



WHAT ATTRACTS GEN Z?

A thesis about how companies strategically are attracting generation Z with IT/digital related competence through their Employer Branding

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*The old saying that “people are the most important asset” is wrong. It is not the people that are the most important asset, but the **right** people are.¹*

¹ Collins, 2001. S. 81

Preface

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This bachelor thesis is written in the spring semester of 2018 at Halmstad University. During this I have learned more about the importance of having an employer brand, in order for companies to attract and maintain talents. The gen Z's differentiates from other generations and its confidence, lack of consequential thinking along with being born with a cellphone in their hands, defines them as the first global generation. In order for companies to attract and maintain the talented gen Z, its essential that they are aware of the gen Z's preferences regarding an attractive employer.

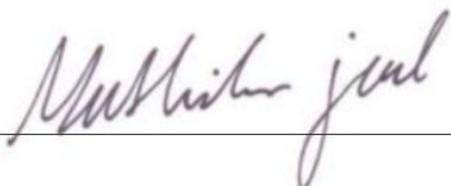
The time has passed were employees stayed faithful to the same employer throughout their career and after 25 years of service was given a gold watch. Today, work is about self-actualization rather than safety, passion over pension and status over stability.

I would like to thank all of the gen Z respondents, for bringing this thesis to life and sharing their thoughts of what defines an attractive employer? I would also like to thank Johan Karlfeldt, Tove Torbjörnsdotter and Johanna Gustafsson for sharing their company's view of employer branding, which have been extremely helpful when identifying how companies and the gen Z's could become a match on the labour market.

Thanks to my supervisor Thomas Helgesson for the guidance and feedback you have giving me along this process and an extra thanks to my opponents, which have giving me valuable feedback and inputs, in order to improve my thesis further. Finally I will also give myself a clap on the back. Writing by myself has been a great challenge but have also taught me to be responsible and take my own initiatives, along with believing in myself.

I have truly enjoyed to learn more about employer branding and I am sure that the significance of having a strong employer brand will only increase in the future.

All the best,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Mathilda Jarl", written in dark ink. The signature is positioned above a horizontal line.

Mathilda Jarl

Abstract

Title: WHAT ATTRACTS GEN Z?

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Problem formulation: With a new generation entering the labour market, HR departments struggle to stay attractive. The talents are hard to attract and even harder to maintain. The importance of employer branding is therefore essential for both the employer and the seekers, in order to become a match. The generation Z desires to make a change and it is up to the employer to give them the opportunity to influence and make an impact.

Purpose: Examine how companies strategically are attracting generation Z through their employer branding and compare this to the preferences of gen Z's. The result of this thesis will lead to the creation of a model explaining which factors are important for companies to include in their employer branding strategy when attracting and maintaining the generation Z.

Theoretical framework: Includes different theories such as The Employer Branding Process, The Five Dimensions of Brand Personality, The Power of WOM and Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. This chapter will also include reviews of previous studies and theories, which are relevant to the researched area.

Method: The method for this thesis will use an qualitative and inductive approach, consisting of 14 interviews with the gen Z's and 3 participating companies. Secondary data is also collected to give the primary data support.

Empirical framework: Consists a summary of the 17 interviews in order to conclude how the companies are working with employer branding compared to the preferences of the gen Z's.

Conclusion: The gen Z's stated three main factors that are important when choosing an employer. These factors are also indicated by the companies. However, the see challenges in communicating these factors towards the Z's and young potentials.

Keywords: Employer branding, Gen Z, Talents, Labour Market, HR and Marketing.

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1. Introduction

1.1. Background

Strategic and value-creating business management is a relevant subject on our current labour market. Meanwhile the access of labour with the right competence is a constant demand within companies on the Swedish market, that are constantly competing to be the most attractive employer for the seekers. The globalization has enabled for Swedish companies to extend their organizations into the international market and to relocate their factories where the prices of labour and resources are remarkably low.² There is without a doubt a structural transformation on the labour market. The technological development has made several professions automated, mechanized and standardized. Meanwhile low qualified labours are replaced with high competence and specialization rather than generalization.³

Other factors which have affected the labour market are demography and a change of demand among the future employees. According to the central bureau of statistics, the Swedish population will reach over 13 million by the year 2060.⁴ This will require more than 400 000 employees by the year 2030 if the dependency ratio will maintain on the same level as today. Meanwhile the number of people exiting the labour market are exceeding the number of people entering.⁵ Whilst the number of people exiting the labour market are increasing so are the number of highly educated individuals. Studies analyzing the number of graduated students showed an 40% increase in the year of 2016 compared to 10 years earlier. This will lead to an increase in age when people enter the labor market for the first time.⁶ Despite the increased number of graduates, the demand of graduates with data and information technology competence exceeds the supply.⁷ There is without a doubt a competence gap regarding IT competence, primarily due to the digitalization, creating a gap of 60 000 individuals with IT and digital related competence if no actions are made by the year 2020.⁸

“When employees are brains rather than arms, the importance of having the right employees on board is crucial for the success of a company.”⁹

According to Albinsson and Geterud we live in a time where organizations and companies are struggling to differentiate themselves, and the challengers will become achievers in the hunt for new talents.¹⁰ According to research and consult company Universum, 50% of all swedish millennials demand that their future employer should match their own values.

²Albinsson & Geterud, 2012

³ Ibid

⁴ Statistiska centralbyrån, 2017

⁵ Statistiska centralbyrån, 2009

⁶ Universitetskanslersämbetet, 2017

⁷ SCB, 2017

⁸ Malmqvist, 2015

⁹ Albinsson & Geterud, 2012. S. 25

¹⁰ Albinsson & Geterud, 2012

This requires that companies offer something unordinary beyond salary, benefits and flexible work schedule to make their jobs “likable”.¹¹ Now there is a new generation about to enter the labour market: generation Z.

Characterized with digital natives and a constant need of staying connected and updated features them as the net generation. Since generation Z are born into the world of technology they also value to be surrounded by that environment. Compared with the millennials, the generation Z are not familiar with the term *discourage*.¹² They are more practical and intelligent than wise and they prefer to see themselves as a natural leader. Generation Z is characterized as more impatient than the millennials and are not afraid of continuous change, leading them to constantly look for new challenges and problems to solve with the help of the world of internet.¹³

The time has passed were employees stayed faithful to the same employer throughout their career and after 25 years of service was given a gold watch. Today, work is about self-actualization rather than safety, passion over pension and status over stability.¹⁴

1.2 Problem discussion

The term HR (Human resources) has become a well known competitive force of creating value for the employer and reaching success for companies around the world. HR is all about having a integrated outlook when it comes to recruitment, educating, maintaining and motivating co-workers.¹⁵ Through established brands companies add value in their products and services, in order to create added value for the consumer.¹⁶

“A brand is a mixture of attributes, tangible and intangible, symbolized in a trademark, which if managed properly, creates value and influence.”¹⁷

A company’s brand does not only creates value for the consumer. It also gives companies the opportunity to add value on the labour market as an employer. With a strong brand on the labour market, companies can attract manpower with the right competence, which is an essential resource for all organizations. This is defined as employer branding.¹⁸

The term employer branding has probably not escaped anyone’s mind within the world of HR - and it is here to stay. Although the term is relatively new and was coined in the end of the

¹¹ Albinsson & Geterud, 2012

¹² Tari, 2011

¹³ Ibid

¹⁴ Albinsson & Geterud, 2012

¹⁵ Edwards, 2005

¹⁶ Bryman & Bell, 2010

¹⁷ Swystun, 2007. S.187

¹⁸ Backhaus & Tikko, 2004

1990s as a result of an increased demand of competence among companies, the meaning behind it has always existed.¹⁹ So what is really employer branding?

Employer branding was initially defined by researchers Simon Barrow and Tim Ambler as *“the package of functional, economic and psychological benefits provided by employment, and identified with the employing company.”*²⁰ They defined employer branding as an employer brand and its associations throughout different perspectives, such as: salary, benefits, status, career opportunities and values etc. The purpose of the employer brand is to provide a coherent framework for employers and organizations in order to *“simplify and focus priorities, increase productivity and improve recruitment, retention and commitment.”*

²¹

With a new generation entering the labour market, HR departments struggle to stay attractive. The talents are hard to attract and even harder to maintain. The importance of employer branding is therefore essential for both the employer and the seekers to become a match. In order to recruit new talents companies needs to “persuade” potential employees with the opportunity of learning and developing in an exciting work environment. The generation Z desires to make a change and it is up to the employer to give them the opportunity to influence and make an impact.²² Although the values among the Z’s are different compared to other generations it is up to the employer to meet these needs, in order to secure their future competence and success for the company.²³

*“Attractive employers get dibs on the most talented candidates and keep them longer. It could become like a self-playing piano, where satisfied employees constantly communicate the employer’s excellence in an authentic way.”*²⁴

1.3 Problem definition

The thesis intends to identify how three leading companies within different industries are actively working to attract the generation Z with their employer branding strategy compared to the actual preferences of generation Z.

1.4 Research question

- *How companies strategically are attracting generation Z through their employer branding compared to the preferences of gen Z?*

¹⁹ Level Recruitment, 2015

²⁰ Barrow & Mosley, 2005. S. 16

²¹ Ibid. S. 16

²² Albinsson & Geterud, 2012

²³ Tari, 2011

²⁴ Dyhre & Parment, 2013. S.14

1.5 Purpose

With a new generation entering the labour market, this thesis will examine how companies strategically are attracting generation Z through their employer branding and compare this to the preferences of gen Z's. The thesis aims to get a better understanding about the generation Z and their values in order for companies to secure their future competence. The result of this thesis will lead to the creation of a model explaining which factors are important for companies to include in their employer branding strategy when attracting and maintaining the generation Z.

1.6 Delimitations

Despite the increased number of graduates, the demand of graduates with data and information technology competence exceeds the supply.²⁵ IT and digital related competence are a constant demand among companies within the Swedish labour market. Therefore this thesis will be limited to examine the preferences of the gen Z's, especially regarding IT related occupations.

This thesis will also be limited to examine three different companies, which are leading actors within their own industries. The three companies are actively working with employer branding in order to attract new talents and maintain them and have also been rewarded for their work. All of the companies have a high demand when it comes to recruiting new talents, especially with IT and digital related competence. In order to create a relevant model for companies to use while constructing their employer branding strategy this thesis will primarily focus on the older gen Z's born between 1995 and 2000.

1.7 Definitions

Employer branding

How companies are perceived as an employer by previous, current and potential employees. To be perceived as an attractive employer gives a company competitive advantages on the labour market and the opportunity to attract and maintain the right competence.²⁶

Internal employer branding

Aims to maintain and motivate current manpower within the company.²⁷

External employer branding

Aims to attract potential competence and manpower to the company.²⁸

²⁵ SCB, 2017

²⁶ Edwards, 2010

²⁷ Dyhre & Parment, 2013

²⁸ Ibid

Competence

The ability the individual has to perform their tasks by using skill and knowledge.²⁹

Talent

Individuals which possess the right competence, in order to create success for both the individual and the company.³⁰

HR department

The department within a company which handles human resources questions. Maintaining employees wellbeing and terms.³¹

Strategy

The term is often divided into two groups, corporate strategy and business/competitive strategy. Corporate strategy aims to answer the question “*what markets are we in or should be in?*” It serves as a framework for corporate decision making both internally and externally. The business strategy aims towards how the “*company is placed relative to its competitors?*” How a company can mobilize its resources to become competitive in the long term and to achieve future goals.³²

Generation Z

Born between 1995-2010 and described as the global generations, since its digital natives.³³
The predecessor of generation Y and forerunner of generation X.³⁴

IT and digital competence

This thesis will be limited of researching the preferences of the gen Z with IT and digital related competence. System architect, engineer, programing, web analyst, digital designer, IT technician, web developer and search engine optimizer specialist are a few of the many occupations available among companies, that seeks individuals with IT and digital competence.

²⁹ Albinsson & Geterud, 2012

³⁰ Ibid

³¹ Edwards & Bach, 2005

³² Moores, 1998

³³ Dill, 2015

³⁴ Zemke, Raines & Filipczak, 2000

2. Frame of references

2.1 Models and Theories

2.1.1 Employer branding

Martin R Edwards defines employer branding as *“an activity where principles of marketing, in particular the “science of branding”, are applied to HR activities in relation to current and potential employees.”*³⁵ According to Edwards the term employer branding was first discussed by marketing academics and after some delay, by a lagging interest from HR academics. This could be explained by *“the fact that writers from the marketing and HR often have different assumptions about what areas validly lie within their areas of expertise.”*³⁶

The word *“branding”* appears traditionally within the marketing sphere and therefore, not an obvious field of study through an HR perspective. However the growth of employer branding, gave it a true HR perspective.³⁷ Despite an increased interest among academics when it comes to employer branding the research within the subject is limited. Previous research aims to create an understanding of employer branding, which has lead to several different definitions among different researchers.³⁸

Dell and Ainspan defines employer branding as *”determine the identity of the company as an employer. It includes the company's values, systems, policies and behavior towards the goals of attracting, motivating and retaining the company's current and potential employees.”*³⁹ Dell and Ainspan argue that companies not only need to maintain their current employees but also focus on attracting new manpower.⁴⁰ Unlike Dell and Ainspan, Backhaus and Tikoo are defining employer branding with a primary focus on a company's current employees and aims to make them feel satisfied in their workplace. They believe that this will lead to committed and proud co-workers which will lead to corporate loyalty and affinity.⁴¹

Martin and Beaumont state that employer branding involves *“managing a company’s image as seen through the eyes of its associates and potential hires”*.⁴² This definition encourage companies to focus on managing aspects of the company's image rather than what rewards and experiences an organisation provides for their employees. This aims to give the

³⁵ Edwards, 2010. S. 6

³⁶ Edwards, 2010 S. 5

³⁷ Edwards, 2010

³⁸ Backhaus & Tikko, 2004

³⁹ Dell & Ainspan, 2001. S. 10

⁴⁰ Dell & Ainspan, 2001

⁴¹ Backhaus & Tikko, 2004

⁴² Martin & Beaumont, 2003. S.15

employment brand additional substance by reinforcing an identity and fostering a particular brand image through communicating corporate values and guiding principles.⁴³

Author Knox presented employer branding in only six words as the unique value an organization offers. He argue that organizations must design a unique offer to differentiate themselves on the labour market.⁴⁴ Despite the differences among the many definitions they have some things in common: employer branding is described through two different perspectives, internal and external.⁴⁵ The internal perspective aims to maintaining existing employees and the external perspective aims to attract new competence and manpower.⁴⁶

“The long term strategy is to develop a more monolithic brand identity, in which case the employer brand can begin to pave the way from the inside out.”⁴⁷

According to Barrow a successful employer branding strategy should be implemented from the inside and out within an organization. This is mainly because creating a employer brand is a time consuming process and requires implementation in every department within an organization to become as successful as possible. Internal employer branding aims to create an attractive corporate culture with values that each employee can identify themselves with. Values are an essential part of employer branding as they pervades an entire organization and its culture.⁴⁸

External employer branding aims to create awareness and a perception about an organization and should answer the question *“why should I work here?”* To be perceived as an attractive employer is an invaluable competitive advantage since most companies are striving for new competence and manpower on today's labour market.⁴⁹

According to Dyhre and Parment there are three primary reason as to why companies should actively work with employer branding within their organizations:

- The supply of qualified labour does not match the needs of the employer, which creates a mismatch between supply and demand. Without the right people with the right competence, companies on the swedish labour market will not be able to function optimally.
- A new generation, the millennials and generation Z are entering the labour market and demanding higher standards on their employer. They see themselves as consumers on

⁴³ Martin & Beaumont, 2003

⁴⁴ Knox, 2004

⁴⁵ Foster, Punjaisri & Cheng, 2010

⁴⁶ Ibid

⁴⁷ Barrow & Mosley, 2005. S. 112

⁴⁸ Ibid

⁴⁹ Martin, 2008

the labour market and want to know why they should choose employer A over B. They value being able to identify their own values with the company's.

- Transparency in society increases through new methods of communication - "*Just by being attractive in the eyes of others, you will remain attractive.*"⁵⁰ The development of social media and lower integrity limits has increased transparency within companies, making the employees true corporate ambassadors.⁵¹

Despite the ambiguity of the definition of employer branding among researchers, they all agree on the importance for companies to include employer branding in their corporate strategy.

2.1.2 Brands/Branding

Although the terms brand and branding are unlikely to have escaped anyone's mind within the business environment. Its significance for companies to differentiate themselves on today's labour market, has become a crucial tool for the company's success.⁵²

Brand was defined as "*a name, symbol, design, or some combination which identifies the product of a particular organization as having a substantial, differentiated advantage*".⁵³

A brand enable for consumers to make associations between attributes and feelings regarding a certain product or service. If this differentiation is achieved and maintained, the brand is considered to have a competitive advantage over similar brands.⁵⁴ To some a brand reflects the best choice of product, while others look at a brand as knowledge and attention. By developing a strong brand companies can attract and keep customers by promoting a unique value, image, prestige, or lifestyle. Branding can be defined as a technique for building a sustainable, differential advantage by exploiting human needs.⁵⁵

By attaching a meaning or feeling to an object the consumer creates associations with the product. Through branding, companies will not only create value for the consumer but also loyal brand defenders, since once consumers are accustomed to a certain brand, they do not readily accept substitutes.⁵⁶ By adding branding to a product, it gives the product a personality or character. For example; Volvo is safe, Mercedes is luxurious, Range Rover is rough and Mini Cooper is chic.⁵⁷

⁵⁰ Dyhre & Parment, 2013. S. 29

⁵¹ Ibid

⁵² Rooney, J. A, 1995

⁵³ Ibid, s. 1

⁵⁴ Baines, Fill & Page, 2011

⁵⁵ Rooney, J. A, 1995

⁵⁶ Ibid

⁵⁷ Baines, Fill & Page, 2011

A brand consists of two main attributes, intrinsic and extrinsic. Intrinsic attributes include functional characteristics of a brand such as its shape, performance and physical capacity. If any of the intrinsic attributes were changed, it could directly affect the proposition of the brand. Extrinsic attributes refer to the name of the brand, marketing communication, shape of the package, price and other elements that enables the consumer to create associations about the brand itself. Consumers usually use the extrinsic attributes to differentiate one brand from another, since for some products, it is difficult to distinguish brands by only using the intrinsic attributes.⁵⁸

2.1.3 Generation Z

A survey made by Forbes Magazine, concluded generation Z, born between 1995 and 2010 as the first real global generation.⁵⁹

*”High-tech is in their blood, they have grown up in uncertain and complex environment which determines their viewpoint about work, studying and the world. Arising from their habit, they have different expectations in their workplaces. We can speak about a careerist, professionally ambitious generation, but their technical- and language knowledge are on a high level. Therefore, they are excellent workforces.”*⁶⁰

Although high-tech is in their blood, many struggle to combine their online life with the offline life. They feel a certain gap between the real world and desires are incompatible. They feel the need to make a change while *“waiting for somebody to pay attention to them and to give a feedback to them, that was often told by their parents: they are fantastic.”*⁶¹

Researchers Bencsik and Machova concludes generation Z as self-confident, lack of consequential thinking, well-adapted, own limits not recognised and on a pursuit of happiness and pleasure.⁶² With the aim of living for the present and questioning the need for self-actualization the generation Z differentiate themselves from other generations.⁶³

It is essential that employers have to realize that this generation will choose a career of their own interest and values and not because they want to meet demands of anyone else. With their enterprising spirit and desire to influence and make an impact to the world, employers must communicate, educate and motivate the generation Z, in order to create a trustful relationship between the employee and the employer.⁶⁴

⁵⁸ Baines, Fill & Page, 2011

⁵⁹ Dill 2015

⁶⁰ Bencsik, Horváth-Csikós & Juhász, 2016. S. 93

⁶¹ Tari, 2011. S.92

⁶² Bencsik & Machova, 2016

⁶³ Ibid

⁶⁴ Elmore, 2014

2.1.4 Millennials

Studies conclude the millennials as “*set to make an impact in the workplace.*”⁶⁵ Although several studies agree on the definition of millennials there are differences between when they are born. According to Bannon millennials - also known as generation Y, are born between 1980 and 1992, however other studies ranges the Y’s anywhere from 1970s through the early 2000s.⁶⁶ Other studies argue that millennials are ranged between 1980 and 1995.⁶⁷ Studies show that there are five distinctive features that characterize the millennials compared to other generations. These include technologically savvy, highly educated, feel the need to balance work with their home, social responsibility and ethnically diverse.⁶⁸

Their tech savvy characteristics originates from the globalized world, that the millennials have grown up in. Studies show that 75% of all millennials are members of an online social network and an additional 62% stay connected by using a laptop or handheld device.⁶⁹

*“Millennials treat their cell phones as natural extensions of themselves and about 83% keep their cell phones next to them 24 hours a day; they are always in touch if they need or want to be.”*⁷⁰

Researchers Bencsik and Machova conclude the millennials as flexible, creative, on a constant quest for new knowledge and no respect for traditions. Millennials believe in success of common effort and seek independence in order to balance their home with their workplace.⁷¹ According to studies, family and relationships are highly prioritized over fame and fortune. In the context of work it is important for generation Y that companies have the same social values as themselves and that they often see the whole world as one, without any borders.⁷² Millennials value challenges at work, and see the opportunity to contribute something important through its task. Each new task becomes a challenge that can be performed to show the employer that they have the right knowledge and competence.⁷³ By knowing what millennials value, the employer can determine the best approach to meet these needs.⁷⁴

*“Employers often complain when they see an employee texting at meetings or connecting to Facebook or LinkedIn, but it could be for purposes of seeking a solution more efficiently.”*⁷⁵

⁶⁵ Bannon et al, 2011. S. 61

⁶⁶ Ibid

⁶⁷ Zemke et al., 2000

⁶⁸ Bannon et al, 2011

⁶⁹ Ibid

⁷⁰ Bannon et al, 2011. S. 61

⁷¹ Bencsik & Machova, 2016

⁷² Ibid

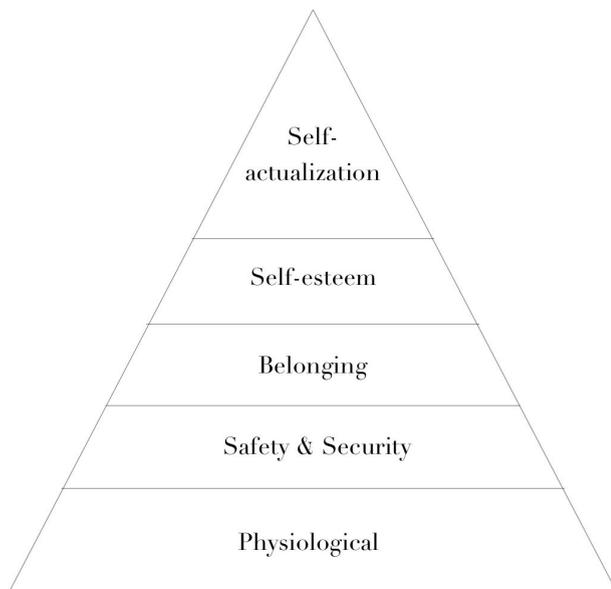
⁷³ Tulgan, 2016

⁷⁴ Bannon et al, 2011

⁷⁵ Bannon et al, 201. S. 62

2.1.5 Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs model is one of the most referenced and discussed theories.⁷⁶ The hierarchy of needs is founded after people's needs and in which order they prioritize them. According to Maslow all of the needs are existing at the same time, but before one can be achieved, the previous need must be satisfied.⁷⁷ The needs identified by Maslow, in their hierarchical order are physiological, safety and security, social, self-esteem and self actualization.⁷⁸



According to Maslow individuals initially seek to satisfy *physiological needs* and they are therefore at the bottom of the hierarchy. Physiological needs are the basic needs individuals require to stay alive and include oxygen, food, clothing and a shelter to keep them warm.⁷⁹

When the need is satisfied, *safety and security* becomes the predominant need for the individual to accomplish. This concludes for the individual to feel free of insecure situations, both personal and financial. This could be achieved by saving money and experiencing financial safety or through self preservation.⁸¹

Figure 1.0. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs.⁸⁰

The *social need* represents striving for meaningful relationships. This include feeling affection and love, from example family or friends. The need could also be accomplished by feeling acceptance from a certain group.⁸²

Self-esteem is divided into two characteristics. It concludes the need to feel both esteem and recognition from others. The satisfaction of the need for esteem will provide the individual with feelings of self-confidence, prestige and control. According to Maslow the individual will feel useful and contributed to its environment.⁸³

⁷⁶ Gambrel & Cianci, 2003

⁷⁷ Ibid

⁷⁸ Hagerty, 1999

⁷⁹ Ibid

⁸⁰ Gambrel & Cianci, 2003

⁸¹ Ibid

⁸² Hagerty, 1999

⁸³ Gambrel & Cianci, 2003

The final level of Maslow's hierarchy of needs is *self-actualization*, also defined as the individual development. This need is achieved once the individual has reached its full potential.⁸⁴

2.1.6 Word of mouth

Researcher Grönroos defines word of mouth (WOM) as "*information about a company's products, services and reliability, communicated from one person to another.*"⁸⁵ The term was first coined in the beginning of the 1950s by William H. Whyte, in his Fortune magazine article⁸⁶, where he argued that one customer has the capacity to influence the behavior of other customers.⁸⁷ Since its beginning the term have received extensive attention from both academics and practitioners and studies have intensified over the years due to the influence WOM has had on the behavior of individuals.⁸⁸ Researchers argue that the effect of WOM not only influence consumers purchase and decision making, but also will shape the consumers expectations⁸⁹, perception attitudes⁹⁰, and even post-usage perceptions of a product or service.⁹¹

Stoke and Lomax defined WOM as "*all interpersonal communication regarding products or services where the receiver regards the communicator as impartial.*"⁹² According to their research WOM can be described in three different terms; direction, valence and volume. Its direction can be input in the decision making process, or an output in the purchase process.⁹³ Valence can be perceived as both positive or negative. Its volume indicates the number of people which the message is relayed to. Input WOM becomes significantly relevant where the product is characterized by experience rather than the opportunity to easily search information about the product.⁹⁴ Depending of the product consumers seek recommendations and extended information about the product before making the purchase decision, in order to reduce their perception of risk.⁹⁵ Negative output WOM appears to be capable of more damage to a company's brand or product than a positive output WOM will bring benefits to the company and its products.⁹⁶

The receiver of WOM, perceives the communication as impartial information. Compared with other promotion methods the intent of WOM is considered to be of higher credibility, which means that the recipient is more readily to percept the message of WOM as "*truthful*".

⁸⁴ Gambrel & Cianci, 2003

⁸⁵ Grönroos, 2007. S.64

⁸⁶ De Bruyn & Lilien, 2008

⁸⁷ Kimmel & Kitchen, 2014

⁸⁸ De Bruyn & Lilien, 2008

⁸⁹ Arndt, 1967; Whyte, 1954

⁹⁰ Anderson & Salisbury, 2003; Zeithaml & Bitner, 1996

⁹¹ Bone, 1995; Burzynski & Bayer, 1977

⁹² Stoke & Lomax, 2002. S. 350

⁹³ Bone 1995

⁹⁴ Zeithaml, 1992

⁹⁵ Herr et al., 1991

⁹⁶ Tarp, 1989

⁹⁷ Several organizations are today actively working with the aim to create a positive perception of a company with the help of WOM communication. The positive image that employees are spreading of their employer has become a successful method for companies to differentiate themselves on the labour market and its competitors. It is also significant for organizations to locate the individuals which are spreading information about the company as they are external image carriers.⁹⁸

2.1.7 Five Dimensions of Brand Personality

Researcher Aaker defines brand personality as “*the set of human characteristics associated with a brand.*”⁹⁹ With a constant competition on today’s market, companies are struggling to differentiate themselves. Through a brand, the company are able to attach an image and personality to its products. By creating a personality to the brand, it can lead to consumers identifying with the personality, which creates trust and loyalty to the brand. This will eventually result in competitive advantages.¹⁰⁰ Aaker was one of the first to present a theory i brand personality. She argued that a brand could have similar types of personalities as an individual, which would influence the consumer creating a symbolic and emotional relationship with the brand.

“*Absolut vodka personified tends to be described as a cool, hip, contemporary 25-year old, whereas Stoli's personified tends to be described as an intellectual, conservative, older man.*”¹⁰¹

In order to describe the relationship between a brand and human characteristics, Aaker developed a framework of five dimensions; *Sincerity, Excitement, Competence, Sophistication and Ruggedness.*

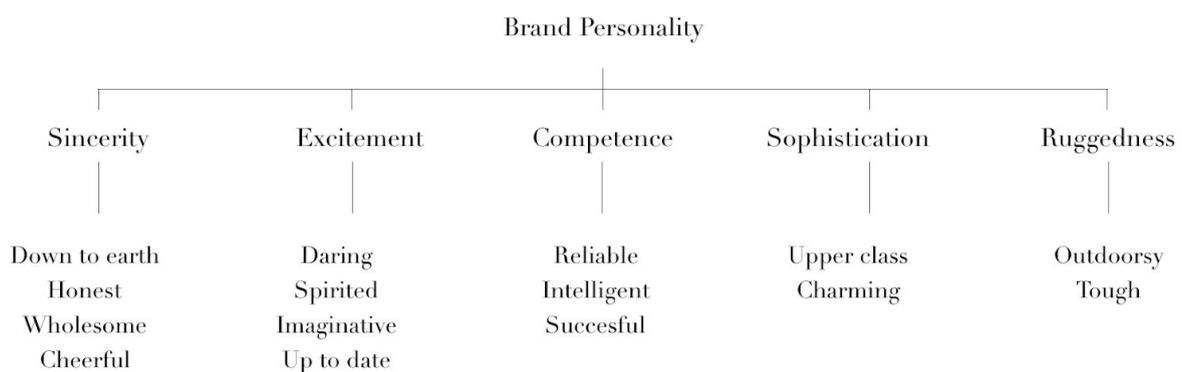


Figure 2.0. Five dimensions of brand personality¹⁰²

⁹⁷ Silverman, 2001

⁹⁸ Baines, Fill & Page, 2011

⁹⁹ Aaker, 1997. S.24

¹⁰⁰ Baines, Fill & Page, 2011

¹⁰¹ Baines, Fill & Page, 2011 s. 347

¹⁰² Aaker, 1997

Sincerity is described as down to earth, honest, wholesome and cheerful. The second brand personality is *Excitement*. It features as bold, spirited and innovative. *Competence* is described as reliable, intelligent and successful, unlike sophistication, which is described as charming and superior. The last brand personality is *Ruggedness*, which features as excessive and eye catching.¹⁰³

The framework of five does not only help companies create brand loyalty, but also maintaining it. Researchers have studied how the personality of the brand affects its attractiveness as an employer.¹⁰⁴ Therefore it is highly relevant to examine whether the company are using branding personal in their employer branding strategy.

2.1.8 The Employer Branding Process

In order for organizations to optimize their employer branding strategy, it is of high value to understand the key processes. It takes commitment and cooperation from the company management to success with the employer branding strategy.¹⁰⁵ To get a better understanding of the key processes the company Universum Global created the model *The Employer Branding Process*. According to the model, companies should strive for fewer employees who possess higher competence.¹⁰⁶

*“To build a sustainable employer brand, attention must be paid to the mechanisms that create an attractive workplace, regardless of the state of the economy.”*¹⁰⁷

The model consists of five steps that aims for companies to get a better understanding in how to create a sustainable employer branding strategy. The model defines employer branding as a *“logical process through which a company tries to achieve its primary goal: to be able to attract their current and future ideal employees.”*¹⁰⁸

The first step is *data collection*. In order for companies to create an understanding of their current position and perceived attractiveness they need to access both internal and external data. Through this companies are able to set new goals towards attracting new competence and compare their perceived attractiveness with other competitors on the market.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰³ Aaker, 1997

¹⁰⁴ Berthon, Ewing, & Hah, 2005

¹⁰⁵ Barrow & Mosley, 2005

¹⁰⁶ Dyhre & Parment, 2013

¹⁰⁷ Dyhre & Parment, 2013. S. 64

¹⁰⁸ Dyhre & Parment, 2013. S. 65

¹⁰⁹ Dyhre & Parment, 2013

Internal data contains demography of the employees, current satisfaction in the workplace, career opportunities and most significantly, the employees' critical view about the organization itself.¹¹⁰

External data is a measurement tool, used to compare brand equity, companies' attractiveness of potential labor and future opportunities within the market. In order to measure this different research, studies and surveys are made. These involve for example, asking students what their perception of an attractive employer is. Since employer branding is a constant ongoing process it is important and interesting for companies to analyze these results. The result of the *external data* gives companies the opportunity to see their attractiveness as an employer in actual items. With a better understanding of the perception as an employer, companies can strategically set goals for the company. The gap between the organization and potential employees' perception about the company can be seen as the actual employer brand.

¹¹¹

Step two is *Employer Value Proposition, EVP*. Almost all companies have a customer value proposition: "you shall always receive a smile in the reception.", "if you are not 100 percent satisfied, you will get a 100 percent refund." and "if the train is late for more than an hour, you will get a voucher worth 50 percent of the travel value."¹¹²

EVP represents the promise a company gives to current and potential employees. The *EVP* should be associated with company value and is a cornerstone for an organization to be successful with their employer branding strategy.¹¹³ *EVP* aims to answer the question "why should I work here?" and it is up to the employer to provide the employer with the answer.¹¹⁴ By identifying factors which are perceived as the most important to potential employees, *EVP* gives the HR department the opportunity to communicate this towards different segments.¹¹⁵

Communication strategy is step three and aims to find the most efficient communication channels to reach out with the company's employer value proposition. The world of web has become a highly important communication method to reach potential manpower. To give the targeted segment the opportunity to read and learn more about the organization, it is important that the company regularly update their website, creating a transparent image of the company.

Printed media and social media channels could be useful communication tools for companies, but it is important to choose the right kind to create awareness among the target group. Printed media is often used to drive traffic to the company's website. Career fairs are a

¹¹⁰ Dyhre & Parment, 2013

¹¹¹ Barrow & Mosley, 2005

¹¹² Dyhre & Parment, 2013. S. 92

¹¹³ Dyhre & Parment, 2013

¹¹⁴ Ibid

¹¹⁵ Ibid

communication channel where potential employees is able to conduct a dialogue and ask questions to existing employees within the company.

Within industries where the competitiveness is high, companies are struggling to differentiate themselves. Therefore companies can achieve competitive advantages by identifying alternative communication channels that other competitors are not using. Communication channels are also significant to reach current employees within the company. By continuously communicating internally, companies give their employees the opportunity to take part of information regarding the organization, developing a sense of affinity with the organization. This will create a stronger employer brand for the company.

Step four is *communication material*. The message a company communicates towards a target group, it need to be expressed with the right words, images and show consistency with the company's brand identity. The communication material should be based on previous steps to attract the target group in a way that differentiates the company from its competitors.

Through consistent use of communication material the company will gain a higher recognition factor. If potential employees can identify with the organization's values and preferences, this will contribute in higher credibility. A sustainable employer branding involves prioritizing current and potential competence, in order to give the answer to “*why should I work here?*”¹¹⁶

The last step of the model is *implementation*. This step aims to implement previous step, in order to see which of the steps who functions, and which who are in need to be altered. Studies show that organizations which have successfully implemented all of the steps, has gained the opportunity to establish a strong employer branding strategy.

Companies who maintain a strong and sustainable employer brand within their target groups have the opportunity to reduce costs that are imposed to attract, retain and recruit desirable competence. Studies show that an attractive employer attracts employees who remain more loyal and productive within the company, while considering lower salary in exchange for the sense of pride in working within the organization.

The process of building a sustainable employer brand is a long term strategy. It is important that the development of the strategy is made through cooperation between the HR and the marketing department. The HR department looks at organizational culture and the working environment while the marketing department has access to the brand communication channels. The different steps in the Employer Branding Process is a long term process and needs constant review and adjustment in order to maintain successful.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁶ Dyhre & Parment, 2013

¹¹⁷ Ibid

“Employees may not be our employees forever, but they might become ours forever, provided we have a strategy to manage alumni relationships. Alumni are ambassadors of our brand and our values - also after they finished working for our organisation.”¹¹⁸

2.2 Previous studies

2.2.1 Employer and Employee Branding: HR or PR?

Numerous of researchers concluded that HR departments have gained an increased interest for the term employer branding. Employer branding is seen as an important activity for companies to work with to achieve competitive advantages on the market. The increased interest of employer branding has developed a new role for the company's HR department, with a strategic focus. Making it significant for the HR department to take account for the company's image and values in its daily workplace. The aim of the article is to conclude why the significance of employer branding has become increasingly important for companies.¹¹⁹

Studies analyzing 138 leading companies worldwide, concluded that over 40 percent are actively working with employer branding strategies to maintain and attract new recruits. There are numerous reasons as to why the significance of employer branding has gained an increased interest among HR departments globally. For instance is employer branding a term that reflects the changes on the global labour market. The main change is that individuals are now searching for companies that stand for specific values that identifies with their own, rather than a high salary. Corporate social responsibility, CSR has become an important preference for potential manpower in the search for an employer. It is therefore important for HR departments to reflect these values in their daily workplace.

Another reason behind the increased interest of employer branding is the opportunity to gain competitive advantages by being perceived as an attractive employer on the labour market. A strong employer brand means that individuals identify themselves with the company, which creates both loyal employees and customers. The article concludes that working with employer branding is an extension of the company's brand, which is essential to maintain and recruit loyal and motivated manpower.

Apart from the benefits of actively working with employer branding, the article argues that there are also consequences. The author argue that employer branding could lead to changed values among the employees. Although the research to support this is limited the article highlights a study made by Kraimer, where the result concludes that if employees can identify themselves with the values of the organization, their work performance will be improved. However, if the employee can not identify with the corporate values, this could eventually lead to termination. It is therefore significant for companies to perform different activities

¹¹⁸ Dyhre & Parment, 2013. S. 50

¹¹⁹ Edwards, 2005

internally, which are aim towards the corporate values. By accomplishing with the activities the employees will be influence to identify with the company, which will lead to motivated and loyal manpower.¹²⁰

2.2.2 Conceptualizing and researching employer branding

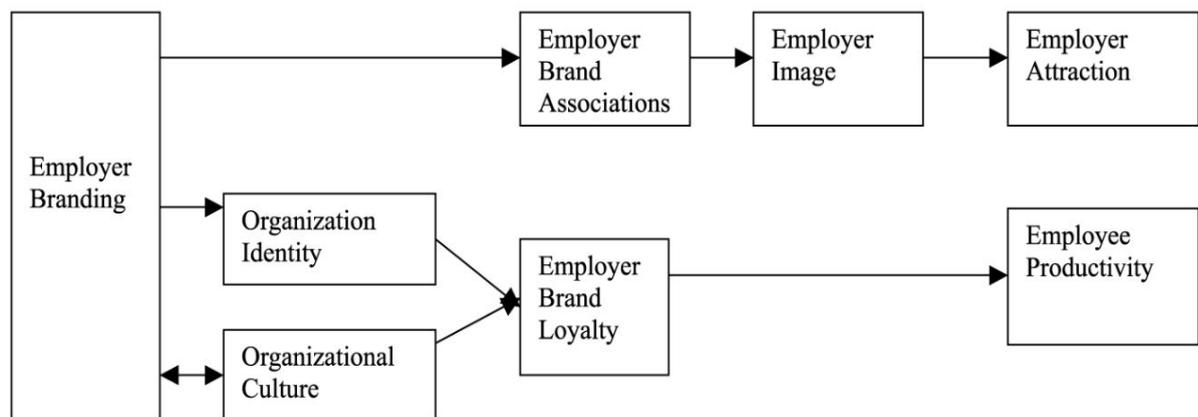


Figure 3.0. The employer branding framework.¹²¹

The framework above aims to create a better understanding about employer branding. The model consists of internal and external branding that affects each other. The internal part represents the bottom half of the model and shows how the organization's culture and identity is affected by employer branding, which will eventually lead to increased loyalty and performance among the employees.

The external part represents the upper half of the model and is linked to how well the company markets itself as an employer. By developing associations for the employer brand, the company can create an image as an attractive employer. If an individual can identify with the image, they will perceive the company as a more attractive employer. In order to raise awareness of the company towards potential employees and attract individuals with the right competence, it is essential that the company communicate its brand as an employer.¹²²

2.2.3 Captivating company: dimensions of attractiveness in employer branding

By communicating the employer brand on the labour market, companies are able to attract labour with the right competence. The article defines employer attractiveness as *“the envisioned benefits that a potential employee sees in working for a specific organisation.”*¹²³ Employees have gained a centred role regarding the corporate brand, enabling the capacity to

¹²⁰ Edwards, 2005

¹²¹ Backhaus & Tikko, 2004

¹²² Ibid

¹²³ Berthon, Ewing, & Hah, 2005. S. 57

both strengthen and revitalize the brand and image of the company. Therefore the recruitment process have become a prioritized issue for companies in order to recruit employees with the right competence and values.

The article aims to get a better understanding as to which factors are contributing in the perception of an attractive employer. To conclude this a survey was made, analyzing the answer of the respondents. This resulted in five main categories which described the image of an attractive employer, called the *five factor model*.

1. *Interest value* - The employer offers an interesting and developing work environment and taking advantage of the creativity of employees in order to produce innovative and high quality products and services.
2. *Social value* - The social environment aims to create cohesion and a good working environment.
3. *Financial value* - The employer offers financial benefits, for example high salary.
4. *Developing value* - The employer offers career opportunities and appreciation.
5. *Application value* - The opportunity an employer allows its employees to apply the knowledge they possess in their daily workplace.

The results of the article will be applied through the perspective of the employer, in order to examine what values companies want to communicate towards their targeted segment. Based on the *five factor model*, the marketing and HR department have the opportunity to develop a strong and sustainable recruitment strategy. Enabling for companies to create advantages over its competitors.¹²⁴

¹²⁴ Berthon, Ewing, & Hah, 2005.

3. Method

3.1 Scientific methods

Researcher Jacobsen defines the term method as “*data on reality*”.¹²⁵ Through the process of writing a thesis the choices of methods in order to validate and gain trustworthiness to the research, are many. According to Söderbom and Ulvenblad there are two different methods that can be used in order to collect data, idiographic and nomothetic method.¹²⁶ The idiographic method also known as the subjective one, aims to describe and seek explanations for a certain situation or process. When using this method a qualitative approach is a given ideal. The qualitative method is based upon case studies, interviews and observations. The nomothetic method defines as objective and aims to seek the opportunity to generalize by measuring results and test hypothesis. This method assumes from quantitative data which is based upon surveys, phone interviews and study of documents.¹²⁷ According to Alvesson and Sköldbberg the different methods can be used separately or combined depending on what kind of information the purpose and research question requires.¹²⁸

According to researchers Burrell and Morgan there are three different methodological paradigms, *Radical Humanist*, *Radical Structuralist*, *Interpretive and Functionalist*. The *Radical Humanist* focuses on human consciousness and sees visions and ideas as a source of change with a describing purpose. The *Radical Structuralist* goes back to Karl Marx and follows an objective and revolutionary view, with the aim that society is seen as not stable and radical changes are therefore possible. The *Interpretive* paradigm bases on a hermetically, antipositivistic and describing view, where qualitative interpretative and understanding are in focus. The perspective of the *Functionalist* is defined by a subjective view. The social context is seen as generally regulated. Change can happen, but the subjects of investigation are acting within and hence are restricted by a certain organization and environment. The Functionalist paradigm is analytic, seeking explanation by often using quantitative methods.¹²⁹

When choosing a scientific approach there are three different methods, inductive, deductive and abductive. The inductive method collects data by going from empiricism to theory. This means that the outcome of the research is not based on any previous expectations of the research area. The deductive method bases its data collection in the opposite way, from theory to empiricism. By using this method the researcher creates expectations of the reality and then examines whether the expectations matches the actual reality. This method has been

¹²⁵ Jacobsen, 2011. S. 29

¹²⁶ Söderbom & Ulvenblad, 2016. S.40

¹²⁷ Söderbom & Ulvenblad, 2016

¹²⁸ Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2008

¹²⁹ Burrell & Morgan, 1979

criticized since the researchers personal preferences could lead to that the researcher only will look for information that is relevant for the perceived expectations, creating a deceptive result.¹³⁰ The abductive method is a mixture of the inductive and deductive methods. By using this method the researcher bases the data collection on the basis of an empirical surface structure, goes to theory and then back to empiricism.¹³¹

The method for this thesis will be based on the interpretive paradigm with a hermetically and inductive approach since the purpose of this thesis is to examine and explain how companies strategically are attracting and maintaining the generation Z through their employer branding and compare this with preferences of the gen Z's.¹³² There have already been made extensive studies about the "general" gen Z's and their preferences.¹³³ However there is a research gap when it comes to attracting and maintaining the generation Z for IT and digital related occupations. The main research regarding the preferences of the gen Z's with IT and digital competence has previously only been made by consult company Universum Global. Since Universum Global is a paid service by companies, the result of the study can not be seen as objective. Despite the already existing information about the "general" gen Z the research will also examine a selected crowd of IT and digital interested gen Z's, in order to examine their preferences with the companies employer branding strategies.

3.2 Choice of method

In order to examine how companies strategically are attracting and maintaining the generation Z through their employer branding, this research requires detailed information from both companies that are actively working with employer branding and from the gen Z's, in order to identify their preferences of a future employer. According to Jacobsen the method should meet the purpose of the research.

To be able to identify the preferences of the gen Z's along with how companies are working with employer branding this thesis will use a qualitative method, consisting of personal interviews in order to get as detailed answers as possible.¹³⁴

3.3 Data collection

Researcher Jacobsen argues that the choice of method is based on the purpose and problem discussion combined.¹³⁵ In order to gather all the data for examining the purpose, this thesis will consist of both primary and secondary data. The secondary data will be primarily gathered from scientific articles and digital sources and literature. The primary data will be conducted through interviews with one respondent from each company that are actively

¹³⁰ Jacobsen, 2011 S.34-35

¹³¹ Söderbom & Ulvenblad, 2016. S.40

¹³² Söderbom & Ulvenblad, 2016

¹³³ Universum, n.d

¹³⁴ Ibid

¹³⁵ Jacobsen, 2011

working with employer branding. In order to be able to compare the companies employer branding strategies with the preferences of the generation Z, the primary data will also consist of interviews with 14 gen Z's. Before the interviews can be conducted its essential that the survey questions are made. The questions are the foundation of this thesis in order to create the explaining model of how companies strategically are working with employer branding compared to the preferences of the generation Z. After the interviews have been conducted they are transcribed and the data will be analyzed.

3.3.1 Secondary data

Secondary data are data that has been collected by another researcher with a different research question. Since the data has been collected for a purpose that differs from this thesis it is highly important to secure that the data is reliable. To ensure that the secondary data is reliable researchers usually compare this to similar data from different researcher and use this in order to gain trustworthiness.¹³⁶ Another factor which has to be taken into consideration is that the data might be angled towards the other researchers purposes and could therefore be misleading.¹³⁷

3.3.1.1 Selection of data

The secondary data had been gathered from scientific articles, journals, literature and web pages. The scientific articles and journals are from Emerald and ABI, obtained from the database of Halmstad University. The secondary data creates a better knowledge within the chosen area and helps to get a better understanding about the gen Z's. The scientific literature is primarily used to get a better understanding of the current swedish labour market, in order to get knowledge of the importance of employer branding. The literature is gathered from the library of Halmstad University. This data will be presented and supporting the problem discussion as well the choice of relevant survey questions that will be the foundation of the empiricism. The secondary data will also be compared with the primary data regarding the preferences of the generation Z.

3.3.2 Primary data

According to Jacobsen primary data is data that has been gathered for the first time and customized from the specific purpose of the research. The primary data is usually gathered by interviews, observations or surveys.¹³⁸

3.3.2.1 Selection of companies

To be able to answer the research question a qualitative research strategy have been implicated, while the empirical framework will be applied to relevant theories. According to Mc Cracken a qualitative study is characterized by the term "*the less is more*", meaning that

¹³⁶ Jacobsen, 2011

¹³⁷ Ibid

¹³⁸ Ibid

a limited selection of respondents are chosen and researched extensively.¹³⁹ Since a qualitative interview requires that the respondents have a high level of skills within the researched area is a non standardized interview preferable.

Jacobsen argues that in order for the respondents to provide valid information for the research purpose a strategic selection of companies are recommended.¹⁴⁰ Based on the choice of method this research will examine three companies, all leading within different industries. The three companies are well established in both Sweden and globally and are actively working with employer branding, which was a presumption when selecting relevant companies to participate in this research. Within each company the people that have been interviewed are working with employer branding and are therefore significant for the result of this research.

Despite the many differences between the researched companies they all have in common that they have been rewarded for their work with employer branding. The rewards indicate that the companies in different ways have managed to accomplish a successful employer branding strategy.

3.3.2.2 Alfa Laval

Since founded in 1883, Alfa Laval has become a world leading actor within the industrial sector. Their products, consisting of three key technologies - heat transfer, separation and flow management, are distributed in over 100 countries worldwide by 17 000 employees.¹⁴¹ With a constant aim towards technology and development, in order to find smart and sustainable solutions, Alfa Laval is always in the quest for new employees with IT and digital related competence. According to Johan Karlfeldt, who are working as internal communications manager at Alfa Laval, the company has always worked unconsciously with employer branding through different initiatives, in order to raise awareness. However in 2016 major efforts were made to develop the employer brand by combining HR and communication and creating an Employer Value Proposition, EVP. Alfa Laval have yet not a global strategy for their employer brand but are communication and implementing their EVP in their five largest markets, Sweden, Denmark, USA, India and China.¹⁴²

The respondent from Alfa Laval is Johan Karlfeldt who have been working with employer branding since 2016 and are also working with competence development, values and organisation culture at Alfa Laval. Johan Karlfeldt have also been nominated as employer branding manager of the year by consult company Universum Global.¹⁴³

¹³⁹ McCracken, 1988

¹⁴⁰ Jacobsen, 2011

¹⁴¹ Alfa Laval, 2018

¹⁴² J. Karlfeldt (Personal interview, 21-03-2018)

¹⁴³ Ulvander, 2017

3.3.2.3 ASSA ABLOY Entrance Systems

Since founded in 2006, ASSA ABLOY Entrance Systems (AAES) has become a global leader in door opening solutions, offering a complete range of door opening products and solutions for the institutional, commercial and consumer market.¹⁴⁴ ASSA ABLOY group was founded in 1994 and might be most known for their locks which could be found in the lockers at school and in the doors of your home. In 2011 AAES was the smallest division of the ASSA ABLOY group with 2500 employees and a turnover of SEK 4 billion. Today, AAES have had a rocket growth and are today the largest division within the ASSA ABLOY group. They are an employer of 11 000 employees, has a turnover of SEK 25 billion and acquiring 4-6 companies every year.¹⁴⁵

ASSA ABLOY Group have actively been working with employer branding since 2016 and was rewarded “*Best HR manager of the year 2018*” specifically for their work with employer branding by Universum Global.¹⁴⁶ This shows that ASSA ABLOY are actively working with employer branding and as a world leading supplier of door opening solutions the company is highly relevant to investigate further especially since they also require IT and digital related competence.¹⁴⁷

The respondent from the company is Tove Torbjörnsdotter who is working as Head of Talent Acquisition.

3.3.2.4 Company X

The participating company will be referred to as company X. This is due to the company's policy that the name of the company and its founder's name can not be printed in this thesis. However the thesis will include a description of company X in order to verify its relevance to this study.

Characterized with strong values that aims at unity, sustainability and diversity, company X is today a world leading actor within the retail industry, with 160 000 co-workers worldwide.¹⁴⁸ Company X have actively been working with employer branding since 2015 and tops Universum's list of the most attractive employers in Sweden. The company have also been rewarded with Randstad Awards for their work as the most attractive company in Sweden.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁴ ASSA ABLOY, n.d

¹⁴⁵ T. Torbjörnsdotter (Personal interview, 01-03-2018)

¹⁴⁶ ASSA ABLOY, 2018

¹⁴⁷ T. Torbjörnsdotter (Personal interview, 01-03-2018)

¹⁴⁸ J. Gustafsson (Personal interview, 20-03-2018)

¹⁴⁹ Ibid

This indicated that company X are not only actively working with employer branding, but have also managed to create a strong employer brand, with associations of being an attractive employer according to both current and potential co-workers.

The respondent from company X will be referred to as Johanna Gustavsson and is working as HR manager.

3.3.2.5 Interviews

The interviews have been made with the available amount of resources in order to give the thesis credibility and validity. The guideline of all the interviews are semi structured with open questions enabling to create a dialogue between the researcher and the respondent.¹⁵⁰

3.3.2.5.1 Company interviews

The company interviews were made with one respondent from each company that are working with employer branding and are therefore highly relevant for this research and its result. Each interview was introduced with a summary of this thesis and its purpose. Before the interviews started all companies were asked if they wanted to be public or anonymous and if the interviews could be recorded. By recording the interviews it enables to create a natural dialogue without needing to focus on taking notes. The interviews were recorded on a cellphone in order to create as few technical disruptions as possible.¹⁵¹

Each respondent from every company was also asked to give a quick introduction and name three things about themselves in order to create a comfortable and relaxed environment. The respondents were asked 7 open questions regarding their work with employer branding and if they aim their employer branding towards different target groups. By asking open question during an interview it enables to have an open dialogue with the respondents and to get exhaustive answers.¹⁵² During the interviews it has been crucial as a researcher to listen actively and ask supplementary questions that are relevant for this study and its purpose.

If a numerous of companies would have been chosen to participate in the interviews there would be a risk that the empirical study would have been quantitative instead of qualitative which is not the purpose of this thesis.¹⁵³ Every employee from each company were chosen based on their role and employer branding experience. The interviews have enabled it to gather qualitative information during a short period of time about how the companies are actively working with employer branding towards different segments.

¹⁵⁰ Wibeck, 2010

¹⁵¹ Jacobsen, 2011 s. 166

¹⁵² Jacobsen, 2011

¹⁵³ Ibid

3.3.2.5.2 Gen Z interviews

The interviews with the gen Z's were conducted through semistructured interviews consisting of 10 questions regarding their preferences of a future employer. The 14 respondents were not given the questions in advance in order to get as objective answers as possible. The respondents were chosen because of their age and university education. Since this research has a qualitative approach all focus when conducting the interviews was to get detailed answers with high validity from a smaller target group rather than getting many answers with lower credibility.

3.4 Analysis of data

In order for all interviews to be analyzed they have been transcribed and categorized into different titles and subtitles that cover the framework of this research. Transcribing all of the interviews have been a time consuming process but have also made it possible to analyze the gathered data and compare the companies employer branding strategies with the preferences of the gen Z's. Finally, all the gathered data have been put in context with the purpose and the research question - *“How companies strategically are attracting generation Z through their Employer Branding compared to the preferences of gen Z?”* Leading to the creation of a model explaining the important factors for companies to include in their employer branding strategy when attracting and maintaining the generation Z.

3.5 Method criticism

Since all the interviews have been conducted through personal interviews there is a risk of the Hawthorne effect, which means that the respondents might answer differently since they know that they are being observed. In order to prevent this as much as possible the aim of all the interviews is to create a natural environment with a dialogue between the researcher and the respondent instead of an interview. The interviews were also recorded with a cellphone in order to create as few disruptions as possible, enabling a fluent dialogue between the respondent and the researcher.

Since the respondents from each company and the gen Z's are Swedish, the interviews were conducted in Swedish and transcribed in both Swedish and English. Therefore major efforts have been made when formulating the research question, making them easy to translate without losing its relevance. In order to avoid biases of the result the interviews have been transcribed as accurate as possible in both Swedish and English.

3.5.1 Company interviews

The interviews have been conducted through personal interviews with 7 open questions in order to create a natural dialogue. If the resources and time would have been available it would be interesting to research more companies and their view of employer branding and attracting the gen Z's. Since this thesis uses a qualitative approach there is no given answer to

how many companies that should be researched in order to create relevance and credibility. Instead of focusing on the number of research companies, the primary factors that have been taking into consideration when choosing research companies are employer branding accomplishments, industry and the size of the company.¹⁵⁴

Since the method of this thesis uses a qualitative approach the selection of respondents from each company have not been randomly selected. If the respondents had been randomly selected the validity of this research could not have been assured, since it requires respondents with expertise within the employer branding area, in order to the creation of a model explaining which factors are important for companies to include in their employer branding strategy when attracting and maintaining the generation Z with IT and digital related competence.¹⁵⁵

3.5.2 Gen Z interviews

The respondents of the gen Z's are primarily studying at Halmstad University and are in the age group of a gen Z. Since the interview consisted of ten open questions, the total result when analyzing the answers will exceed a 100 %. The result of the empirical framework have been used to make the model that will enable for companies to attract the gen Z. The model clarifies the respondents preferences of a future employer and shows the connection between theories and the collected data, that has been coded through manifests and latent codes.

If more time and resources would have been available it would be highly interesting to interview respondents from universities across entire Sweden. Despite that the respondents from Halmstad University come from different cities located from the north to the very south of Sweden it would have been interesting to research if the values of the gen Z's would be different depending on where they are studying. The gen Z's where not given the questions in advance in order to get as objective answers as possible.

3.5.3 Source criticism

In order to guarantee reliability it is of great importance to critically analyze the secondary sources that have be used in this thesis to support the primary data. The main secondary sources that have been used for this thesis comes from scientific journals that have been critically analyzed when it comes to factors such as relevans, when the research was made and how updated it is. The digital sources are primary gathered from the statistics central bureau of Sweden (SCB) and Universum Global.

SCB have been used to support the problem discussion and background. The information that have been gathered from the website were submitted in the year of 2017, and are therefore seen as updated data. Universum Global was used to characterize the generation Z. Despite

¹⁵⁴ Bell & Bryman, 2010

¹⁵⁵ Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009

that Universum Global is not concluded as a objective website, the information about the general gen Z's have been collected as a free of charge service and the information have also been supported with scientific articles in order to gain reliability and trustworthiness to the research. This thesis also consists of literary sources. The litterature have primarily been used to support the background and shaping the method framework.

3.5.4 Criticism of Universum Global

In order for companies to participate in the studies made by Universum Global, companies needs to pay a commission.¹⁵⁶ This conclude that Universum's ranking charts and studies are not objective measurement tools for companies. Universum Global is a consult company which sells employer branding related services for companies, in order for them to improve the creation of their employer branding strategy. This may affect the credibility of this thesis negatively since *The Employer Branding Process* made by Universum Global is a part of the frame of references and mentioned in the analysis. However the criticism is also relevant for the research purpose as it creates a gap regarding the preferences of the gen Z's with IT and digital competence.

3.6 Credibility

According to Jacobsen data that is collected for research purpose must have high reliability and validity.¹⁵⁷ Validity aims weather the thesis actually measures what was the actual purpose of this research. Reliability represents trustworthiness and refers to whether if the result and finding of the research would be the same if the study where to be conducted by another researcher or time.¹⁵⁸

3.6.1 Reliability and validity in the qualitative research

Validity is often divided into two different sections, internal and external validity. Internal validity aims whether the study measures the actual purpose and the external measures the relevance for companies to use the study in their work, in this case when founding their employer branding strategy. The study focuses to analyze how three companies are actively working with employer branding in order to attract and maintain future employees with IT and digital related competence and compare this with the actual preferences of the generation Z. In order to do so, three companies that are all leading within different industries have been interviewed along with 14 gen Z's that see themselves as a future employee within the IT industry. Since the study is measuring the actual purpose this gives the thesis internal validity.¹⁵⁹ If the delimitation to focus on individuals with IT and digital related competence would not have been made, the information retrieved from the gen Z's could have had a

¹⁵⁶ Universum, n.d

¹⁵⁷ Jacobsen, 2011

¹⁵⁸ Ibid

¹⁵⁹ Ibid

higher width. However this delimitation was seen as highly significant, due to the gap of IT and digital related competence on the Swedish labour market.

Since the purpose of this thesis is to create an explaining model for companies to include when creating their employer branding strategy this gives the study an external validity.¹⁶⁰ Although the model aims to help companies achieve an effective employer branding strategy when it comes to IT and digital competence, all companies are unlikely to have the same affect and the model only aims to function as a guideline that companies can implement in their current employer branding strategy.

A factor when conducting a scientific research that may affect the validity of the study could be that the respondents could misinterpret a question, which could affect the result of this study.¹⁶¹ However this has been avoided as much as possible since all the interviews have been conducted through personal interviews, enabling to ask supplementary questions and create a dialogue between the respondent and the researcher.

In order to gain reliability to the research and its purpose all interviews with the respondents from each company, are actively working with employer branding in their daily work and are chosen because of their expertise within the area, employer branding. All the interviews were recorded in order to enable accessible data after the interviews were conducted. This research aims to identify the preferences of the gen Z's and compare this with how companies are actively working with employer branding in order to attract and maintain talented co-workers.

All gen Z's are currently studying at Halmstad university and it's possible that gen Z's from other universities might not have the same preferences. If more time and resources would have been available it would be interesting to further investigate gen Z's at other universities. This study is delimited to the early gen Z born between 1995 and 2000, however within 10 years it could be necessary to further analyze the preferences of the gen Z's born between 2001 and 2010 to analyze if there are any differences compared to the early gen Z's.

Despite that the two terms validity and reliability are closely related to each other, since a high validity will also reflect a high reliability, a high reliability will not guarantee a high validity.¹⁶²

3.7 Ethics

When conducting a scientific research the importance of ethics are highly significant, especially when conducting a qualitative study. Due to the limited selection of respondents in

¹⁶⁰ Söderbom & Ulvenblad, 2016

¹⁶¹ Bell & Bryman, 2010

¹⁶² Ibid

a qualitative research, this requires that the respondents are opening up to have a dialogue, enabling them to be very personal. In order to make the respondent feel comfortable, it is significant to respect their integrity and personal sphere.¹⁶³

Before participating in any interview all companies and the gen Z's were given a information email about the research and its purpose. The respondents were also given the opportunity to be anonymous and information regarding where and how the research would be published.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶³ Lanz, 1993

¹⁶⁴ Brinkmann & Kvale, 2009

4. Empirical framework

4.1 The companies

4.1.1 Alfa Laval

According to Johan Karlfeldt, Alfa Laval has strategically been working with employer branding since 2016. Alfa Laval has consistently topped Universum Globals list: The best employer in Sweden, which is measured by internal image, loyalty and well-being among the co-workers. However when it comes to being perceived as an attractive employer on the labour market, Alfa Laval struggles to raise awareness about their employer brand. According to Karlfeldt the company strives to be perceived as an innovative, modern, entrepreneurial company where the employees get the opportunity to take their own initiatives and focus on things that they are passionate about. Karlfeldt believes that Alfa Laval have several challenges when it comes to attract and maintain the right competence and believes that Alfa Laval needs to change their people experience, in order to overcome these challenges.

Alfa Laval are currently aiming their employer brand towards three different target groups: engineers, IT and individuals under the age of 35. According to Karlfeldt he believes that in order to attract newly graduates or young professionals they also need the help of younger co-workers to find out what they are seeking after. When communicating with people in the ages 20-35, Alfa Laval has discovered that they need to focus on soft values and the actual purpose of their products instead of the practical one, for example:

“Being able to work with products that makes it possible to clean water and grow tomatoes in the desert, instead of mentioning working with heat exchangers and separators.”

When being present on student fairs Alfa Laval aims their language towards their target group with the purpose of creating an image of what it is like to work at Alfa Laval. The company also tries to describe people that they are seeking based on culture and motivation instead of skills and capabilities. Despite from student fairs, Alfa Laval is also present on social medias, such as LinkedIn and Facebook. However their content previously lacked genuineness and are currently striving to become more personal with shorter content, in order to attract people's attention.

In order to develop the entire employer brand, Karlfeldt have actively been working on shortening down Alfa Laval's job applications and primarily focus on sustainability, working for a higher purpose and development opportunities instead of ranking a long list with capabilities that appears to require someone to be a rocket scientist.

“Find the interesting stories and tell them where the people are.”

Karlfeldt also highlights the importance of looking after the well-being of existing co-workers. He strongly believes that in order to be perceived as attractive on the labour market, the well-being within the company need to reflect that in order to maintain the competence. Karlfeldt state that in order to spread their message, it starts with the employees of Alfa Laval.

Recently, Alfa Laval launched a new project that required 50 engineers with different experiences. According to Karlfeldt, it became a challenge to attract and maintain individuals with tech competence, primarily because of Alfa Laval's low awareness. For every graduated engineer, the labour market requires 4,5 engineers to stimulate the competence demand among companies. In order to attract this competence, Alfa Laval needs to be top of mind and be seen in the right places.

"Finding 50 competent engineers is not damn easy."

Internally Alfa Laval is founded of the swedish culture, genuine history of being "a 134 year old young company" and always in need for new and sustainable solutions. According to Karlfeldt, Alfa Laval does not have any specific values. However, they have something called Alfa Laval DNA, which tells the story about the company and their standpoints:

"We are open, informal and friendly.

We are straightforward and tell it like it is.

We believe in diversity and equal career opportunities.

We are curious and want to understand our customers' situations.

We keep things simple and focus on cost-efficient solutions."

In order to communicate the employer brand to the recruitment team, Karlfeldt have been responsible for two sessions where HR managers have been invited to be instructed in the employer brand and the EVP of Alfa Laval. For those who could not participate or had further questions after the sessions, Karlfeldt also arranged different webinars. Additionally there have also been workshops in how to write job ads and a platform has been created for the EVP on Alfa Laval's intranet.

In the future 5-10 years, Karlfeldt wishes that more resources are made in the employer branding work along with visiting the companies primary global markets: China, India, USA in order to locate different needs among the labour markets.

4.1.2 ASSA ABLOY Entrance Systems

Since 2011, ASSA ABLOY Entrance Systems has gone from being the smallest division within the Assa Abloy Group with 2 500 employees and a turnover of SEK 4 billion to have a rocket growth and becoming the biggest division with 11 000 employees, reach a turnover of over SEK 25 billion and acquiring 4-6 companies every year. According to Tove

Torbjörnsdotter, Head of talent acquisition and employer branding manager, competence acquisition have never been a struggle for AAES throughout their rocket growth. However now, the company see a radical change of becoming a match with the seekers and the importance of a strong employer brand have become radically increased. AAES have continuously worked with employer branding unconsciously although, in 2016 major efforts was made to launch a pilot project, with a primary focus on the swedish market. AAES have chosen to target their employer branding towards three different target groups: students or young professionals, women and IT. By identifying different target groups it enables for AAES to communicate better with the different groups.

According to Torbjörnsdotter, working with employer branding has helped identifying important strengths for AAES as an employer but have also identified major gaps that they are now trying to fill. Torbjörnsdotter state that they have strengths in external communication, as once they catch someone's attention they are often captured by the company and its standpoints. However, there are major gaps when it comes to communicating the employer brand internally mainly since, AAES is a decentralized organization which means that most employees are only used to work within their own areas. Torbjörnsdotter would therefore wish that there was some activity that could be made to include the entire organization and erase the clear lines between the different divisions.

AAES wants to be perceived as an innovative and exciting company that focuses on entrepreneurship, development and being able to make an impact in the workplace since the work is constantly changing. This image is primarily communicated through social media channels such as: LinkedIn, Instagram, Twitter and Facebook, their website and student fairs. In order to attract students and young professionals, AAES has discovered that soft values are prioritized among the target group. However, sometimes finds it hard to communicate these since most people in that target group relates ASSA ABLOY only with the locks.

In order to change their image of a slightly boring company that makes locks into a innovative and entrepreneurial company that sees every individual as a unique. Torbjörnsdotter highlights the importance to communicate with the target group. She also highlights the importance of recruiting individuals with IT competence since if no actions are made their will be a gap of 60 000 individuals with tech and IT related competence in the year of 2020 in Sweden.

AAES are working towards four different values: engaged, open minded, professional and building together, that all have been identified by their way of working instead of being written and then implicated in the organization. Engaged represents being curious, committed, passionate and in the seek to build new relationships. Being open minded reflects the drive for change, being inspired and inspire others and being a part of creating



successful teamworks. Professional stands for being challenged, responsible and show respect for others. Finally, we are building together represents thinking in solutions and not problems along with finding new ways to make things happen.

“Be proud of the past, build the future.”

When it comes to communicating the employer brand to the recruitment team, Torbjörnsdotter state that there are some limitations primarily since, the recruiter most commonly is not a recruiter but a manager and therefore finds it hard to focus on the employer brand while recruiting new co-workers along with managing their work. Torbjörnsdotter wishes to find a way to be able to communicate the message without it taking too much focus from others or seek a will among the co-workers to ask about the employer brand instead of pushing out the message primarily since, the organizations is decentralized.

According to Torbjörnsdotter, she strives that AAES within the next 5-10 years will have a solid platform with guidelines and strategies how AAES sees employer branding both internally but also externally, what symbolizes an ASSA ABLOY co-worker personally and to have an increased cooperation between the divisions within the company.

“Fail fast, everything is not structured and make sure to know what you would have done differently.”

4.1.3 Company X

Company X has today one of the strongest employer brands in Sweden and started working with employer branding in 2015. According to Johanna Gustafsson, HR manager and head of company X’s employer branding, she state that the company has always worked with employer branding unconsciously although, saw the true weight of a strong employer brand as the company found it hard to find the right competence within different areas. When launching their employer branding strategy, company X primarily participated at different student fairs and other events where they were asked to participate due to their well known and established brand. Gustafsson state that the employer brand of Company X is characterized by strong values, seeing every individual as unique and working together. She also highlights the competitive advantages of being perceived as an attractive employer on the labour market, enabling to attract and maintain the right competence.

According to Gustafsson there are challenges for company X when it comes to recruiting tech competence primarily since the company is seen as an actor within the retail industry. In order to be able to attract this competence Gustafsson believes that the company needs to improve their way of communicating with this group, in order to be perceived as an innovative and exciting company. Since company X is also competing of tech and IT related competence with other companies, are the significance of recruiting according to the values of company X highly important.

“For us, it’s about creating target groups and to understand who we are talking to.”

Company X have chosen to target their employer branding towards three different target groups: young professionals, seniors and specialist. In order to identify the needs among the different target groups, company X have created different personas to be able to attract and maintain these groups. The different personas have been created in order to see what the groups value, live, behave and prefer. For example if company X needs to recruit a tech specialist they use the personas to be able to identify how to communicate and attract a specialist more efficiently.

“Founder X has set the mentality that every person is needed, that everyone is unique and contributes in their own way.”

According to Gustafsson, company X wants to be perceived as an innovative and exciting company that are constantly in the need to find new and sustainable solutions by working together. However, she believes that in order to be perceived as this, company X need to increase the awareness about the company since, there are still some people that only see the company as a retail company and not a company with 2000 co-workers within IT.

The primary communication channels of company X are student fairs, LinkedIn, facebook and their website. Gustafsson state that the company is successful when it comes to promoting their products on social media although, there are some improvement that can be made in order to communicate the employer brand even better. When the company is present at student fairs, they make sure to adjust their messages and ways of communicating depending on different target groups, in order to attract a wider audience.

When attracting and maintaining young professionals which are newly graduates with a working experience of maximum three years, company X have learned to focus on development opportunities, challenges and values. Since, company X have quite strong values Gustafsson believes that the values should be pervaded but not seem forced. When seeking for new co-workers, company X have also learned that being competent is so much more than hard values and knowledge, its about personality, motivation and willingness.

In order to ensure that the employer brand is communicated to the recruitment team, Gustafsson highlights the importance of communication. When creating a persona, they gather information along with co-workers and a recruitment team as well making sure to arrange different activities to boost the recruiting process for certain roles.

During the next 5-10 years Gustafsson hopes that company X will be top of mind and have a strategy that enables to be seen and heard in the right places to the right people.

4.2 The gen Z's

"I believe that my weaknesses can be complemented by someone else's strengths."

When asking the question of what makes a company attractive, 64% of the gen Z's answered that they found a company attractive when they see the opportunity to personal development within the company. 29% of the respondents answered that they found a company attractive when the company is continuously active on social media and further 7% found a company attractive if the company was located in a bigger city. All of the respondents highlighted the importance of a professionally looking website when it come to gathering information about a company. 79% of the respondents also mentioned social media as a key method for gathering information about a company where 45% of the 79% answered that they primary use LinkedIn. Other social media channels that the gen Z's also uses occationally are Instagram and Facebook. The power of word of mouth was of great importance when gathering information about a company according to 50% of the respondents and 43% also prefers student fairs, where they get to talk to someone from the company, in order to:

"Get an image of what it's like to work there."

When the respondents were asked if brand awareness was significant when choosing an employer, 93% said that they would rather choose a more established employer with high brand awareness as newly graduates if they had similar work tasks, co-workers and salary as an employer with lower brand awareness. The reason to this was mainly to boost the resume and gain the experience of working at a established company early in their careers. However all of the 93% also said that brand awareness would have a low or no significance later on in their careers.

All of the 14 respondents state that co-workers are an important factor when choosing an employer. 93% of the respondents also said that having meaningful and variated work task are important factors, 50% of the respondents answered personal development, 50% said that having a manager that sees you for your personality and not only by your resume and another 7% of the respondents answered that the location of the company are all important factors when choosing an employer.

All of the respondents finds an open minded organisation where everyone is treated as equals when it comes to preferences of an organisation culture. All of the respondents also value an organisation where everyone has the right to speak their opinion and be able to work in a relaxed and friendly environment. When asking the question of which working method the respondents prefers, all of the respondents finds it more attractive to work in a team and being able to learn from others. However 36% also state that they sometimes value to work alone as well. 21% of the respondents prefers an activity based workplace and 64% sees

feedback as an important part of their work, both to give and receive. All of the respondents state that their personal values should match with their employer. Being aware of the values of an employer are important for all respondents and if a mismatch should appear regarding values and standpoint, especially when it comes to discrimination and equality all of the respondents state that this could make them second guess their employer. On the opposite all of the respondents also answered that their work motivation would increase if their values were to match with their employer.

“By doing something that you enjoy, you will automatically become better at what you’re doing.”

According to 71% of the respondents, they believe that doing something you enjoy will motivate them in their workplace. Further 79% answered that having co-workers that supports and learn from each other will motivate them. Additionally 57% of the respondents sees team building activities outside the office as motivational factors and 50% of the respondents also stated that being challenged in their workplace will motivate them. When asking the question in which way the salary affect the respondents choice of an employer all of the respondents answered that the salary affects their choice. However, there are significantly more important factors according to the gen Z’s.

All of the respondents answered that they would rather choose a job with meaningful work tasks rather than a higher salary. 86% stated that personal development is more important than a higher salary and another 14% of the respondents answered that the importance of having supportive co-workers exceeds the importance of a high salary. According to the gen Z’s, they all believe that the importance of a higher salary will increase once they are older and more experienced in their field of work. However, the main reason for this is that they are likely to have families to support and contribute.

When asking the question of what are the most important factors when choosing an employer according to the gen Z’s, 71% answered work task, 57% stated personal development, 29% answered co-workers and finally 14% stated that one's personal values match with the company.

5. Analysis

5.1 The analysis model

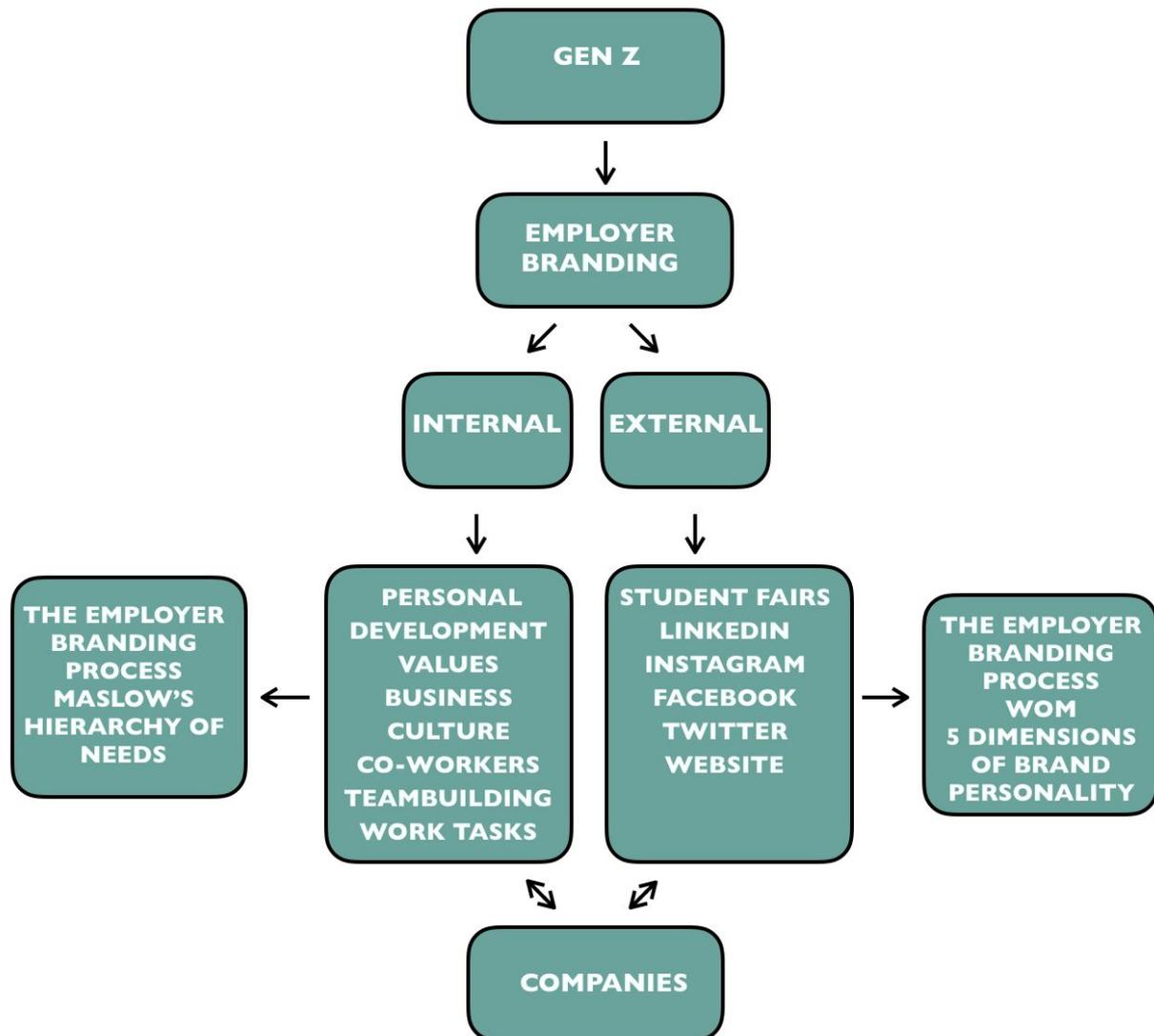


Figure 4.0. Attract and maintain the generation Z model

When analyzing the preferences of the gen Z's and comparing them with how companies strategically are working with employer branding, there are both several similarities and differences that can be identified, in order to become a match. This have been summarized in the model above to conclude the following: *attract and maintain the generation Z.*

Employer branding is divided into two areas, internal and external. Internal focuses on how to maintain and motivate current co-workers along with business culture, well-being and values. External aims to attract potential co-workers by creating awareness about the company as an attractive employer. A simple description would be that external employer branding should answer the question: why should I *work* here? And internal should answer the question: why should I *stay* here?¹⁶⁵

“The question is not why should we work with employer branding? It’s how?”

When analyzing the result of the empirical framework it becomes clear that all companies have challenges in finding the right competence and sees the importance of having a strong employer brand. The importance of having a strong employer brand is impacted by the digitalization and the labour market, making it harder for companies to differentiate themselves.¹⁶⁶ All of the companies have identified different target groups that they feels the desire to communicate with. The companies also state that they see challenges in attracting these target groups and hopes by identifying their preferences regarding communication and what defines an attractive employer, that they will be able to reach them more efficiently. Despite that none of the companies have directly aimed their employer branding towards gen Z, they all have young potentials as a target group. However the young potential group is defined differently among the companies. Alfa Laval sees every individual under the age of 35 as a young potential and company X defines a young potential as an individual with limited working experience (1-3 years). This concludes that all of the companies are aiming their employer branding towards gen Z, despite not mentioning it as gen Z.

When analyzing the gen Z’s, one of the most important factors when choosing an employer was having co-workers that supports each other. The gen Z’s appreciates working together in a team that supports and succeeds together. Togetherness is a key value according to all companies as they believe in building together along with being open minded and friendly. However, the gen Z’s also value team building activities outside the office, regardless of the company’s size. Team building activities was something that was hard to analyze when interviewing the companies. This is primarily because of that these activities are more common on a local basis.

“Giving and taking responsibility are ways to grow and develop as individuals.”

Other important factors according to the gen Z’s was work tasks and personal development. Both factors a very individual and hard to measure since, how an individual interprets a work task is based individually. In order to become a match, it is of great importance for companies to give and receive feedback. Also, the importance of having the reality to meet the expectations of both parties, if any deviations would appear. Being engaged, straightforward,

¹⁶⁵ Edwards, 2010

¹⁶⁶ Albinsson & Geterud, 2012

lead by example and tell it like it is are all examples of the companies values, which indicates that they are working within these areas.

All of the companies have values or DNA that pervades the entire organization. This was another factor that was important according to the gen Z's since, they value an organization where open communication, honesty, diversity and equality are prioritized. These are factors that all of the companies also have indicated that they are working towards, since being different, respectful, curious and having equal career opportunities are all values stated by the companies. Additionally the gen Z's wishes that their personal values should match with their employer, since by having their personal values to match with the company, it enables for the gen Z's to identify themselves with the company and working against something that they believe in. However, if a mismatch should appear regarding values, especially when it comes to discrimination and equality all of the gen Z's state that this could make them second guess their employer.

In order to attract and maintain the right competence companies needs to understand how to communicate and which channels that should be used, which is something that the gen Z's also have preferences in. The majority of the gen Z's state that student fairs and LinkedIn are the primary channels where they want to meet companies. However, on LinkedIn they do not only desire to read about a specific role at a company, they also what to get an image of what it is like to work at the company and having them as an employer. All of the companies stated that they are active on LinkedIn and participates in student fairs. However, the amount of student fairs differentiates among the companies. Regarding LinkedIn all companies are active but have different approaches when it comes to communicating the employer brand, which could be seen as indistinct towards the gen Z's.

Almost 30% of the respondents highlighted the importance for companies to continuously stay active on social media. This demands for companies to have resources on their social media channels and update continuously. The gen Z's also state that they often encounter a company's marketing of a product or service. However, they are unfamiliar with companies marketing themselves as an employer through social media, which is something that they would appreciate.

Acknowledge that none of the gen Z's mentioned the salary as a motivational factor although, they want to recognize their worth on the labour market. However, there are significantly more important factors according to the gen Z's. All of the respondents state that they would rather choose a job with meaningful work tasks rather than a higher salary. A majority of the gen Z's also mentions that personal development is more important than a higher salary, along with having supportive co-workers that succeeded together.

5.2 The Employer Branding Process

As previously mentioned should the Employer Branding Process function as a framework for both internal and external employer branding and are divided into five different steps, in order for companies to get a better understanding in how to create a sustainable employer branding strategy.¹⁶⁷ The first step is internal and external data collection, which could be reconciled with both internal and external employer branding. According to the gen Z's they state the importance of giving and receiving feedback at a company. This will not only enable for companies to acknowledge their co-workers, but also get an indication on the well-being in the workplace. When analyzing all of the companies, this was something that all indicated that they are working with since being straightforward, lead by example and tell it like it is are all examples of the companies values.

Internal data collection could also be made when companies do researches, in order to measure the co-workers well-being and comfort within the company, which was also important according to the gen Z's. The external data collection is made when companies are actively communicating with potential talents in order to identify their preferences of an attractive employer and the gap between the organization and the talents perceptions about the company can be seen as the actual employer brand.¹⁶⁸ According to the gen Z's were LinkedIn and student fairs the primary channels where they want to interact with companies. Despite the fact that the number of student fairs differs among the companies, the result shows that all companies are present during several student fairs, in order to promote their employer brand and meet with potential talents.

Step two of the employer branding process is the Employer Value Proposition, EVP which represents the promise a company gives to current and potential co-workers. The EVP can therefore be associated towards both internal and external employer branding since, the importance of promoting the EVP is equally significant as maintaining it. If the EVP does not match the expectations of the external communication, this could have a negative impact on the employer brand.

Communication strategy is step three and is directly associated towards external branding since, it primarily uses the world of web as an important communication method to reach awareness.¹⁶⁹ When analyzing the interviews with the gen Z's, they highlighted the importance for companies to stay active on social media and update continuously. All companies stated that they are active on social media, although they see challenges in being

¹⁶⁷ Dyhre & Parment, 2013

¹⁶⁸ Barrow & Mosley, 2005.

¹⁶⁹ Dyhre & Parment, 2013

present in the same places as their targeted audience and communicating with them as efficiently as possible.

“Find the interesting stories and tell them where the people are.”

Step four is communication material and aims at the message a company communicate towards a target group. This is also associated towards external employer branding and reflects the companies challenges of how to communicate with gen Z’s and young potentials. Despite that all companies are active on social media, it is essential that their message is communicated in the right way. According to the Employer Branding Process a message needs to be expressed with the right words, images, show consistency with the company’s brand identity and differentiates the company from its competitors, in order to have the right effect.¹⁷⁰ According to the gen Z’s, they prefer less text and more pictures and videos, in order to get the image of that it is like to work there.

The final step of the process is implementation, which aims to implement previous steps, in order to build a sustainable employer brand. This step aims towards both internal and external employer branding since, it focus on both communication and motivation and engagement among current employees of a company.¹⁷¹

“We are building together.”

5.3 Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs

According to Maslow represents the social need striving for meaningful relationships, which could be achieved from either family, friends, people in your surrounding or by feeling accepted by a certain group.¹⁷² A majority of the gen Z’s highlighted the importance of having supportive co-workers that works and succeeds together, along with having a friendly business culture. According to Maslow the next step of the hierarchy is self-esteem which is achieved when feeling recognition from others along with feeling useful. This was another factor that a majority of the gen Z’s state that they value in an organization culture.

Feeling useful and appreciated for their work primarily through feedback by co-workers was identified by the gen Z’s as a motivational factor in their workplace. The final step of Maslow’s hierarchy of needs are self-actualization, which is achieved when an individual has reached its full potential¹⁷³. According to a majority of the gen Z’s, they all desire the opportunity to personal development in their workplace. Since a majority of the gen Z’s highlighted the importance of having supportive co-workers, receive feedback for their work

¹⁷⁰ Dyhre & Parment, 2013

¹⁷¹ Ibid

¹⁷² Hagerty, 1999

¹⁷³ Gambrel & Cianci, 2003

and develop personally, these are factors that companies should include in their employer branding strategy, in order to motivate and maintain the gen Z's.

5.4 Word of Mouth

A majority of the gen Z's state that they find other people's opinions regarding a company as more trustworthy than receiving information from the company itself. The power of WOM could therefore have a great impact on a company's employer brand and should be incorporated when designing a communication strategy for the employer brand. Since, WOM is seen as a way of communicating it is associated to external employer branding. However, it is also of great significance for companies to communicate their employer brand internally, as their co-workers are automatically brand ambassadors, both inside and outside the workplace.¹⁷⁴

5.5 The Five Dimensions of Brand Personality

“The set of human characteristics associated with a brand.”¹⁷⁵

By attaching a personality to a brand it will automatically create association among consumers, enabling for companies to differentiate themselves from its competitors. By attaching a personality to a brand will also reflect the employer brand since employees are likely to desire working at a company that reflects their own values and interest, along with something that they will have a distinct association towards. By incorporating the framework of five in the employer branding strategy will not only create a stronger brand, but will also create a genuine image about the company as an employer, along with gaining competitive advantages regarding finding the right talents on the labour market.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁴ Baines, Fill & Page, 2011

¹⁷⁵ Aaker, 1997. S.24

¹⁷⁶ Baines, Fill & Page, 2011

6. Conclusion

With the aim of getting a better understanding about the generation Z and their values in order for companies to secure their future competence, this thesis researches how companies are strategically working with employer branding, in order to attract and maintain the gen Z's? The results of the empirical framework have led to the creation of an analysis model explaining, which factors are important for companies to include in their employer branding strategy when attracting and maintaining the generation Z. The theories that have been used in this thesis have been directly associated towards the companies work with employer branding along with the preferences of the gen Z's, in order for companies to get a better understanding about the different preferences.

When concluding the empirical framework it became clear that none of the research companies have gen Z's as a specific target group. However, all of the companies are aiming their employer branding against students and young professionals which are likely to be a gen Z. Additionally, all companies state that they are all in the seek of IT and digital related competence and that they see several challenges regarding finding the right talents, along with the importance of having a strong employer brand and communicating it in the right way.

6.1 Recommendations for companies

When interviewing the gen Z's they state that LinkedIn, Instagram, student fairs and the company's website are the primary channels where they wish to interact with companies. Student fairs are primarily important to the gen Z's since, they see student fairs as the opportunity to talk with someone who works at the company, in order to get an image of what it is like to work there. According to the gen Z's, the key preferences when it comes for companies to being perceived as an attractive employer are:

- ✓ Work tasks
- ✓ Personal development
- ✓ Having supportive co-workers

It is therefore highly significant for companies to prioritize these factors when communicating with the gen Z's and maintain a genuine and welcoming organization culture. The gen Z's also state, that teambuilding for them creates a bond between the co-workers, which will lead to an improved cooperation and well-being within the company, regardless of a company's size. When analyzing all of the companies, they are indicating that these factors

are something that they already are working with, since all factors can be identified within the companies values and DNA. However, they all see challenges in communicating this towards the gen Z's and young professionals since most important factors according to the gen Z's are internal factors, which could be hard to see before choosing an employer.

In order to motivate co-workers, companies need to meet the demands of their employees, in order to become a match. According to Maslow, people have a hierarchy of needs that they seek to accomplish both in their career and personally. Although that this might be intended, this could have a direct affect on the co-workers well-being in the workplace, especially since a majority of the gen Z's state co-workers, meaningful work tasks, give and receive feedback, organizational culture and personal development as motivational factors in order to achieve well-being in their workplace. By having co-workers that are motivated and engaged in their work will also strengthen the employer brand through word of mouth, since these co-workers are likely to talk about the company with people in their surrounding and on social media.

In order for companies, to collect and use the internal and external data in a efficient way, it is important to acknowledge that there might be clear gaps on how an organization wants to be perceived and is actually perceived on the labour market. When identifying an eventual gap, companies needs to choose whether accepting the actual perception on the labour market or feels the need to change the actual perception, in order to become a match with the ideal perception. This will also serve as a framework when it come for companies to motivate and engage its co-workers.

Regarding the EVP which represents the promise a company gives to current and potential co-workers, is equally as significant both internally as externally. If the EVP does not match with the expectations, this could have a negative effect on the employer brand. Therefore it is highly significant that companies identify their employer value proposition internally before identifying important communication channels. The EVP should be unique, genuine and personal along with answering the question: "*Why should I work here?*" In order to find and attract talents on the labour market the EVP must be communicated in the right way, using the channels that their target group primarily use.

When deciding on a communication strategy for the employer brand, companies could benefit and gain competitive advantages by attaching a personality to their brand, which will also reflect the employer brand since potential co-workers are likely to desire working at a company that reflects their own values and interest. By incorporating the framework of five will help companies build a stronger brand, create a genuine image about the company as an employer, along with gaining competitive advantages regarding finding the right talents on the labour market.

“When employees are brains rather than arms, the importance of having the right employees on board is crucial for the success of a company.”¹⁷⁷

6.2 Suggestions of further research

There is without a doubt a structural transformation on the labour market. The technological development has made several professions automated, mechanized and standardized. A new labour market is being developed where new terms will apply and the importance for companies to attract talents will increase. In the future I believe that the significance of employer branding will continue to strive and resources will be made in order to create a positive image about a company as an employer. This will require for companies to do further studies in order to identify their target groups and being able to attract them.

A suggestion for further studies would be to analyze gen Z's that are studying in different cities throughout Sweden and see if their preferences are different from each other, depending on the size of the city that they are studying in. Another study that would be interesting to conduct is to analyze the unconscious personality traits that the gen Z's are perceived to have according to researchers Bencsik and Machova. For instance they conclude the gen Z's as living in the present, self-confident, lack of consequential thinking, well-adapted, own limits not recognised and on a pursuit of happiness and pleasure. When interviewing about their perceptions of what defines an attractive employer these characteristics was hard to identify. However, I believe that they are important in order, to motivate and engage a gen Z.

One of the respondents from the companies told me:

“you should not stay loyal to a company, but to people.”

¹⁷⁷ Albinsson & Geterud, 2012. S. 25

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8. Appendices

8.1 Appendix 1 - Gen Z interview questions

- 1. What does a company attractive according to you?**
- 2. How do you gather information about a company?**
- 3. What significance does brand awareness have when choosing employer?**
- 4. Which factors are important for you when choosing your future employer?**
- 5. Which qualities do you value in a organisation culture, and how is this important for you?**
- 6. Which type of working method do you prefer?**
- 7. In which way is it important that your personal values match with the companies?**
- 8. What motivates you in your workplace?**
- 9. In which way does the salary affect your choice of employer?**
- 10. Which factor is most important when choosing an employer?**

8.2 Appendix 2 - Company interview questions

Background questions (will not be recorded)

Who are you?

What's your role in the company?

How long have you been working at your company?

Describe yourself with 3 words

Questions (recorded)

1. When did your company start working with employer branding?

Reason as to why your company started working with employer branding?

Are there any specific strategies? Short/Long term?

2. What's your image of your employer branding strategy today?

Strengths and weaknesses?

Are there any competitive advantages you have gained by working with employer branding and how do you show them off?

3. How do you want to be perceived as an employer?

Specific values?

How is this communicated externally?

Which channels are used? Student fairs, social media etc.

4. Are you aiming your employer branding differently to different segments today?

Why/why not?

Are you aiming your employer branding towards gen Z today?

If so, how are you specifically aiming your employer branding towards the gen Z's and what are the biggest differences/challenges, example compared to other generations and age groups? If not, why?

5. Are you aiming your employer branding strategy related to competence/services?

Why/why not have you decided/not to aim it like this?

How are you specifically aiming your employer branding strategy to attract IT and digital related competence?

6. How do you make sure that the employer branding strategy is communicated to the recruitment team?

7. How do you see your employer branding strategy developing in the next 5-10 years?

Sincerely,

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