary to carry out your roles and responsibilities. These symbolic and functional benefits may be implicitly taken for granted, or they might be important elements within a company's Employer Value Proposition (Barrow and Mosley, 2005).

The symbolic benefits could be explained as the value a brand delivers in more subtle and complex ways (Lievens et al, 2007). Symbolic benefits of product brands promote a relevant and attractive emotional benefit that serves to ‘position’ the more functional benefits of the product in the mind of the consumer. In the labour market, emotional engagement and symbolic benefits have become a hot topic and are just as important for employer brands as they are for branded consumer products and/or services (Robbins and Judge, 2010). It has long been recognised that there are more that motivates employees than salary (Robbins and Judge, 2010) and in a world where the struggle for the best talent is intense, the need to differentiate oneself through symbolic benefits is said to become more important. Since functional values are easy for competitors to replicate, symbolic benefits make it easier to distinguish oneself as an employer. In other words, theory suggests a shift from what the brand *does* for you, to how the brand makes you *feel* (Barrow and Mosley, 2005, p.59).

The literature nowadays talks about the ‘employment experience’ and what symbolical benefits it provides the employee with. However, the emotional attachment an employee feels towards his or her employer tends to be driven by the value he or she derive from the total employment experience (Barrow and Mosley, 2005). Symbolic benefits could therefore also include things such as the inherent satisfaction employees derive from the tasks they perform, the extent to which they feel valued by their colleagues, and their belief in the quality, purpose and values of the organisation they represent (Barrow and Mosley, 2005, p.59). Symbolic benefits are

connected to what has been referred to as the ‘psychological contract’ between an employee and the employer, a concept that will be further developed in the section below (Barrow and Mosley, 2005, p.59).

### 3.4.2 THE PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTRACT

Theories regarding the psychological contract and employer branding have been combined in order to further understand the employment experience (Edwards, 2010). In short, theories concerning the psychological contracts treat the question of the employee’s obligations towards the employer in relation to the expected commitments from the organisation in return (Rousseau, 1989). It is also important to highlight the fact that an employee or applicant of an employer brand may simultaneously be a consumer of the same company’s consumer brand. In almost all cases of companies directed towards consumers, a strong consumer brand is helpful when trying to build a sustainable employer brand (Barrow and Mosley, 2005). An integration of the consumer and the employer brand is crucial since they are so closely interrelated and both aim to attract and retain people (Barrow and Mosley, 2005), sometimes even the same individuals. If what the employer brand and the consumer brand signal differ too much, it will cause cognitive dissonance, which increases the risk of employees leaving the organisation. If the employee identifies him- or herself as a consumer with the consumer brand, but discovers another reality as an employee within the organisation and the employer brand, cognitive dissonance occurs (Barrow and Mosley, 2005).

Cognitive dissonance may also occur if the external and internal communication of the employer brand differ (Parment and Dyhre, 2009). An employee who was initially attracted by the employer brand is more likely to leave the company if that employer brand message is not consistent throughout the organisation. Parment and Dyhre (2009) think of the employer brand as a product that the company has sold and which the employee has bought, explaining the importance to make sure that the employee is still happy with the ‘product’ after point of sale. An employer must live up to the promise they made to their employees at the point of recruitment. If not doing that, cognitive dissonance might arise and employees risk feeling disappointed with their employer since the psychological contract was violated.

The psychological contract is defined by Rousseau (1989, p.123) as: “*an individual’s beliefs regarding the terms and conditions of a reciprocal exchange agreement between that focal person and another party*” and concerns *unwritten* contractual features of the employment offering and employment experience. The concept includes the belief that a promise has been made and a consideration is offered in exchange for it, which ties the parties to some sort of reciprocal obligations (Rousseau, 1989). Since the master thesis at hand focuses on the employee’s experience, it is essential to make a distinction between ‘psychological contracts’ which will be further elaborated, and ‘implied contracts’, which will not. ‘Psychological contracts’ are viewed to exist between the individual employee and the organisation whereas

## THE EMPLOYER BRAND AS A SYMBOLIC RESOURCE

'implied contracts' is considered as a mutual obligation existing at the level of the relationship between the parties (Rousseau, 1989).

*“Psychological and implied contracts are different in that they exist at different levels, individual versus relational, and because psychological contracts are highly subjective and parties to a relationship do not need to agree, whereas implied contracts exist as a result of a degree of social consensus regarding what constitutes a contractual obligation”* (Rousseau, 1989, p.124).

A psychological contract emerges when an individual perceives that contributions he or she makes obligate the employer to reciprocity (or vice versa), but it is important to note that what constitutes the contract is in fact the individual's *belief* in an obligation of reciprocity (Rousseau, 1989). The belief is unilateral and held by a particular individual, meaning that it does not constrain any of those other parties to the relationship (Rousseau, 1989). The longer the relationship endures, with repeated cycles of contribution and reciprocity, the deeper the relationship the employee perceives and the broader the array of contributions and inducements that might be involved (Rousseau, 1989). It is also essential to note that only individuals have psychological contracts, not organisations. The employer, constituting the other party in the relationship, provides the context for the creation of a psychological contract but cannot have a psychological contract with its employees (Rousseau, 1989).

In order to fully understand the concept of the psychological contract, Rousseau (1989) suggests an examination of what happens when a psychological contract is violated. Violating a psychological contract is the employer's failure to respond to an employee's contribution in ways the individual believes the employer is obliged to (Rousseau, 1989). The failure to meet the terms of a psychological contract has proved to result in more than just unmet expectations, it signals damage to the relationship between the employer and the employee. Since what underlies psychological contracts is trust and good faith, a violation situates the relationship in a form of trauma where these factors are undermined (Rousseau, 1989). Since a psychological contract is viewed as a perception of reciprocal obligation where the individuals perceive that they have done *their* part, individuals whose psychological contract has been violated feel let down and betrayed, which has shown to produce intense emotional and attitudinal responses, sometimes to the extent that the employee chooses to leave the employer (Rousseau, 1989). Restoration of the relationship involves the reestablishment of trust, possible through a repeat of the process that initially created the relationship (Rousseau, 1989.)

Rousseau (1990) later makes a distinction between *relational* and *transactional* psychological contracts, where transactional content is based more on economic exchange features and differs from relational psychological contract content, where the provision of subjective perceptions of trust and fairness are central (Edwards, 2010, p. 14). A particular employer brand consists of both *transactional* features as well as important socio-emotional/cultural (*relational*) features (Martin

## THE EMPLOYER BRAND AS A SYMBOLIC RESOURCE

and Hetrick, 2006, cited in Edwards, 2010). Transactional psychological contracts involve specific, monetary exchanges between parties over a limited period of time (Robinson, Kraatz and Rousseau, 1994, p.139). Examples of features that characterise transactional psychological contracts are competitive wage rates and the absence of long-term commitments (Robinson et al., 1994). Relational contracts on the other hand, involve open-ended, less specific agreements that establish and maintain a relationship between the two parties and involve both monetary and non-monetary exchanges (Robinson et al., 1994). Inducements in relational contracts include training and development opportunities and a long-term career path within a firm (Robinson et al., 1994). Violation of the transactional psychological contract on behalf of the employer tends to create mere inequity in the transactional exchange, inequity that may be resolved merely by adjusting transactional obligations in order to restore the balance between inducements and contributions (Robinson et al., 1994, p. 141). Conversely, violation of the relational psychological contracts tends to result in more significant effects, for example it might nullify relational obligations and destroy the relationship itself (Robinson et al., 1994). Thus, the damage to the relational obligations caused by violation may often be irreparable (Robinson et al., 1994).

However, a third complementing aspect, called the '*ideological features*', of the psychological contract in relation to employer branding has later been suggested (Martin and Hetrick, 2006, mentioned in Edwards, 2010). Ideological features involve "*credible commitments to pursue a valued cause or principle*" and are considered as an important aspect of what some employers would be expected to provide for their employees (Martin and Hetrick, 2006, mentioned in Edwards, 2010, p. 18). Edwards (2010) continues by connecting this to Blau's (1964, mentioned in Edwards, 2010) work, which suggests that the fulfilment employees might get from working towards a particular ideological goal, can act as a reward. Edwards (2010, p. 14.) stated "*employees might wish to work for a company that has particular values or principles if they share these principles*" and continues this reasoning by arguing that the more an employee share ideological goals with a company, the less important other aspects of the employment experience, such as for example pay, become.

Organisations vary in how they make up their combination of these three aspects (transactional, relational and ideological) and the combinations are what constitutes a unique employment offer and thus differentiate a company among other employer brands (Martin and Hetrick, 2006, cited in Edwards, 2010). Lievens et al. (2007) highlight that the variation in the symbolical and functional benefits of each employer brand contributes to an organisations image associated with the employer brand and could therefore be seen as related to the organisation's particular psychological contract profile.

Edwards (2010) considers the psychological contract a useful framework to draw on when considering what makes up an organisation's employer brand and Employer Value Proposition. As stated above, the symbolic and functional benefits of the employer brand can be considered as linked to the theory of the psychological contract (Barrow and Mosley, 2005; Lievens et al, 2007)

and Edward (2010) further highlights the benefits of a model that incorporates symbolic aspects to the organisation's character when discussing employer branding. Edwards (2010) states that it enables the understanding of an additional range of reasons to why people want to work at an organisation. Moreover, Edwards (2010) discusses whether being associated with particular symbolic characteristics linked with an employer brand might give the employee some form of reward (symbolic), or that the employee may gain symbolic capital from being associated with a particular brand characteristic. Edwards (2010) also brings attention to the impact of identification on the attractiveness of the employer. He explicitly states:

*“Literature and research investigating identification can help explain the circumstances under which people are more likely to identify with an organisation...key arguments include the idea that people have a need to ensure a positive self regard in connection with their identity...”* (Edwards, 2010, p.12)

Edwards (2010) closes his assertion with an example of an organisation having a particularly good environmentally sustainable reputation, which could be seen as an ideological goal, meaning that employees who value this principle may enjoy and appreciate being associated with such an organisation. This might imply the concepts of the psychological contract's relevance as a framework useful to study the organisational- and employer brand identification, which will be further elaborated in the section below. It can also be remarked that Edwards (2010) discussion of the symbolic characteristics of an employer brand linked to the employee's valued principles further implies a connection between employer brand identification and the social identity creation.

### **3.4.3 'EMPLOYER BRAND' IDENTIFICATION**

In order to further understand the employee's experience of the employer brand, theories regarding *organisational identification* and employer branding have been linked together (Livens et al, 2007). Literature and research have shown that a high degree of organisational identification has a strong positive effect on the employer brand and vice versa. The integration of the two fields have also helped to explain why an organisation has a good reputation and a attractive *employer brand* (Edwards, 2010, p.12). Some researchers define organisational identification as:

*“The degree to which a member defines him- or herself by the same attributes that he- or she believes defines the organisation”* (Dutton, Dukerich and Harquail, 1994, p. 239).

However, employees vary in how much they identify with their employer. When they identify strongly with the employer, the attributes they use to define the employer also identify them. What the employee thinks about the organisation and what others think about the organisation, has been proved to affect the way that the employee thinks of him- or herself as an individual



## THE EMPLOYER BRAND AS A SYMBOLIC RESOURCE

(Dutton et al, 1994, p.239). This highlights the importance of organisational identification linked to the notion of the employees' self-identity. Lievens, et al. (2007) demonstrates in their research that both functional and symbolic benefits predict applicants' attraction to a certain employer brand. However, symbolic perceived identity dimensions are said to best predict employees' identification with their employer and employees are also said to attach importance to outsiders' assessment of the organisation (Lievens et al, 2007). This implies the relevance of 'employer brand identification', in other words what makes the employee identify with the employer brand in addition to the organisation.

Previous research on organisational identification and employer branding has mentioned the concept of the 'construed external image', how employees think outsiders assess their employer, as influential to the employees' organisational identification (Dutton et al, 1994). The master thesis at hand focuses on the employer brand identification rather than the organisational identification, but the above mentioned similarities between the two concepts indicates that the theory of the 'construed external image' might be relevant for the employer brand identification as well. It has been stated that consumers use brands as a symbolic resource to communicate their identity to others (Elliot and Wattanasuwan, 1998), meaning that individuals are concerned about how others assess the brands they use (the construed external image). It might therefore be interesting to study whether employer brands are influenced by the 'construed external image' in a similar manner as the organisational identity. However, it should be noted that the construed external image may not be identical to outsiders' actual assessment of the organisation, which is referred to as the 'corporate reputation' (Dutton et al, 1994).

The 'construed external image' can according to Lievens et al. (2007) be examined through an experiment, the so-called 'cocktail party test'. The 'cocktail party test' includes a social situation where an individual's answer the question for which organisation or employer brand he or she work. If the individual states the employer brand and the conversation almost immediately sways in another direction, this indicates that the organisation or employer brand is held in low regard. However, if people express their appreciation and keep talking about the employer, this suggests that the organisation or the employer brand is highly valued. In other words, individuals typically compare the information received from outsiders of the organisation to what they as insiders of the organisation believe the company stands for. When an employer is viewed favourably by ourselves and by others, organisational identification (Lievens et al., 2007) and possibly the employer brand identification is likely to be strong. The reverse happens when an employer is held in low regard (Lievens et al., 2007, p. 45). This so-called 'cocktail party test' has been explained to provide valuable information for individuals evaluating which employers are held in high (or low) regard and how outsiders are judging them (Lievens et al, 2007), which has an impact the symbolic value of the employer brand. Prior studies have paid little attention to the specific components that determine employees' perceived organisational identity and their construed external image of organisations (Lievens et al. 2007). However a considerable amount of research shows that:

## THE EMPLOYER BRAND AS A SYMBOLIC RESOURCE

*“...there are significant positive paths between the attractiveness of perceived organisational identity and construed external image, and the strength of organisational identification”* (Dukerich, Golden and Shortell, 2002, p. 521).

This suggests that organisations with an attractive external image, for example a positive corporate reputation among consumers and potential recruits, or a positive construed external image, tend to be associated with higher levels of organisational identification (Dukerich et al., 2002). Drawing on the arguments put forward above, the same conclusion could be made for research concerning employer brand identification. Lievens et al. (2007) has also emphasised that it is crucial to examine which factors (functional and symbolical) company outsiders as well as company insiders' associate with a given employer in order to avoid cognitive dissonance.

## 3.5 LINKS BETWEEN THE THEORETICAL ORIENTATIONS

The above-described three fields of theory have some interesting links among them. First, it becomes obvious that the structure of our western civilisation has shifted. Society has moved from a production society to a consumption society. According to previous researcher, the primary way of constructing one's identity today is through consumption of brands (Bauman, 2007). As mentioned in the sections above, brands have come to serve as symbolic resources that individuals use in order to signal lifestyles and belongingness to certain groups. Simultaneously, as the labour market has moved towards the consumer market's design and nature, Gen Y has started to treat employment as a commodity (Parment, 2008). They grew up in a postmodern consumption world, filled with brands, symbols and choices and they look upon employment, not as a lifelong project, but as a temporary experience (Parment and Dyhre, 2009).

Bauman (1998), links the change of the status of work with the demand for aesthetic experience brought by consumption. As a result, he suggests that work itself can in fact become an object of consumption (Bauman (1998). Bauman (1998) continues his reasoning and discusses the value of work as judged by its capacity to generate pleasurable experience, complementing this by maintaining that work is a place for identity construction, yet only for a minority of people from privileged professions.

*“The aesthetic value of work as well as the freedom to choose and to move has become a powerful stratifying factor in the consumer society. It's no longer about limiting working hours to a minimum and thus leave more space for leisure, but to completely wipe out the line that separates vocation from leisure activity, job from hobbies, work from recreation, to elevate the work itself as the highest and most satisfying pleasure”*  
(Bauman, 1998, p. 55).

Bauman's (1998) claim about work as an object of consumption remains undeveloped but his discussion follows another concept brought to the field of consumption by Gabriel and Lang (1996), namely the concept of 'consumers as communicators' and 'consumer as hedonists' as explained under 3.1. Gabriel and Lang's (1996) descriptions of 'consumers as communicators' are very much in line with Bauman's (1998) theory of the postmodern consumer and the work of Appadurai (1990), who stated that the age of postmodernism might be called the 'age of symbols'.

Employer branding could be considered to have evolved as a result of the processes of moving from a society built around production to a 'consumer society' (Bauman, 1998) and Gen Y's entry on the labour market (Parment and Dyhre, 2009). Until recently, customers were seen only as those external to the organisation. The rise of concepts such as 'internal marketing', has made

arguments such as *'the organisation's personnel are the first market of any company'* more audible. In fact, if work is to be regarded as an object of consumption, employees are in many ways seen as internal customers, and jobs are seen as internal products. Employment-products must attract, develop and motivate employees, thus satisfy the needs and wants of the internal customers (Berthon et al., 2005). While the employment experience is far more complex than any product or service experience, there is a recognition that companies would benefit from adopting a similar approach for marketing of employment, as for product or services (Mosley, 2007, p.137).

To summarise, the existence of a research field such as employer branding indicates that many organisations nowadays look upon their employer brand as a product on a market, the market being the labour market. However, there are some significant differences in the characteristics of the employee and the consumer which necessary to acknowledge. The following section will highlight these dissimilarities.

### **3.5.1 THE EMPLOYEE – A CONSUMER OR COMMODITY?**

Gen Y-employees and the future labour force have, owing to their certain characteristics mentioned above, been referred to as job-hoppers, the zigzag people or career-surfers (Salomonsson, 2005, p. 119). Salomonsson (2005) describe careers as 'boundaryless' and states that a creative career is not just shaped by the organisation but by the individual, who takes an active part in 'crafting' his or her own career. Salomonsson (2005, p. 122) further describes these career-surfers while giving an example of their 'shopping' for jobs online. There, job-seekers can scroll among the vacancies announced by various employers, or market themselves by sending in their CV hoping to attract an employer. This gives individuals access to see their own 'market-value'. The only problem with these 'job-shops' online is that even if you have clicked to add a job offer that interests you, you cannot buy it immediately. The completion of the transaction requires an approval from the employer (Salomonsson, 2005, p. 122), which consolidates the distinction between consumers and employees.

Moreover, the well-established Stakeholder Theory-model states and describes the different stakeholders surrounding a company, and here consumers and employees are described as two separate stakeholders (Holmström and Lindholm, 2011). The main differences between the products or services you consume and your employer is that unlike conventional products and services, an employee cannot 'buy' himself a place in a particular company. It takes a certain type of education alternatively experience or network to succeed in getting a job. The company therefore has a larger say and more impact as an employer towards their employees, than as a producer or seller of products and services has towards their consumer (Holmström and Lindholm, 2011) Furthermore, even if Gen Y-employees are described as job-hoppers (Salomonsson, 2005), the majority of Gen Y does not have the possibility to change employers with the same speed that they change the brand of fast moving consumer goods, this due to

## THE EMPLOYER BRAND AS A SYMBOLIC RESOURCE

monetary reasons. In addition, as an employee, you are not in the position to ‘end’ the commitment to your employer whenever you want, and your employer has the right to end the commitment to you. This is not a risk for a consumer of a fast moving consumer good-brand. An employer is simply more powerful and has a larger say and the ‘relationship’ is a long-term investment from both sides (Holmström and Lindholm, 2011). This means that, an individual engaging in online job shopping as Salomonsson (2005) stated it, would simultaneously become both a consumer – with the potential to choose and influence the market – and a commodity that can be rejected.

However, drawing from the theory sections above on consumers and Gen Y, your possessions and your employment can both be said to send signals to your surroundings about what ‘type of person’ you are. Just like buying a BMW and ‘become a person who has a BMW’ with all the symbols attached to it (Schembri and Merrilees, 2010), it might be possible to work for Ernst & Young and thus ‘become an Ernst & Young’ employee which then would give you the attributes that the Ernst & Young brand is related to. Both types of brand can tell a *story* about what type of person you are, to which social group you belong (Elliot and Wattanasuwan, 1998). In the contemporary consumer society we are deemed personally responsible for every aspect of ourselves, everything we do has implications for the self and as a result all aspects of our existence are monitored and scrutinised as objects, read as reflections of the self (Slater, 1997, p. 91). Therefore, individuals have opinions about employer brands and consumer brands, regardless if they are directed towards them as employees or consumers. In the same way as you ‘choose’ where to live or what car to buy, your choice of employer could send signals to your surroundings and function as a status symbol. To conclude, the desire to ‘be or become someone is applicable in both cases of consumption and employment. Following that, the identity perspective is applicable in both consumer- and employer branding. In order to orientate oneself in society, people use brands as symbols in order to indicate what ‘social group’ one belongs to. Still, since these theories build on the postmodern western society, the arguments are restricted to western communities.

Having analysed the relevant theories above, it can be concluded that consumption has indeed entered the employment experience. By drawing parallels between the research fields of consumer theory, generation Y and employer branding, the analysis of literature led on to the notion of ‘consumption of the employer brand’, a concept that seems to be of current interest in contemporary literature. This chapter contributes to the field of employer branding by elaborating on the concept of ‘consumption of the employer brand’. While adopting the notion of work as an object of consumption, the next chapter will treat the research question and examine whether employer brands are used by employees in Gen Y as a symbolic resource in their social identity creation.

## **CHAPTER 4: ANALYSIS OF EMPIRICAL FINDINGS**

In this master thesis it has been established that consumption theory and social psychology state that it is not possible to separate the development of a self-identity from the creation of a collective social identity (Jenkins, 1996 mentioned in Elliott and Wattanasuwan, 1998). When examining whether Gen Y employees are said to use the employer brand as a tool in the symbolic construction of their social identity, the inseparability between the self-identity and the social identity indicates the importance to also investigate the employer brand identification. The data collected from the case study also contributed to the relevance of investigating whether employer brand identification functions simultaneously as the ‘consumption’ of the employer brand.

The analysis is therefore divided in two sections. The first section examines the secondary research question, the employer brand identification, which in this case study of Siemens was found to be salient among the respondents. The second section of the analysis contributes with an elaboration on the primary research question of this master thesis – whether Gen Y employees use the employer brand as a symbolic resource in their social identity construction, a question that the case study research at Siemens could not provide a unanimous answer to. Both parts of the analysis build on the empirical findings and are outlined with support from the chapter three.

### **4.1. EMPLOYER BRAND IDENTIFICATION**

The data collected during the case study implies that employer brand identification can be seen as related to the self-identity of the employees. The respondents mentioned that the attributes they associated with the employer brand largely corresponded to the attributes they ascribed themselves, which makes it interesting to examine when the employer brand identification is most occurring and what attributes that were found to be salient.

Edwards (2010) stated that ‘the psychological contract’ is what makes up an organisations employer brand, indicating the frameworks’ usefulness to help identify when employer brand identification occurs. In short, it could be said that employer brand identification occurs when and where the psychological contract is upheld (Edwards, 2010). As mentioned earlier in this master thesis, research has suggested three types of psychological contracts, transactional-, relational- and ideological psychological contracts (Martin and Hetrick, 2006 mentioned in Edwards, 2010). However, Edwards (2010) draw specific attention to the ideological psychological contract and mentions that the transactional psychological contract will lose some of its significance if there exists a shared ideological goal between the

employee and the employer brand. This is a statement that to some extent can be verified by the result of this case study.

The degree to how much the employee attaches him- or herself to the employer brand and identify with it, can be related to how well the employee perceive the psychological contract to have been upheld. When the psychological contract is violated, cognitive dissonance may occur, which makes it difficult for employees to identify with the employer brand (Parment and Dyhre, 2009). Building on the theories of the psychological contract by Rousseau (1989) and Martin and Hetrick (2006 mentioned in Edwards, 2010), this first section of the analysis will concentrate on the concept of the transactional-, relational- and ideological psychological contracts and how employer brand identification could be said to originate from these.

### 1. THE IDEOLOGICAL PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTRACT

The ideological psychological contract involves commitments to pursue a valued cause or principle. For Siemens this is predominantly connected to their efforts to attain a sustainable future for the society and its environment. Linked to theories of Gen Y and their aspiration for life-fulfilment and meaningfulness, the ideological psychological contract could be the most important for the future labour force. However, the research of this master thesis revealed a more nuanced picture. Even though the case study research at Siemens has strengthened the significance of the maintenance of the ideological psychological contract for employer brand identification, it is of highest importance not to underestimate the impact of the other two features of the psychological contract, the transactional and the relational psychological contracts.

The case study showed that Gen Y employees at Siemens AB identified with the ideological goals and therefore also the employer brand, whereas Gen Y employees at SIT AB did not identify with the ideological goals and therefore not with the employer brand. This is illustrated by a quotation from one of the employees at SIT AB:

*“...I consider it [Siemens Sweden’s environmental- and sustainability profile] very important and I know that Siemens do a lot of sustainability and so... but like, I work with gas turbines so I do not really feel that sustainability is something that I do... even if I would prefer to have a job where I feel that I am saving the world a little each day. Perhaps it is easier for those who work with pinwheels...” (SIT AB)*

Cognitive dissonance is proved to occur if the employer brand communicates a specific ideological goal (internally and externally), which is not upheld throughout the organisation. Gen Y employees tend to demonstrate lower levels of employer brand identification in those areas of the organisation where the ideological psychological contract is not upheld, in this case at SIT AB. Where cognitive dissonance occurs, the Gen Y employees tend to identify with their organisation, industry sector or business unit, rather than the employer brand.

## THE EMPLOYER BRAND AS A SYMBOLIC RESOURCE

For Gen Y employees at Siemens AB, the ideological psychological contract was experienced to be upheld, and a rather important factor for their employer brand identification. The literature on Gen Y describes the generation as thinking of self-fulfilment and life meaningfulness as one of the key functions of employment (Pihl, 2011). What lies in the concepts of self-fulfilment and life meaningfulness can of course vary from individual to individual but to work for ‘a higher cause’ was in this case study found to be salient. Gen Y employees at Siemens AB stated that the ideological goal of the employer brand contribute to a feeling of meaningfulness. For example, one respondent expressed:

*”I find it enjoyable to work for a company that you can stand for. I really believe in what Siemens stands for; environment, health, all they do and their core values, that is something I believe in. It is fun to work for a company that works actively with these questions, I might have swallowed the internal propaganda a bit, but I still think that it is a good company that tries to do its best in order to make the world better somehow. It is like, of course you need to be profitable as well but in much they do there is a focus on making things better for the world and that is something that I like.”* (Siemens AB)

Furthermore, when trying to explain what makes up a ‘good’ work or employment, the following statements illustrates the reasoning of several different respondents:

*“What is a very good job? Something that you are good at and that you can contribute with, something that feels meaningful”* (Siemens AB)

*”I would most preferably have a job where I can feel that I save the world a little bit every day”* (SIT AB)

These quotations show that the factor of ‘meaningfulness’ is present in the respondents’ view of what an employer brand preferably should provide and the importance of that this promise is kept within the ideological psychological contract.

## 2. THE TRANSACTIONAL PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTRACT

The transactional psychological contract is based on economic exchange figures or what has been referred to as a part of the functional benefits. Among the respondents, the initial wage rate at Siemens is experienced as rather low compared to other competing employer brands. As one employee stated it:

*“...so honestly, Siemens is not good at paying wages, it is not because of the wages that one chooses to work here. I have a friend who, really, is working in an identical business and I know what they have in salary and compensation as well...”* (Siemens AB)

However, the transactional psychological contract is still experienced as upheld since the feeling of a low initial wage rate is considered to be somewhat counterbalanced by the shared



## THE EMPLOYER BRAND AS A SYMBOLIC RESOURCE

ideological goals and the ideological psychological contract. These results are in line with Edwards' (2010) statement that the transactional psychological contract seems to lose some of its significance in relation to the ideological psychological contract. One employee referred to it like this:

*“It is not the salary that makes me get up in the morning and go to work, I would never like to think that way...”* (Siemens AB)

However, some of the respondents did mention that the transactional psychological contract is more important in the beginning of an employment, which is in line with what has been suggested in previous theory (Robinson, et al, 1994, p.139). A male respondent stated that insufficient compensation would imply cognitive dissonance but meant that, with time, this dissonance tend to cease and be taken over by other factors.

*“...when looking for a job, I think that if the employer is too far away from their competitors in compensation, they will not be interesting. However, the further you climb in the hierarchy, there are other factors that becomes more important than salary, like becoming a specialist, the freedom to feel entrepreneurial and to become a recognized player in ones field...”* (Siemens AB)

This quotation indicates that with time the employee seems to pay more attention to the *relational* psychological contract rather than the *ideological* psychological contract as stated above. Even though evidence exists to that the ideological- and relational psychological contracts are more important than the transactional contract, it must be emphasised that employees still want the economic compensation to be fair in proportion to what they do.

*“We had a leadership training-session where someone said that you should not pay more than you are not willing to lose the person for. Like, if you are willing to pay 35 000 in order to not lose a person, you should pay that amount already in the current situation...”* (SIT AB)

The results indicated that the transactional psychological contract reflects the value that the employer put in the employee, meaning that the salary reflects the worth of the employee and should be in line with what the applicant is expecting. Otherwise, it becomes difficult for the employee to identify with the employer brand.

### 3. THE RELATIONAL PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTRACT

Finally, the relational psychological contract constitutes the provision of subjective perceptions of trust and fairness, the so-called socio-emotional and cultural features (Martin and Hetrick, 2006, cited in Edwards, 2010). The interviews indicated that the relational psychological contract at Siemens was held in high regard by the respondents, and circulated around feelings such as trust, security, and a globalised and international company culture.

## THE EMPLOYER BRAND AS A SYMBOLIC RESOURCE

An important factor within the relational psychological contract linked to the employer brand identification, is how the employees feel at work and the word that is most prominent in interviews with the Gen Y employees is 'safe':

*"...but then I think it's just this thing about taking care of each other..."* (SIT AB)

The relational psychological contract was upheld to a large extent both among Gen Y employees at Siemens AB and SIT AB, and it heavily influenced their employer brand identification. The respondents expressed that they felt 'safe' with the employer brand, that a large employer brand as Siemens have the employees' back in a different way than a smaller employer brand would have. One of the things, which are communicated both internally and externally about Siemens' employer brand is 'balance in life', something that the Gen Y employees proved to identify strongly with.

Many of the respondents mentioned that, in the beginning of the employment, the company made an effort to let the newly acquired employees get to know the employer brand better. Lectures about the company and the sectors were held, but also about values, vision and career possibilities. Many of the respondents mentioned this as a mean to overcome the cognitive dissonance and a possible violation of the relational psychological contract, strengthening their identification with the employer brand.

*"...the internal education means that one can always meet people in different parts of Siemens, which is great. First, because one gets to know people that are driven but also because one gets to know Siemens a bit better, what they do on the different parts and increase awareness of the company and so on..."* (Siemens AB)

The time-aspect, which was mentioned above under the transactional psychological contract, also became evident when differences in employer brand identification among the respondents were noticed. Respondents who had taken part of the trainee-program were inclined to express higher levels of employer brand identification than those who had not. The program showed to give the trainees an opportunity to get to know different parts of the company, both location wise and sector wise. The trainees all got a very good overview of the company and got to meet many different people in the organisation, whereof many at high positions. This, and the fact that the trainees at several occasions got to act as company ambassadors at for example career fairs at different universities, helped to make them quickly feel a part of the organisation and identify with the employer brand. On the question of what would be different if she had not gone through the trainee program, one respondent said:

*"Well, then you would not have understood the overall picture, you would not have seen that what you do is one piece in this large game"* (SIT AB)

Siemens AB's and SIT AB's use of the trainees as company representatives also made them, as employees, more aware of Siemens' core values and vision. When they actively work to spread

## THE EMPLOYER BRAND AS A SYMBOLIC RESOURCE

these values, they themselves become more apprehensive of what their employer stands for and start to appreciate and identify with those values. It seems that, by understanding the context of the company and how one, as an employee, can be part of and influence this context, a closer connection to the company is created. What the company wishes to stand for becomes more salient for the trainees and therefore also present in their understanding of the organisation.

*“Then, I know quite a lot about the global picture and how the threads run, probably because I have been a trainee and stood there on career fairs and explained how everything works. I might have a wider picture than those who have not been a trainee”*  
(SIT AB)

These arguments together could be an important reason for why trainees relate more easily to the employer and do identify with the employer brand to a larger extent.

From this section of the analysis of empirical findings, it can be concluded that Gen Y employees at Siemens AB and SIT AB do identify with the employer brand and that employer brand identification could be related to the maintenance of the psychological contract as suggested by theory (Edwards, 2010). An additional insight was that the respondents at Siemens AB did express a somewhat stronger attachment to the employer brand than their colleagues at SIT AB. This could possibly be explained by the specific characteristics of Siemens AB, as described under 2.5.1. The fact that Siemens AB is a sales unit engaged in several different sectors, could have an impact on the employee’s somewhat stronger employer brand identification. SIT AB, on the other hand, is active only within the energy sector. The employees at SIT AB were inclined to identify stronger with their profession and their sector than Siemens’ employer brand. These insights lead on to the second part of the analysis examining the primary research question of the master thesis.

## 4.2 THE EMPLOYER BRAND AS A SYMBOLIC RESOURCE

The second part of the analysis is concentrated on the primary research question of this master thesis:

*Do Gen Y employees 'consume' the employer brand as a symbolic resource in their social identity creation?*

The case study at Siemens Sweden did not provide any results that allowed the primary research question to be answered unanimously. It is interesting to note that the primary research question was not possible to answer with a 'yes' even though it was verified that the employees do identify with the employer brand. Since theory indicates the connection between the creation of a self-identity and development of a social identity, it is of interest to look into how it could be that the employees at Siemens do identify personally with the employer brand but do not use it as a symbolic resource in order to ascribe to a certain 'social group' or engage in social competition. As one respondent expressed it herself, when she was asked about what she believed Siemens employer brand stood for on her CV, she explicitly answered, *"I have not reflected on that"*. (SIT AB)

The analysis of results contributed with **four main reasons** to *why* it cannot be concluded that Gen Y use the employer brand as a symbolic resource in the creation of a social identity.

### 1. WORK TASK PRECEDE COMPANY AND THE EMPLOYER BRAND

The respondents at Siemens AB and SIT AB were inclined to refer to *what* they worked with, rather than to *whom* they worked for. As stated before, this conduct was especially prominent among the respondents at SIT AB, who were predominantly engineers within one specific sector. They expressed a stronger identification with their profession than the employer brand.

Many of the engineers at SIT AB were drawn to Siemens as an employer primarily because of the specific sector Siemens could offer employment within, the complex work tasks and a promise of a global career. All these factors are more connected to the profession than the employer brand. On the question on whether he would mention the name of his employer in a conversation with a new acquaintance, one of the respondents answered *"no, not any longer"*. When asked why, he stated: *"Because I am not Siemens, I work with what I work with and I could just as well do that somewhere else."* (SIT AB)

The status of the profession and work tasks exceeding the employer brand was emphasised by several other respondents, another SIT AB engineer stated:

## THE EMPLOYER BRAND AS A SYMBOLIC RESOURCE

*“At an employee inquiry, my department answered that we are not proud over Siemens, we are proud to have a job which gives personal development. If you ask people who have been here for a while, they don’t give a crap about what name it says on the signs, they have pride in their profession, not in the company. We do not have that attachment to Siemens, our business has only been Siemens for 10 years.” (SIT AB)*

This citation also implies the importance of time, as has been brought up before in this analysis. Even if the respondent in this case had not experienced another employer than SIT AB, his co-workers are more attached to their sector and profession rather than the employer brand and therefore do not act as ‘company ambassadors’ in front of newly hired staff. Time can have an impact on if and when an employee commences to relate to and identify with the company and its employer brand, and in the long run feel that it could be used as a beneficial symbolic resource.

The empirical findings indicate that the respondents from SIT AB and Siemens AB can be linked to the concept of ‘consumers as hedonists’ and ‘consumers as communicators’ (Gabriel and Lang, 1996). The case study research has shown that the employees of Gen Y would in fact, in their ‘consumption of the employer brand’, be explained as ‘consumers as hedonists’ rather than ‘consumers as communicators’. If the respondents had strategically used the employer brand as a symbolic resource in their social identity creation, they would have been ‘consumers as communicators’. This since their pleasure would then have been found in the result of the ‘consumption’, or rather the signs that the ‘object of consumption’ (the employer brand) communicated to others. Since this could not be strengthened - and the respondents instead perceived that the value and pleasure was found in the ‘consumption’ itself (the work task, industry and profession), together with the feelings they could derive from it – Gen Y employees at Siemens AB and SIT AB can instead be explained as ‘consumers as hedonists’.

As explained above, the research indicated that depending on type of profession and company, the work task and the specific industry sometimes become more important than the employer brand. Gen Y employees therefore do not feel a need to use the employer brand as a symbolic resource in their identity creation. In other words, in this case, the symbolism of the profession is perceived to exceed the usefulness of the employer brand as a symbolic resource. Since this case study research only contained interviews with employees at Siemens, this led us on to an examination on how the ‘construed external image’ of the employer brand prevents the use of the employer brand as a symbolic resource.

## **2. THE CONSTRUED EXTERNAL IMAGE AND PUBLIC FAMILIARITY OF THE EMPLOYER BRAND**

What employees think about outsiders’ assessment of the employer brand has also been shown to have an impact on why they do not use the employer brand as a symbolic resource when creating their social identity. One reoccurring comment among the respondents was their feeling that the general public does not know what Siemens *actually* do and what the brand stands for. Outsiders

## THE EMPLOYER BRAND AS A SYMBOLIC RESOURCE

are believed to associate Siemens' employer brand to a large German organisation. The products and services that have been, or are visible for the public are predominantly cell phones (which have not been in production for many years now) or white goods and these consumer products are what the Swedish public today associate with Siemens employer brand. The elements of sustainability, 'green energy' and social responsibility (which are the ideological goals Siemens uses to profile their employer brand and make the employees feel that they work for a higher cause) are not sufficiently well known among the Swedish public. This means that even if an employee feels proud of what the company does, he or she does not gain any social benefits by this, implying that there is no use of the employer brand as a symbolic resource. To state "I am a Siemens employee" does in most cases not mean anything special in the eyes of the public.

*"It's nothing you feel ashamed of, working for Siemens and if someone asks, then you answer. But when you meet a new person and say that you work for Siemens, you always have to explain 'I don't work with cell phones'... So like, you're proud to be working for Siemens but you always have to explain what it is exactly that you do". (Siemens AB)*

However, an important insight provided by the empirical findings, was that the situation was differently experienced in for example Germany. Respondents who had been at the Siemens Headquarters in Germany said that the general public's knowledge about the company and the employer brand in Germany was quite the opposite from the general public's knowledge in Sweden. In Germany, the employer brand of Siemens was linked with status and prestige and everyone there know what Siemens employer brand stands for and what the company does. This implies that the nationality of the employer brand can have an impact on how 'useful' employees experience that the employer brand is as a symbolic resource. This since it affects the general public's familiarity with- and knowledge about the employer brand. As one respondent stated it:

*"There [in Germany], I would say that the 'identity' is even stronger. Just in that, I was at the headquarters office so it was like, it becomes something quite different over there. Here in Sweden Siemens is incredibly unknown in comparison..." (Siemens AB)*

The 'construed external image' was examined through a development of the 'cocktail party test' (Lievens et al., 2007) mentioned in 3.3.4, or what could be referred to as the 'imaginary cocktail party test'. It involved interviewing employees at Siemens AB and SIT AB by using projective techniques where the respondents were questioned about an imaginary cocktail party. The respondents were asked to consider how they think an unknown outsider would react when they tell them about their employer brand. How the respondent chooses to present him- or herself in the case of an imaginary encounter with an imaginary 'outsider', seems to depend on either what type of profession the respondent have or what type of profession the imaginary outsider has. This could be explained by the influence that the profession has on what social group an individual belongs to and if other members of this social group are acquainted with what Siemens do and what their employer brand stands for.

## THE EMPLOYER BRAND AS A SYMBOLIC RESOURCE

Moreover, this can be linked to what one of the respondents referred to as the ‘initiated’ and the ‘uninitiated’. The ‘initiated’ are either Siemens employees from other countries, sectors or clusters, or other engineers acquainted with the sectors that Siemens are active within. The ‘uninitiated’ are what in theory is called the ‘outsiders’, people that have no contact with neither Siemens, nor the industries they are active within. The ‘initiated’ were supposed to immediately understand what Siemens stands for and be positively interested when a respondent said that she/he was a Siemens employee, while the ‘uninitiated’ were expected to not have a clue and appear rather uninterested. An ‘uninitiated’ was explained to probably have heard about Siemens before, but to be incapable of associating the employer brand to any industry sector, work task, specific profession or impressions of superiority etc.

The respondents’ experience was that the ‘uninitiated’ in Sweden thought of Siemens not in explicitly negative terms, but as a large, rather grey, foreign, cell phone-company and not as the global industrial corporation occupying leading market- and technology positions worldwide, that it actually is. The ‘initiated’ on the other hand was expected to have knowledge about this. One of the engineer respondents stated:

*“There are probably some people who think that it is a bit boring, or like “why are you working for a German, big business” but there are also those who think it's awesome, those who know how big and wide it is.”* (Siemens AB)

Another engineer respondent further elaborated on this and concluded that:

*“It is still a large company with a rather extensive interview process and with a large number of applicants, so it is clear that there is something that is seen as positive.”*(Siemens AB)

However, the respondents did not consider it common knowledge what ‘type of individuals’ Siemens in Sweden recruits, or how competent their employees are. When asked what the employer brand of Siemens says about him on his CV, one respondent state:

*“...the problem is that I don't believe that it says so much about me as a person. I don't think people know what kind of persons Siemens look for.”*  
(SIT AB)

In order for the employer brand to function as a valuable symbolic resource on the CV, it has to be widely known by the public and by competitors. If the employer is known to only recruit the ‘best talents’, a position there most probably works better as a symbolic resource.

The empirical findings implied that ‘initiated’ individuals have a more positive impression of Siemens employer brand than the ‘uninitiated’, and since the respondents did experience that the public in Sweden belongs to the group of so called ‘outsiders’ or ‘uninitiated’, they also felt that there was no use of the employer brand as a symbolic resource in their social identity creation.

## THE EMPLOYER BRAND AS A SYMBOLIC RESOURCE

Another interesting aspect of the ‘construed external image’ that is displayed as having an impact on the respondents’ reluctance to ‘consume’ the employer brand as a symbolic resource is the complexity of Siemens’ employer brand. This case study research indicated that the size and the many dimensions of Siemens sometimes were experienced as a weakness. The complexity contributes to the publics’ ignorance of the employer brand. One engineer even expressed:

*“...it means the end of conversation, there are very few that even have a clue what Siemens is doing.”* (SIT AB)

However, the research also indicated a positive outcome of the public being so unfamiliar with the employer brand. Some respondents expressed that they would be proud to say that they worked at Siemens, even to those who are ‘uninitiated’, because it gave them an opportunity to continue the conversation by telling and explaining all the advantages with Siemens employer brand themselves. One respondent even went as far as refer to it as a way of storytelling or a game:

*“What do you think we do? Telephones? No, we actually do this, this, this and this too”.*  
(Siemens AB)

This often led to that the ‘uninitiated’ were positively surprised and impressed by Siemens’ employer brand. Some respondents said that the reaction sometimes even was passed on to them and their identity. Several respondents explicitly said that it was “fun” and “cool” to tell and correct people about what Siemens do and stands for, which implies that the ‘uninitiated’s’ ignorance is not always looked upon as a weakness. Also, for the respondents this meant that they could give outsiders “their” impression of Siemens and to a large extent influence how outsiders thought of Siemens and in extension also themselves as persons, meaning that they somewhat did recognise the employer brand’s potential of having a symbolic value.

### 3. THE ‘VALUE’ OF ECONOMIC COMPENSATION

The respondents, with almost no exception, all commented on what *they considered* to be a low initial wage rate at the company. The case study research indicates that, even though the respondents made it clear that several other factors counterbalance the wage, it is still possible that the wage rate has an impact on the company’s reputation, and ultimately on how much status an employer brand signals. This since pay still makes out an important piece in a company’s Employer Value Proposition. One of the respondents reflected on her employment in relation to the employments of her old classmates from university:

*“My classmates all work as management consultants now and earn at least twice as much as I do.”* (SIT AB)

The respondents’ current comprehension of the wage rate at Siemens is that it is low in relation to their responsibilities and what they offer their employer. This comprehension of a low initial



wage rate indicated that the employer brand became less useful as a symbolic resource for the employees identity creation.

#### **4. THE 'CONSUMER CHOICE' IS NOT FOR EVERYONE**

Literature on Gen Y indicates that for this generation, the world offers an endless amount of choices. Individuals of Gen Y are stated to experience that they liberally can choose the employer and employer brand which goes best with his or her personality (Parment and Dyhre, 2009). However, the differences between consumers and employees became evident in this case study of Siemens Sweden, where the feeling of 'liberty of choice' could not be seen in the interviews. A newly graduated student from university, as the majority of the respondents were when they first approached Siemens, tends to feel more in a position of *need* than *choice*. There is a feeling of competition for good employments and employer brands and in addition, several respondents graduated and applied for jobs during the financial crisis in 2008-2009, another factor restricting the 'liberty of choice'. What needs to be recognised is that the so-called 'talents' do not represent the whole Gen Y labour force, far from everybody finds themselves in a position where they can pick and choose an employer brand however they like. So, due to financial crisis and a high unemployment rate, Gen-Y employees do not have the opportunity to choose the employer best suited for their values and lifestyle. Individuals feel lucky if finding a relevant work and do not feel that the luxury of choosing exists. Thus, even if Siemens was far from the only option for the respondents, a feeling of having the opportunity to match the employer brand after ones personality and lifestyle could not be supported. The respondents, as stated above, tended to prioritise that the work tasks were considered satisfying in themselves and a sense of security of employment, when they considered which employer to apply for. Not how they could use the employer brand as a symbolic resource in their social identity creation.

However, it is possible that the respondents' feeling of not being able to 'choose' among employer brands could diminish with time as the respondents gain more experience and competence.

## 4.3 SUMMARY

To summarise the analysis of the empirical findings, it can be stated that the employees at Siemens AB and SIT AB could be said to identify with their employer brand. Since the psychological contract was perceived as being upheld, the identification process was facilitated and employer brand identification could be verified among Gen Y employees at Siemens. However, it was not possible to confirm that employees of Gen Y at Siemens would use their employer brand as a symbolic resource when creating their social identity. Four potential explanations for why this was not possible to conclude were outlined. First of all, the respondents tended to put work task and profession before the employer brand when referring to their identity. Secondly, the employer brand of Siemens is not very well known in Sweden and therefore makes it difficult for the employees to gain social advantages from ‘consuming’ the employer brand. Thirdly, the employees experienced the initial wage rate as quite low; a factor that they thought had an impact on the employer brand’s reputation within the industries where Siemens AB and SIT AB are active within. Finally, where the literature states that individuals of Gen Y have grown up with an endless amount of choices and that they feel that they can choose the employer brand best fitted for their personality and lifestyle, the reality shows a different picture. The financial crisis and a feeling of competition among young graduates and employees leave no room for freely choosing the individual’s most preferred employer brand.

If concluding the analysis by drawing a link to the identity concept, the result of this case study research could be described as follows: the respondents, could to a large extent relate to what the employer wished the employer brand to stand for. In that sense they can be said to identify with the employer brand and integrate it in their self-identity. Despite this, the above-mentioned reasons prevent the employees from using the employer brand as a symbolic resource. In other words it is not possibly to verify that employees use the employer brand as a mean to ‘signal’ what ‘type of person’ they are (i.e. their social identity).

## **CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION**

### **5.1 CLOSING DISCUSSION**

Theories on consumer research, generation Y and social psychology together implied the relevance of a concept of ‘consumption of the employer brand’. Drawing from the psychology of consumer research, the research question of this master thesis considered whether it would be possible to provide an indication that Gen Y employees use the employer brand as a symbolic resource in their social identity creation. The inseparability between the self-identity and the social identity mentioned in theory (Jenkins, 1996 mentioned in Elliot and Wattanasuwan, 1998), together with the empirical findings of the case study research, led to an ambiguous answer to the primary research question since employees tended to identify with the employer brand while still be unwilling to use it as a symbolic resource in their creation of a social identity.

Contrary to what is suggested by current theory, employees as ‘consumers’ seem to be more inclined to ‘consume’ their employment as ‘hedonists’ than as ‘communicators’. The work task precedes the employer brand in that it is considered more important *what* you work with than *where* you do it. Consuming work in a hedonist way would mean that the employee, viewed as a consumer, enjoys the *process* of working, gaining value from the tasks performed rather than the *symbolic* value it represent through the employer brand. The employment experience itself, rather than the signals the ‘consumption of the employer brand’ communicate is the main reason people appreciate their employer.

The case study research was conducted at Siemens Sweden, a ‘high tech’ organisation active in four different sectors. As an interesting result of this, the complexity of the work tasks was heavily emphasised by the respondents. Specific and challenging work tasks, personal development and global challenges are three key features that characterises the Siemens’ employer brand. The work tasks are to a large extent seen as something exciting and desirable within the employment experience. Due to the characteristics of the industry, emphasis and attention were redirected from the employer brand to the Siemens’ ability to offer complex and interesting work tasks. In other words, in this case study the symbolic value of the profession exceeds the symbolic benefits of the employer brand. Further discussions around *when* and *why* profession and specific work tasks precedes the employer brand would be interesting, since an employee working for an employer who cannot offer exciting work tasks or the symbolism attached to a specific profession, might be more inclined to use the employer brand when creating his or her identity.

This leads on to the notion that depending on what industry the company is active in and what type of work tasks they can provide the employee with, the importance of the employer brand as a symbolic resource in the identification process of the employee may alter. In contexts where the work tasks are perceived as stimulating and adding to the employee’s personal development and

## THE EMPLOYER BRAND AS A SYMBOLIC RESOURCE

the individual thus take pride in the profession itself, a strong, compelling employer brand could become less important. On the other hand, when the industry is not very exciting and attractive, or when the tasks are not seen as complex or stimulating, the employer brand may become more important as a symbolic resource. One example is industries where employees can perform exactly the same work tasks at several competing companies and where the employment experience is very similar. Take for example a barista at a coffee house, in that case the employer brand could become more important in order to make the company special in the eyes of the employee, and in the eyes of the employee's social context. When there is nothing 'special' about the tasks being performed, the need for a socially well acknowledged employer brand might increase. This way of reasoning builds on the assumption that employees have a need to identify with their employer and search for ways to accomplish this. When the implications to identify with the profession become less, the importance to identify with the employer brand grows larger. In that case, the employee would be more of a 'consumer as a communicator' since the main value of the consumption of the employer brand would lie in what it signals, its symbolic meaning.

The western society may have moved from a production society to the current 'consumption society' and the impacts of this shift might, as the literature states, have also reached the labour market. However, if focusing on consumption as the transfer of symbols via brands, the fundamental differences between consumers and employees are too salient for it to be concluded that employees use employer brands in a similar way as to how consumers use consumer brands regarding their social identity creation. When putting too much emphasis on symbols, we tend to underestimate the pleasures derived from the consumption process itself, in this case the employment experience. Even though brands constitute an important aspect of our daily lives and this inevitably also affects the image of employers, it is important not to throw the production side of the employment experience aside. It could perhaps be possible to view employees as both producers and consumers in the sense that they 'consume' the experience of employment, in which they simultaneously produce an outcome for the employer. Reasoning like this, as mentioned earlier, means looking at the employee as consuming the employment as a 'hedonist' and not 'communicator'.

In conclusion, the literature suggested that employees of Gen Y look upon and treat employment in a similar way as consumer products. However this master thesis implies that such a statement could be too simplistic and has contributed with a more nuanced picture of the employee's usage of employer brands. It might be the dream of many to have the possibility to 'choose' the employer brand best fitted for one's personality and lifestyle, but in reality there are several factors which still prevents this concept from becoming true. The fundamental difference between employees and consumers regarding the power structure in relation to the employer is, and most probably will stay, crucial for whether the 'consumer of the employer brand as a communicator' is possible. The literature implies that companies to a large extent compete to attract the best employees within Gen Y. Nevertheless, since this 'competition' is also evident among the employees who are competing over 'the most attractive employer brand', the

possibility to ‘consume’ whatever employer brand individuals want, will most likely never be possible, at least not in all industries.

### 5.2 MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

The case study at Siemens Sweden resulted in some practical and managerial implications worth mentioning. As presented above in the problem discussion, the employer branding strategy could look different depending on the type of business a company is in. An employer like Siemens demands talents with highly technical skills and is therefore in great need of distinction among competitors and attraction of the right type of competence. As previously mentioned, many of the work tasks at Siemens are characterised by complexity and high requirement of technical skills. This contributed to the employee’s clear focus on the employment experience itself instead of their possible use of the employer brand. The managerial implication of this is connected to employer branding campaigns. Employers like Siemens may make a mistake by focusing too much on ‘buzz-words’ such as ‘sustainability’ in relation to promotion of their exciting technology and the complex and stimulating work tasks they can provide for their employees. When the pride employees feel, mainly lies within their work tasks, it is of high importance not to deprive them of their pride by letting other aspects, such as for example social responsibility and sustainability overshadow what the employees of the company actually do.

Ideological elements such as ‘sustainability’ in the marketing of the employer brand are not irrelevant, but as more and more companies start to promote themselves using these kinds of ‘buzz words’, the work task or type of technology used, might in fact become the ‘new’ and best suitable factor of differentiation, at least for employer brands representing companies within the industry-sector and the search for talents within the engineering field. Too much focus on ‘symbolic’ features might result in employers attracting the *wrong* kind of talent. In the end, it is all about attracting the *right* talents: otherwise the future and profit of the company could be threatened. On the other hand, there are many companies and organisations that cannot offer complex work tasks, high technology or a specialised profession. Those employers might instead have more to gain from highlighting ideological elements such as corporate and social responsibility, and strive for employees to feel proud of, and identify with the employer brand rather than their profession.

Another interesting insight from this case study is that the size and complexity of a global employer as Siemens might reduce the usefulness of a common employer brand covering the whole company. Since the employer brand covers four different sectors and is present in over 190 countries, it might be better to have several separate employer brands in order to attract the *right* talent for the *right* sector and job.

Lastly, it is necessary not to underestimate the importance of wage. Even though it was verified that several other factors can counterbalance an experienced low wage rate, it still has a

significant impact on attraction and retention of employees. When more and more companies market themselves as ‘caring’, ‘sustainable’ and so on, wage might arise as a useful tool of differentiation.

### **5.3 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH**

As mentioned above, this master thesis suggests that further research is needed on when and how employees experience that the importance of the employer brand exceeds the importance of works tasks and profession. Contemporary literature on employer branding tends to recommend one solution for all companies, a so-called ‘one size – fits all’ message, where the symbolic and ideological features are central. However, there is a need for companies to gather deep insights of what kind of industry or work tasks that characterises it, and how these impacts the employees’ experiences of the employment.

The analysis of the empirical findings also resulted in a suggestion that trainee programs have an important impact on the extent to which the employees identify with the employer brand. Further research on what impact a trainee program has for employees’ identification with the employer and its brand would be of high practical interest.

## **LIST OF REFERENCES**

- Alvesson, M. (2010). *Interpreting Interviews*. SAGE publications.
- Ambler, T. & Barrow, S. (1996). The employer brand. *Journal of Brand Management*, 4(3), pp. 185–206.
- Appadurai, A. (1990). Disjuncture and Difference in Global Cultural Economy. *Public Culture*, 2 (Spring), pp. 171-191.
- Ashforth, B.E. & Mael, F.A. (1989). Social identity theory and the organization. *Academy of Management Review*, Vol. 14, pp. 20-39.
- Backhaus, K. & Tikoo, S. (2004). Conceptualizing and researching employer branding. *Career Development International*, Vol. 9 Nos 4/5, pp. 501-17.
- Backman, J. (2008). *Rapporter och Uppsatser*. (2 uppl.). Lund: Studentlitteratur.
- Baray, G., Postmes, T., & Jetten, J. (2009). When ‘I’ equals ‘we’: exploring the relation between social and personal identity of extreme right-wing political party members. *British Journal of Psychology*, Vol. 48, pp. 625-647.
- Barrow, S., & Mosley, R. (2005). *The Employer Brand: bringing the best of brand management to people at work*. West Sussex, England: John Wiley & Sons Ltd.
- Barthes, R. (1972). *Mythologies*, (Annette Lavers, Trans.). London: Cape.
- Bauman, Z. (1998). *Arbete, konsumtion och den nya fattigdomen*. Göteborg: Bokförlaget Daidalos AB.
- Bauman, Z. (2007). *Konsumtions liv*. Göteborg: Bokförlaget Daidalos AB.
- Berthon, P., Ewing, M. & Lian Hah, L. (2005). Captivating company: dimensions of attractiveness in employer branding. *International Journal of Advertising*, Vol.24, NO. 2, pp. 151-172.
- Best, S. (2003). *A Beginner’s Guide to Social Theory*. Chapter 6. SAGE Publications.
- Bryman, A. & Bell, E. (2011). *Business Research Methods* (3rd ed.). Oxford University Press.
- Campbell, C. (1983). Romanticism and the Consumer Ethic: Intimations of a Weber-style Thesis. *Sociological Analysis*, 44(4): pp. 279-296.
- Campbell, C. (1987). *The romantic ethic and the spirit of modern consumerism*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd.

## THE EMPLOYER BRAND AS A SYMBOLIC RESOURCE

Campbell, C. (2005). The craft consumer: Culture, Craft and consumption in a postmodern society. *Journal of Consumer Culture*, Vol. 5, No. 23

Corrigan, P. (1997). *The sociology of consumption: an introduction*. London: Sage Publications.

De Chernatony, L. & Dall'Olmo Riley, F. (1998). "Defining A "Brand": Beyond The Literature With Experts' Interpretations", *Journal of Marketing Management*, Vol. 14, pp. 417- 443.

Donoghue, S.(2000). "Projective Techniques in Consumer Research", *Journal of Family Ecology and Consumer Sciences*, Vol. 28, pp.47-53.

Dukerich, J.M., Golden, B.R. & Shortell, S.M. (2002). Beauty is in the eye of the beholder: the impact of organizational identification identity and image on the cooperative behaviours of physicians. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, Vol. 47, pp. 507-33.

Dutton, J.E., Dukerich, J.M. & Harquail, C.V. (1994). Organizational images and member identification. *Administration Science Quarterly*, Vol. 39, pp. 239-63.

Edwards, M.R., (2010). An Integrative review of Employer Branding and OB Theory. *Emerald Personnel Review*, Vol. 39, No. 1, pp. 5-23.

Elliott, R., & Wattanasuwan, K. (1998), Brands as symbolic resources for the construction of identity. *International Journal of Advertising*, Vol. 17, pp. 131–144.

Falonious, T. (2010). *Varumärket inifrån och ut: en handbok i internt varumärkesarbete*. Malmö: Liber.

Fuat Firat, A. (1997). Globalization of Fragmentation - A Framework for Understanding Contemporary Global Markets. *Journal of International Marketing*, Vol. 5 No. 2, pp. 77-86.

Fuat Firat, A. & Venkatesh, A. (1995). Liberatory Postmodernism and the Reenchantment of consumption. *Journal of Consumer Research*, Vol. 22, pp. 239-267.

Gabriel, Y. & Lang, T. (1996). *The unmanageable consumer: Contemporary consumption and its fragmentation*. London: Sage.

Haire, M. (1950). Projective techniques in marketing research. *Journal of Marketing Research* Vol. 14, No. 5, pp. 649-656.

Homström, N. & Lindholm, G. (2011). *Företagsekonomi – från begrepp till beslut* (6th ed). Bonnier Utbildning AB.

Jakobson, M. (1994). *Kläder som språk och handling*. Stockholm. Carlsson Bokförlag

Levain, M. & Tissier, J. (2012). *La génération Y – par elle-même: quand les 18-30 ans réinventent la vie*. Ed. Francois Bourin.



## THE EMPLOYER BRAND AS A SYMBOLIC RESOURCE

Lievens, F., Van Hove, G. & Anseel, F. (2007). Organizational identity and employer image: towards a unifying framework. *British Journal of Management*, Vol. 18, pp. 45-59.

Martin, G., Beaumont, P., Doig, R., & Pate, J. (2005). Branding: A New Performance Discourse for HR? *European Management Journal*, Vol. 23, No. 1, pp. 76-88.

McCracken, G. (1988). Culture and consumption. New approaches to the symbolic character of consumer goods and activities. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Mosley, R.W. (2007). Customer Experience, Organisational Culture and the Employer Brand. *Brand Management*, Vol. 15, NO. 2, pp. 123-134.

Parment, A. (2008). Generation Y: Framtidens konsumenter och medarbetare gör entré. Malmö: Liber AB.

Parment, A. & Dyhre, A. (2009). Sustainable Employer Branding: Guidelines, worktools and best practices. Malmö: Liber, p. 67.

Pauget, B, & Dammak, A. (2012). L'arrivée de la génération Y : quelles conséquences managériales et organisationnelles pour les organisations sanitaires et sociales françaises ? *Pratiques et Organisation des Soins*, Vol. 43, No. 1.

Pilcher, Jane (1993). Mannheims Sociology of Generations: an undervalued legacy. *British Journal of Sociology*, Vol. no.45 Issue no.3 September 1994. University of Leicester: Department of Sociology.

Pihl, E. (2011). Att leda nästa generation: generation Y, obotliga egoister eller oslipade diamanter. Karlstad, TUK Förlag

Punch, K.F. (2005) Introduction to social Research: quantitative and qualitative approaches (2nd ed.) London. SAGE Publications Ltd

Reed, A. (2002). Social identity as a useful perspective for self-concept-based consumer Research. *Psychology and Marketing* Vol. 19, No. 3, pp. 235-266.

Robbins, S.P, & Judge, T.A. (2010). Essentials of Organizational Behavior (global ed.). New Jersey: Pearson Education.

Robinson, S.L., Kraatz, M.S., & Rousseau, D.M. (1994). Changing obligations and the psychological contract: a longitudinal study. *Academy of Management Journal*, Vol. 37, No.1, pp. 137-152.

Rousseau, D.M. (1989). Psychological and implied contracts in organizations. *Employee Rights and Responsibilities Journal*, Vol. 2, pp. 121-39.

## THE EMPLOYER BRAND AS A SYMBOLIC RESOURCE

Rousseau, D.M. (1990). New hire perceptions of their own and their employer's obligations: a study of psychological contracts. *Journal of Organisational Behaviour*, Vol. 11, pp. 389-400.

Salomonsson, K. (2005). Flexible, Adaptable, Employable: Ethics for a New Labour Market' in Löfgren, O. and R. William (eds.) *Magic, Culture and the New Economy*. Oxford: Berg.

Schembri, S. & Merrilees, B. (2010). Brand Consumption and Narrative of the Self. *Psychology & Marketing*, Vol. 27, No. 6, pp. 623-638.

Schewe, C, Debevec, K, Madden, T, Diamond, W, Parment, A & Murphy, A. (2013). If you've seen one, you've seen them all! Are young millennials the same worldwide? *Journal of international consumer marketing*, Vol. 25, Issue, 1, pp. 3-15

Slater, D. (1997). *Consumer Culture & Modernity*. Cambridge. Polity Press in association with Blackwell Publishers Ltd.

Tajfel, H. (1981). *Human groups and social categories: studies in social psychology*. Cambridge. Cambridge U.P.

Timmermans, S. & Tavory, I. (2012). Theory Construction in Qualitative Research: From Grounded Theory to Abductive Analysis. *Sociological Theory, American Sociological Association, SAGE Vol.30, No. 3*, pp. 167-186.

## ELECTRONIC SOURCES

Siemens Sweden 2013, *Siemens Data*, Available at:

<http://www.nwe.siemens.com/sweden/internet/se/omsiemens/Pages/Default.aspx>  
(accessed May 10, 2013)

Universum Global 2013, *ideal employer rankings Nordic top 50*. Available at:

<http://www.universumglobal.com/IDEAL-Employer-Rankings/Nordic-Top-50>  
(accessed May 10, 2013)

The American Marketing Association, *AMA Dictionary*. Available at:

[http://www.marketingpower.com/\\_layouts/dictionary.aspx?dletter=b](http://www.marketingpower.com/_layouts/dictionary.aspx?dletter=b)  
(accessed May 10, 2013)

Siemens Sweden 2013, *Siemens Data, sustainability*. Available at:

[http://www.nwe.siemens.com/sweden/internet/se/omsiemens/Hallbar\\_Utveckling/Pages/Default.aspx](http://www.nwe.siemens.com/sweden/internet/se/omsiemens/Hallbar_Utveckling/Pages/Default.aspx)  
(accessed May 10, 2013)

Universum Global 2013, *Employer branding figures and facts*. Available at:

<http://www.universumglobal.com/Employer-Branding---Universum/Figures---Facts>  
(accessed May 10, 2013)

# **APPENDIX**

## **1. INTERVIEW TEMPLATE, SIEMENS**

Guide for interviews conducted in Upplands Väsby week 12 and Finspång week 14, 2013.

### **1.1 SHORT PRESENTATION AND INFORMATION ON THE INTERVIEWERS**

- Who we are, which education we have and where we come from.
- We are interviewing young, rather newly hired employees at Siemens since the aim of the interview is to get a clearer picture of what makes young employees choose Siemens before other employers. In addition we want to find out what characterises Siemens employer brand and which attributes the employees attach to the brand.
- The interview will take about 60 minutes and your name will not be mentioned in the report and thesis.

### **1.2 PERSONAL INFORMATION ON THE RESPONDENTS**

- How old are you?
- For how long have you been working at Siemens?
- Siemens is a company active in many different branches of industry, what is your main area and what are your main work tasks?
- Are you educated at a University? What kind of program or courses did you take?
- How many employments did you have before you started at Siemens?

### **1.3 THE RESPONDENT'S PERSONALITY CHARACTERISTICS**

- What are your interests outside of work?
- What does your ideal vacation look like?
- Do you commute by car or bus?
- Could you please describe your ideal home?
- If you were a super hero, what would your special power be and why?
- Imagine your 30<sup>th</sup> birthday party, what would it look like? (what kind of food, guests, music and so on)

### **1.4 THE RESPONDENT'S EMPLOYMENT EXPERIENCE**

- Are you affected and can you benefit from Siemens brand in your daily work life? (for example in contact with clients and so on)
- Do you take any notice of Siemens work with employer branding in your daily work?
- Do you reckon Siemens employer brand to be well known amongst employees and possible future employees?

### **1.5 THE RESPONDENT'S RELATION TO THE EMPLOYER BRAND**

## THE EMPLOYER BRAND AS A SYMBOLIC RESOURCE

- Why did you approach Siemens in the first place?
- What made you take interest in Siemens as an employer?
- Which channels of communication did you use when looking for information about Siemens as an employer?
- What relation did you have with Siemens before employment? (for example customer or media picture)
- Can you remember how you felt during your first day at Siemens?
- What was attractive about Siemens, what could they, as an employer, offer you?
- Do you think that the daily life and work at Siemens correspond to the picture you had before you started to work at the company? If not, what has changed?
- What does it mean that it says Siemens on your CV? For your future career?
- If the work task would be the same, what does Siemens brand represent on your CV compared to competitors?
- Siemens Sweden markets themselves as a green and sustainable company, can you relate to that picture? Is it important for you personally to work for a so called sustainable society?

### 1.6 THE RESPONDENT'S PERCEPTION OF SIEMENS EMPLOYER BRAND

If Siemens was to be a car,

- Of what brand would the car be?
- Would it be an older or newer car?
- Which colour would the car have?
- How fast would the car be?

If Siemens was a sports star,

- Within which sport would Siemens be active?
- Would Siemens be number one or where would you place it on the ranking?

If Siemens were an animal,

- What animal would it be?
- What characterizes this animal?

### 1.6 (LIEVENS et al., 2007) "THE COCKTAIL PARTY TEST"

You meet a new acquaintance at a party:

- When presenting yourself, would you mention that you are employed at Siemens?
- How would the person react when you told him or her that you are employed at Siemens?
- How do you think that he or she looks upon you as person after you told him or her that you are employed at Siemens?
- If another person at this party starts to say negative things about Siemens, what would your reaction be? Would you defend your employer?

### 1.7 SIEMENS' EMPLOYER BRAND IN MEDIA

## THE EMPLOYER BRAND AS A SYMBOLIC RESOURCE

- If a scandal were to occur, what part do you think that Siemens would play in this scandal?
- If Dagens Industri would do a front story on Siemens in ten years, what would the headline be?
- If Siemens would introduce or start to work in a manner which was against your own personal principles, what could that be?
- How would you react in a situation like that?
- Which personal opinions or convictions would make you leave Siemens? (for example nuclear etc.)

### **1.8 SIEMENS EMPLOYER BRAND ATTRIBUTES**

**- SEE PICTURES IN APPENDIX 2.**

The company's identity is a unique set up of different associations that the company's brand conveys. Drawing from what you know about employer branding, what is your understanding of how the company wishes to be perceived as (internally and externally)? Here you find several pairs of pictures, reflect on which impression they give you. Then decide on which one of the pictures you think is closest to Siemens and its employer brand. There is no right or wrong answer, we would just like you to argue for your choice. If you believe both pictures to be right, that is ok as long as you explain why.

### **1.9 COMPLEMENTING DIRECT QUESTIONS**

- Which are Siemens strengths and weaknesses as an employer?
- How does Siemens communicate their employer brand to you employed at the company, through which channels?
- Would you say that the employees at Siemens share the same view and understanding of Siemens employer brand as the company wishes them to do?

### **1.10 SIEMENS EMPLOYER VALUE PROPOSITION**

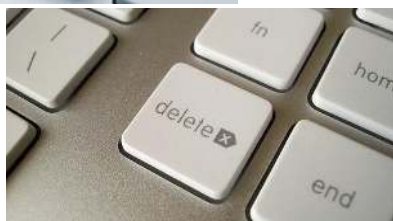
- What is the most prominent feature of Siemens employer value proposition?
- What is most important to you, functional or symbolic benefits?
- What is the most common reason given for people's commitment and loyalty to the organisation?
- What are the mostly commonly described characteristics of the organisation?
- What do employees most commonly describe as the benefits of working for your organisation? Functional or Symbolic?
- If you were approached by another company, which offered you a higher salary, which attributes of Siemens current employer brand would make you stay?
- If nothing in today's reality would convince you to stay, what would it take for Siemens to make you stay?

## 2. PICTURES USED IN THE INTERVIEWS

### 2.1 RISK-TAKER VS. CAREFUL



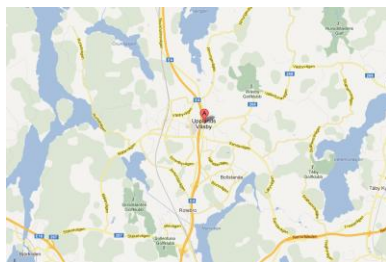
### 2.2 ENCOURAGING VS. OPPOSING



## 2.3 TRADITIONAL VS. INNOVATIVE



## 2.4 GLOBAL VS. LOCAL





## 2.5 FOCUS IS ON TANGIBLES VS. INTANGIBLES



## 2.6 AN ORGANISATION CHARACTERISED BY STIMULATION VS. CONFLICT



## 2.7 TEAMWORK VS. INDIVIDUAL PERFORMANCE



## 2.8 CHAMELEON VS. UNWILLING TO CHANGE



## 2.9 INTROVERT VS. EXTROVERT



## 2.10 UNDERDOG VS. MARKET LEADER



### **3. ARTICLE**

#### **Publication Proposal:**

The article attached below is written for a Swedish professional journal called 'Chef', which is a managerial journal addressed towards Chief executives in Sweden. The article has not been published and is fictitious. The vision of 'Chef' is to make the Swedish working life better by developing Swedish managers and publish the latest research and theories of management and leadership. The journal aims to give manager all they need in their everyday life as a leader. Today, the journal reaches around 150 000 decision makers in Sweden each month. 'Chef' has been around for 18 years and is one of the most successful specialised publishers in Sweden. The journal is published with eleven issues per year and the subscribed circulation was 107 200 in 2011. 'Chef' is provided by Chef Stockholm HB, which is owned by 'Ledarna'. 'Ledarna' are Sweden's chief organisation, managers' own professional organisation, with 90,000 members in all sectors and at all levels.

# Vad framtidens anställda egentligen vill ha

**Ä**r du också en av alla chefer som hoppas snärja de bästa talangerna inom generation Y? Då är det dags att gå emot strömmen, strunta i symboliska fördelar och stället formulera en vinnande strategi utifrån ditt företags- och er branschs unika karaktär.

Dagens arbetsmarknad beskrivs bli allt mer lik produkt- och tjänstemarknaden vilket har lett till att medarbetare börjar betrakta sin anställning som en slags produkt, redo att "konsumeras". Denna utveckling förstärks i och med den "nya" generationens intåg på arbetsmarknaden, den så kallade generation Y som karaktäriseras av individualism, illojalitet och ifrågasättande. Som svar på detta har företag börjat applicera marknadsföringsstrategier på HR-området och marknadsför sig nu som arbetsgivare med hjälp av olika branding-aktiviteter – det som inom företagsvärlden kallas för employer branding.

Under de senaste åren har det inom management lagts ett stort fokus på

denna generation (wh)Y, ett begrepp som vanligtvis inkluderar individer födda mellan 1978 och 1995. Men vilka är egentligen dessa unga medarbetare och vad kräver de av sin arbetsgivare för att man skall lyckas vinna deras godkännande?

Management-litteratur beskriver generation Y som illojala och själviska, eftersom de sägs sätta sin egen vinning framför företagets. Generation Y ser inte på arbete som en plikt utan strävar efter att anställningen ska fungera som en väg till självförverkligande, och på så sätt motsvara deras livsstil och personlighet. De är uppväxta i ett samhälle som tydligt karaktäriseras av konsumtion och ser inte brands som någonting skrämmande, utan snarare som en tillgång. Generation Y är vana med att använda sig av brands för att uttrycka sin sociala status och identitet. Likheterna mellan konsumentmarknaden och arbetsmarknaden har dessutom lett till att generation Y numera också ser arbete som en viktig del av identiteten.

För att lyckas locka framtidens talanger har dessa faktorer ökat trycket på företag att marknadsföra sitt employer brand på rätt sätt. Det viktigaste är att utveckla employer branding-strategier som utmärker just ditt företag bland era konkurrenter.

Då det länge har funnits ett tydligt fokus kring livsstil och identitet gällande vad som attraherar individer i generation Y, försöker många företag differentiera sig genom att satsa på just dessa "mjuka" och symboliska motivationsfaktorer som till exempel organisationskultur, CSR och gemensamma värderingar mellan företaget och dess anställda. Funktionella motivationsfaktorer, såsom lön och arbetsuppgifter, anses dessutom vara lättare att replikera och har

## THE EMPLOYER BRAND AS A SYMBOLIC RESOURCE

därmed fått hamna i skymundan i employer branding sammanhang.



([http://www.levycreative.com/wp/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/mikebyers\\_010419.jpg](http://www.levycreative.com/wp/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/mikebyers_010419.jpg))

Men vad händer när alla företag satsar på och belyser samma motivationsfaktorer? En ny studie från Lunds Universitet lyfter nu betydelsen av funktionella fördelar och en varning utfärdas samtidigt för att lägga allt för mycket tillit till varumärkets mjuka värden.

När alla arbetsgivare på arbetsmarknaden idag marknadsför sig med hjälp av symboliska motivationsfaktorer och säger sig arbeta för en bättre miljö och ett bättre samhälle, finns det en risk att anställda betraktar dessa element som hygienfaktorer.

Funktionella motivationsfaktorerers comeback på arbetsmarknaden visar sig vara ett faktum då lönen bevisats vara en viktig del i

arbetsgivarens anställningserbjudande. Särskilt stor vikt vid lönen lägger medarbetare i rekryterings-sammanhang, där den fungerar som en viktig differentieringsfaktor mellan potentiella arbetsgivare. Studien vid Lunds Universitet visar också att lönen innefattar ett symboliskt värde på två olika sätt. Dels för den anställde som individ, som uppfattar lönen som en viktig indikation på vilket värde arbetsgivaren lägger vid denne. Dessutom uppfattas lönen uttrycka prestige, vilket symboliserar vilket värde omgivningen lägger vid den anställde.

Funktionella motivationsfaktorer är särskilt viktiga inom employer branding för de företag som verkar inom branscher där de funktionella attributen är utvecklande i sig själva. Studiens resultat indikerar att företag där typ av anställning och arbetsuppgifter är utvecklande samt erbjuder en personlig utmaning och stimulans för individen, har mindre att vinna på att belysa symboliska och "mjuka" motivationsfaktorer. I dessa fall identifierar sig medarbetarna mer med sitt yrke och känner snarare stolthet över sin uppgift i företaget, än företaget's employer brand, organisationen, samt dess image i helhet. Med andra ord, det som lockar och motiverar den anställde är *vad* man gör och inte på *vilket* företag man gör det.

Som chef på ett företag som inte kan erbjuda stimulerande och utvecklande arbetsuppgifter, eller inte innefattar yrken som anses prestigefyllda i sig själva, finns det dock fortfarande mycket att vinna i användandet av symboliska motivationsfaktorer inom employer branding. När medarbetare inte känner stolthet över sitt yrke kan dessa symboliska värden hjälpa dem på traven med att istället identifiera sig med företaget's employer

## THE EMPLOYER BRAND AS A SYMBOLIC RESOURCE

brand och därmed öka arbetsgivarens attraktionskraft.

Branschtillhörighet kan alltså sägas påverka vilken typ av strategi som arbetsgivaren bör ha för att på bästa sätt kunna differentiera sig gentemot sina konkurrenter och därmed locka framtidens talanger.

Slutligen, genom att lägga allt för stort fokus på symboliska motivationsfaktorer riskerar arbetsgivare inom vissa branscher att förminska det som medarbetarna faktiskt känner mest stolthet över och identifierar sig med, sina arbetsuppgifter och sitt yrke. Att marknadsföra företaget som arbetsgivare genom "buzz-words" såsom "hållbarhet" och "socialt ansvarstagande" är inget fel i sig, men i de fall där medarbetaren i första hand förknippar sin anställning med arbetsuppgiften och verksamheten i sig, finns det en risk för att det uppstår en krock.

När arbetsgivaren och arbetstagaren har skilda uppfattningar om vad företagets employer brand förmedlar och står för så är det inte längre en fördel att ha ett employer brand starkt förknippat med symboliska värden. Läggs för mycket vikt vid symboliska värden av ett employer brand som i själva verket är starkare förknippat med ett speciellt yrke eller en speciell bransch, tenderar man ofta att underskatta det fördelar som anställningen, genom till exempel arbetsuppgifter, för med sig i sig själv.

Så även om varumärken utgör en viktig aspekt i generation Y:s dagliga liv och detta oundvikligen också påverkar deras bild av dig som arbetsgivare, så är det av yttersta vikt att inte förminska betydelsen av arbetsupplevelsen i sig själv. Studien vid Lunds Universitet visade att det inte är den symboliska betydelsen av ett företags employer brand som i första hand

konsumeras, utan själva arbetsupplevelsen i sig. Så även om ord och värderingar såsom "hållbarhet" och "ansvarstagande" låter väldigt bra, så är det i de flesta fall trots allt vad medarbetarna *gör* de där åtta timmarna om dagen som har störst betydelse. Därmed är det där du som chef bör ta avstamp i ditt employer branding-arbete.

Lööw och Bredberg, maj 2013