Perception of Company’s Brand Image from Perspective of Young Talents

Case: Ericsson AB

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Abstract

Employer branding plays the key role for organization's position on the market as it allows to attract and retain the right talent. Strengthening the brand image provides the company with a powerful instrument to communicate its message and vision to the potential candidates. The purpose of this research study was to examine the perception of the case company's current brand image from the perspective of students and recent post-graduates and to determine if Ericsson in Sweden is considered to be an attractive workplace for young professionals. Ericsson Packet Core in Sweden is now more of a software company rather than telecom company, as a result, the brand image needs to be updated. The primary objective of this study is to identify the weaknesses and strengths in the branding strategy of Ericsson's employer image taking in consideration the differences in perceptions between internal and external members of the organization.

The Literature Review has built a strong theoretical framework that covered the key concepts to create a foundation for the present research. Triangulation method was used for data collection and analysis, which included semi-structured interviews with 7 company representatives for the qualitative section and questionnaires based on a Likert scale for the quantitative section featuring 105 respondents.

According to the results, the clear communication of the changing brand image plays crucial role in attracting young talents with matching skills and profiles. Taking in consideration the case of the company in focus, the lack of efficient connection between company's values and prospective candidates can be seen as the main weakness. Based on the results, the recommendations concerning the formulation of transparent and understandable message and proposition to the potential applicants are given.

Keywords/tags (subjects)
Employer branding image, employee value proposition (EVP), employer of choice (EOC), knowledge sharing, employee retention, talent attraction, employer attractiveness

Miscellaneous (Confidential information)

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1 Introduction

Encompassing the mission, values, culture, and personality of the organization, employer branding helps attract people with the right talents while retaining current staff for business success (Hadi & Ahmed, 2016). The employer brand represents an organization's qualities as an employer to current and potential employees similar to how a product brand will market itself to customers. Just like product branding, employer branding presents the image of the company and then the benefits associated with the product, or in this case, the benefits of working for Ericsson Sweden.

As positions become more specialized, how to manage and lead a diverse group of people will also become more specialized. Business changes, markets shift, rise, and fall, employees leave, retire, or are terminated, and technology makes appealing advancements and makes certain processes obsolete. Ericsson Sweden will need to re-establish a reputation that will last through the ever-changing world. A lasting company is one with a reputation of doing the right thing and treating its clients and employees in the right way. It is still vital that leaders anticipate changes in the industry, anticipate shifts in customers' needs and future company needs to position the organization as one to stay in business and fulfil those needs.

Burke posited that organizational change has content which differs from the process of change. The content of change is rooted in the culture of the organization, including the mission, purpose, strategy, and values. The process is how change occurs, such as planning, launching, and implementation (Burke, 2011). Organizational change requires leadership to create a vision of the 'after' and transferring that vision onto subordinates. How an organization changes takes on several forms and can occur incrementally and radically.

Such revolutionary changes are evident with changes to an organization's mission, new and expanded goals, which alters the functions of leadership, strategy, structure, culture, and operating systems. The fundamental mission of the organization remains the same, while change occurs in the form of solving problems and making improvements. The deep structure of an organization is significantly altered with revolutionary change. Revolutionary change is usually met with opposition as there is a strong human need for stability (Schein, 2010). Yet, there are times when a complete overhaul is necessary with completely different products, services, or both (Burke, 2010).

More incrementally, the majority of organizational change occurs from evolutionary change. Evolutionary change is experienced through improvements or incremental steps to address problems, a concept known as continual improvement or "Kaizen" in Japan. Examples of evolutionary changes include new product packaging, compensation, new products or services, and leadership and management changes. The entire culture of the organization is not altered, only certain aspects adjusted to improve how the business functions.

A company can establish a brand through personality and culture, i.e., the work environment, the way employees work together, policies, procedures, events, event benefits and treatment of employees by management (Hadi & Ahmed, 2016). The corporate culture of an organization is the business and market environment in which it operates. The culture is created by the several primary factors, which are led by the firm's influential leaders, and include and the artefacts, beliefs and values from the perspective of both leaders and workers, and basic underlying assumptions of the organization (Schein, 2010).

Xie, Bagozzi, and Meland (2015), in a Norwegian study, found that job applicants were more apt to apply for employment with companies who they could self-identify with. The companies whose employer brand incorporated social identity and attitude were found to be more attractive for job applicants (Xie, Bagozzi, & Meland, 2015). A Belgium study found that a company's external employer image had the power to reduce corporate absenteeism (De Stobbeleir et al., 2016). A company's external employer image centres around how outsiders feel about employment with the company. The study found that the more positive employment with a company is perceived by non-workers, the less likely employees will skip work. This could stem from the fact that employees would have a hard time explaining why they do not want to go to a place that others perceive as a great place to work.

Employer branding also serves as a way for organizations to engender trust as an employer, a factor that will be important for Ericsson to establish after terminating 3,000 positions. A study of students in the German consultancy market found that the extent to which the employer brand is trusted was influenced by the sincerity the organizations depicted (Rampl & Kenning, 2012). The more attractive an employer's brand the more the students found the brand trustworthy. As this study uncovered, the level of branding required to be felt and believed by the students required genuine sincerity integrated into the company's culture about its workforce. As Ericsson shifts operations, its culture will have to also shift, and include its attractiveness as an employer into the culture. Ericsson will need to emphasize its employer brand and possibly launch a change in culture as it changes is operations.

This study will examine Ericsson Packet Core in Sweden attractiveness as an employer as it has started a transition process to become more of a software company rather than a telecom company, which will require young innovative minds to take the company into the next century of communications. The culture of the company will need to be one that not only appeals to potential employees but also the one that strengthens talent retention and supports current employees' careers and wellbeing. By examining the company's employer branding image from the perspective of potential applicants and current employees, the data will also inform other organizations on the importance of an employer brand that is ingrained in the culture of organizations to assure the genuineness of the efforts and attract and retain talented employees.

1.1 Motivation for Research

The motivation for the following research paper can be illustrated from two perspectives: case company's current demand for the data in the marketing field and author's own interest in the subject and the organization itself. The choice of the topic from Ericsson's perspective was based on the current process of changing the scope of its operations on the market, and, therefore, the necessity of marketing strategy adjustments. As the company, which is in the continuous process of searching for new talents to join the teams, it is highly important for the case company to find the correct potential applicants with matching skills and profiles. However, several issues were outlines by the management of the company such as differences in perception of company's operations by the inside professionals and the members outside the organization.

Based on the latest HR experiences in the company, Ericsson was struggling with finding enough young talents, which might be closely connected to the situation when recent graduates are not fully aware of the company as potential employer. As the employer branding activities needed to be adjusted accordingly, the research was required to examine how Ericsson brand image is seen by the potential applicants outside the company.

There was a demand for data to be collected from both current and potential employees in order to draw overall trends and identify weaknesses in the current branding strategy. This will allow to increase brand awareness and raise company’s position in the employer rankings in the future.

From the author’s perspective, the topics of marketing and branding are closely connected to the main professional interests, and fully support the future career development. Nowadays, the IT industry has one of the most significant market shares and includes the biggest global corporations, which strategies feature the latest framework and skills also in the business and marketing area. In the current rapidly changing environment, it is crucial to be able to follow the latest trends and gain knowledge from the leaders of the industry. The research process and the work on the chosen topic will give the author the unique opportunity to contribute to the business development of one of the largest global organizations in Sweden, take part in the daily operations and strengthen the agile and decision-making skills. Working along with the professionals in the field will provide large networking opportunities, as well as allow to improve the marketing and analysis skills in real-life working environment, on practise and by solving the actual and important business case.

1.2 Research Objectives and Research Questions

Research Problem

As the case company is currently experiencing the process of transition, its brand image needs to be updated following the latest changes in the company's strategy and position on the market. However, it is not clear for the company management and branding teams if students and recent graduates perceive Ericsson as an employer according to its current vision and strategic goals. Therefore, the representatives of the case company are not certain how the branding and educational activities should be adjusted to support and strengthen the company's current brand image and proposition.

Research Objective

The primary purpose of this research paper was to examine if the case company is considered an attractive workplace for the young professionals and identify the differences between the perception of Ericsson's current brand image among students and professionals already working in the company. The collected data would include the assessment of the case company as an employer from the perspective of students, the opinions on the current brand image activities by the management representatives and proposals on how to effectively adapt the marketing strategy in order to attract potential young talents and promote a positive image of the company as an employer. This will, therefore, allow Ericsson to modify the branding strategy according current situation and work precisely on improving the main weaknesses mentioned by the participants.

Research Questions

The following general research question aims to address the main focus of this academic paper:

1. What is the current perception of Ericsson as an employer from the perspective of students and recent graduates in Sweden, and how it differs from the case company's internal vision?

Moreover, two sub-questions were developed in order to specify and support the general research question:

2. What are the possible reasons behind Ericsson losing its position and popularity in employer ratings in Sweden?
3. What adjustments to the branding and marketing strategies can be done in order to raise employer brand awareness among potential applicants and strengthen its position as an attractive workplace among young talents on the market?

1.3 Structure of Thesis

The academic research paper consists of several chapters that create the primary structure and also includes the subchapters that specify the main concepts and theories. The structure of the thesis is described below, as well as illustrated on Figure 1:

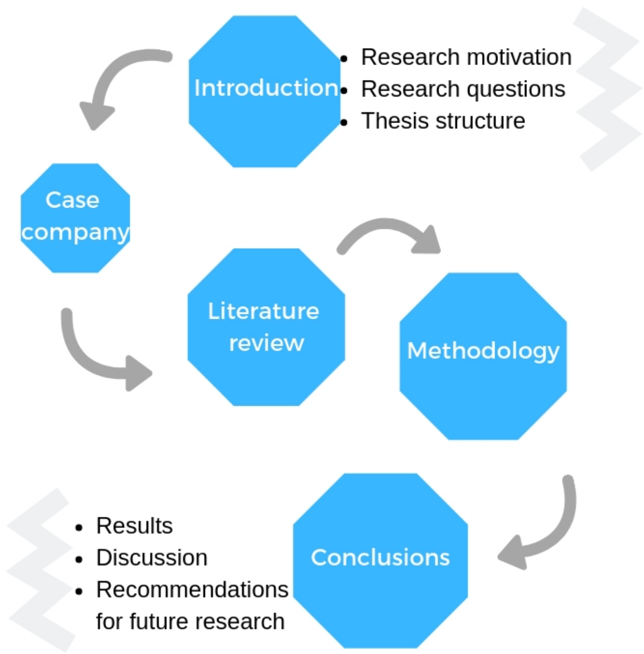

Figure 1. Structure of the present research paper

The present research paper begins with the Introduction chapter, which provides the reader with the objectives and purposes of this research study, as well as describes its main topic and scope in the marketing area. Moreover, Introduction chapter explains the motivation behind the research from both authors, and the case company's perspective. This chapter is followed by case company's brief history and position on the market, which supports better understanding of the research problem in this particular business environment. The Literature Review, which is the next chapter, creates a strong theoretical basis for the research study, reviewing previous knowledge gathered in the field. This chapter builds up a framework of the main theoretical concepts, that are the most applicable for the topic of the study as well as to the case of Ericsson based on its situation analysis. In this section, the theoretical concept is examined and presented more in the detail to reflect the latest findings regarding the employer branding and attractiveness.

The Research Methodology chapter explains and justifies the authors' decision regarding the choice of research design, the research methods and the research approach. The chapter covers the essential steps for conducting the research as well as follows the research process conducted for this study and the techniques utilized by the researcher. As the triangulation method is used in the present research paper, the methodology chapter takes a look on the process from two perspectives: qualitative and quantitative in order to draw the complete picture of the data collection and analysis in detail. It is followed by a subchapter of high importance, that covers the ethical considerations of the research, as well as possible limitations.

The final chapter, that sums up the thesis work is the Conclusions part, which includes the research results, first divided into two sections: qualitative and quantitative. The comparison of the analysed data is conducted and the overview of conclusions is featured in the Discussion subchapter. This chapter deals with the challenges from the author's perspective faced during the research process, as well as outlines the recommendations for the future research. The reliability and validity is discussed to examine the quality of the collected results.

2 Case Company Background

The following chapter will provide the overview of case company's history and explain its current position on the market. What is more, the scope of operations will be explained as well as the concept of transition process that has been initiated during the last years and acted as a cause for the need for the employer brand image update.

2.1 Ericsson's Significance on The Market

By the end of 2018, it is estimated that more than 36 percent of the world's population will be using a smartphone (Statista, 2016). In 2016, 2.1 billion people were using smartphones. Smartphones not only connect people to their friends and family, but through the Internet people are able to shop, search the Internet, secure rides, watch movies, and connect with the entire world. The technology that allows these handheld devices to lay the entire world before its users are feats of geniuses. One such genius in the technology world is Ericsson Sweden. Ericsson Sweden is one of the leaders in the telecommunications sector. Each time a smartphone user scrolls through their Instagram or Twitter feed, they are using technology patented by Ericsson Sweden (Ericsson, 2018).

2.2 Brief History of Case Company

Since its inception in 1876, Ericsson has watched and been instrumental in helping people to communicate over distances. Its founder Lars Magnus Ericsson started a telegraph repair shop in Stockholm, Sweden (British Telephones, 2010). Within two years Ericsson was making telephone equipment. Hired to adjust telephones by Bell Telephone Company, he assessed them and improved their designs to produce a higher quality mechanism. By 1879 he was making his own designs. As demand increased, people began to look for better and easier ways to talk with others. Technician Anton Aven combined the earpiece and the mouthpiece into a single handset that Ericsson incorporated into his products in 1884 (Rombo, 2010).

While Ericsson did not invent the single handset on his own, he was able to leverage the brilliance of Aven to advance the business and the world's ability to communicate. Ericsson understood that there are others with the vision and skill to change the world, and he combined that to establish a company that is still making strides in the way people communicate in the world. Being able to attract the smartest and most innovative workforce can mean the difference between a flash in the pan business or, one that becomes and remains a trusted creator of products for more than 140 years.

2.3 Shifting Focus of Operations

The success of any company hinges on its ability to attract and retain the best talent (Graen & Grace, 2015). A company's internal members are instrumental in its ability to maintain its significant rating, attract new customers, and most importantly, retain existing customers. One of the most vital ways for a business to succeed in business is to value people, customers, and employees alike. Even a company with a proven track record of employing great staff needs to continue and sometimes reimagine its brand image to appeal to new generations of workers (Hagemann, Vetter, & Maketa, 2017). Especially when that company is transitioning from its original industry to a new one. Branding and image are not just concepts for companies to gain business, they are vital components necessary in attracting and retaining a reliable workforce (Hadi & Ahmed, 2016).

Ericsson Sweden is in the throes of a major shift in its operations. In October 2016, the company announced that it was transitioning from telecommunications to software development (Ericsson, 2016). This shift in operations stems from a need to adjust in order to meet changes in technology, new customer groups, and garner an increased share of software development. Since its founding, the company has made some of the world's most significant communication advancements hold more than 42,000 patents (Ericsson, 2016). Those inventions, innovations, and patents were not the work of one person, but from many brilliant people over the years. In order for Ericsson to remain a leader in the technology field, and now that the company is shifting operations, it is vital that it continues to attract and retain the best and brightest workforce who will lead the company.

As Ericsson Packet Core in Sweden starts the process of transitioning to a new scope of its operations, it will still need to attract and retain the most creative employees to support this organizational change. Included with the company's announcement are plans to reduce its workforce by 3,000 positions in research and development and sales and administration (Ericsson, 2016). Some of these reductions will include voluntary reductions. However, admittedly, this is only for the short-term as the company reorganizes its operations. Reduction in existing research and development and sales will allow for the company to attract an approximate 1,000 engineers by 2019 (Ericsson, 2016). The company will not only have to reassure remaining staff on the security of those positions, but also brand itself as a great place to work for the young graduate workforce it is planning to attract and cultivate to advance this new direction. The company will need to address the effectiveness of its employer brand communication the members outside the organizations.

3 Literature Review

The purpose of the present chapter is to present information regarding current literature that relates to the topic under investigation. Therefore, information is being presented regarding knowledge sharing, employer brand image, employer branding, employee value proposition, employee expectations, experience, and advocacy, and employer attractiveness and employer of choice. The mentioned concepts and the research papers create a strong scientific base for the actual data collection and helps to prepare the researcher for trend analysis using the previous knowledge.

3.1 Knowledge Sharing

Word-of-mouth has been as one of the leading channel for transmitting the data and information between the individuals. The latest rapid growth of digitalization and online communities has played important role in the communication between customers, as knowledge sharing and experience sharing have entered the completely new level. The retail business can be seen as a perfect example demonstrating the highly powerful concept of knowledge sharing and the way how the consumption decision is affected (Reza Jalilvand & Samiei, 2012). This specific type of business reflects the general assumptions for the broader retail industry by illustrating how easily open information can impact the purchasers, as well as the potential customers. The estimation scales are surveyed for resolute quality, centred authenticity, and discriminant authenticity using data assembled in a review of Iran Khodro's arranged customers in Iran. An assistant condition showing framework is associated with the examination of the effects of electronic word of mouth on check picture and purchase desire (Reza Jalilvand & Samiei, 2012). The results found that electronic word of mouth is a champion among the top factors affecting the company's brand image and purchase motivation for brands in the client markets. The strong virtual communities became extremely popular throughout the last decades, which also feature increasingly high level of motivation for knowledge-sharing among their members. The existing estimation of brand image is extended to some other setting, specifically electronic word of mouth, which plays a crucial role in the era of globalization and Big Data. (Reza Jalilvand & Samiei, 2012).

One of the most powerful correspondence channels of this century is The Internet, that empowers individuals to share information, learning and knowledge among each other. In any case, it is not apparent why individuals share data with pariahs for no undeniable favourable position, nor is it apparent as to the essential factors influencing such lead. The main paradox of the current situation is seen as there are no obvious reasons for people to participate in the global virtual community, which leads to the need to address the issue to find out the adherent actions to facilitate and motivate knowledge sharing virtually. To attempt to appreciate these virtual environment challenges, the researchers solidified the theories of social capital and individual motivation to explore the components influencing picking up sharing behaviour in a virtual system, applying a part affiliation thought to separate the coordinating effects of individual motivation on data sharing behaviour (Chang & Chuang, 2011). By separating the results of a diagram using an overview, the researchers found that beneficence, unmistakable verification, correspondence, and shared vernacular had a basic and useful result on getting the hang of sharing. Reputation, social affiliation, and trust effects influenced the quality, anyway not the sum, of shared learning. Part affiliation moderating influence the relationship of unselfishness and the measure of shared data (Chang & Chuang, 2011). The conceptual framework can be illustrated as a diagram (see Figure 2) that points up to the main dimensions affecting the sharing behaviour discussed above.

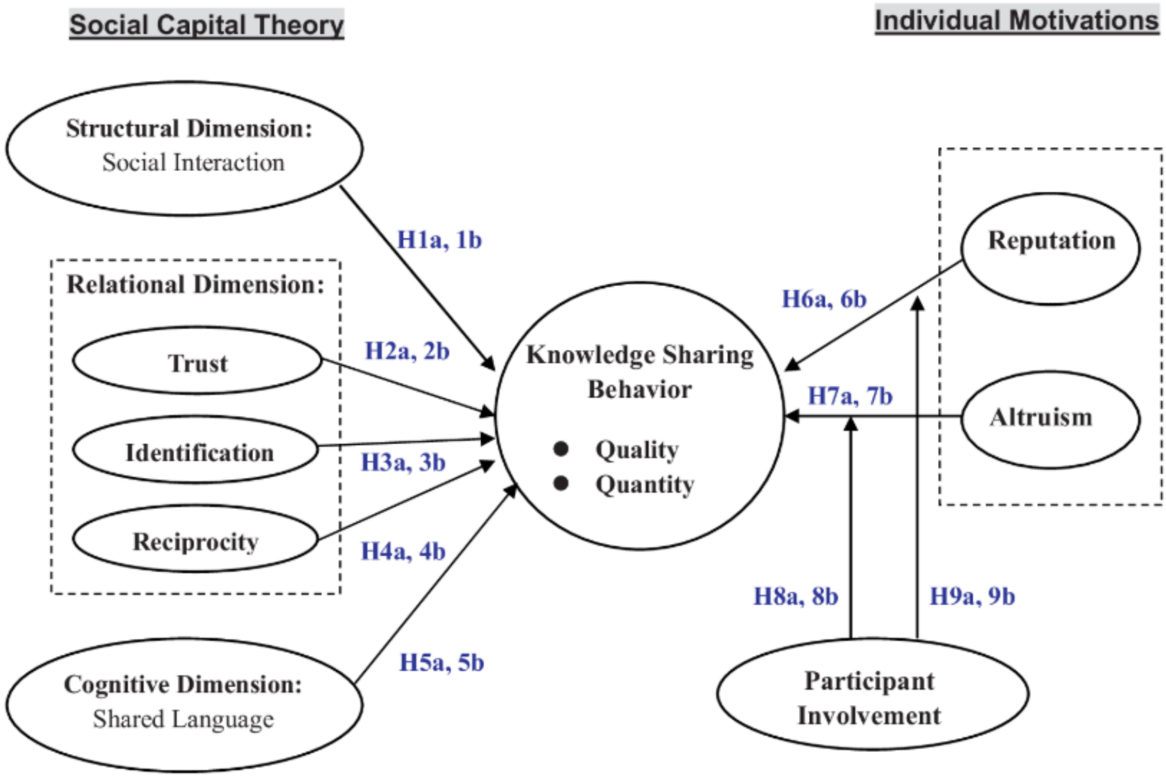

Figure 2. Conceptual framework for factors impacting knowledge sharing (Chang & Chuang, 2011).

To support the knowledge-sharing concept, it is possible to relate co-creation elements to the wonder of checking, growing the building square structure, using the advancing thoughts of brand system and brand co-creation. Brand co-creation is supported by the total organizational involvement, as well as the outside marketing functions that engage the stakeholders int efficient dialogues. The data from a longitudinal relevant examination of the LEGO Group is used that provides a comprehensive picture on the brand co-creation in real-life working environment and features the relationships between business partners and case company's stakeholders, reframing the co-creation. The enhanced model is proposed that features the suggestions to the main issue that arises when using the knowledge sharing: the extent of company's information disclosure and the risks connected to the data sharing. This model concludes the risks and assumptions from the perspective of four dimensions (see Figure 3) in light of association/accomplice duty and legitimate self-introduction, which the researchers endorse as central stresses to the making theory of brand co-creation. In the era of globalization, brands might act as the empowering tools to assist the society to get back the control over the global international organizations (Hatch & Schultz, 2010).

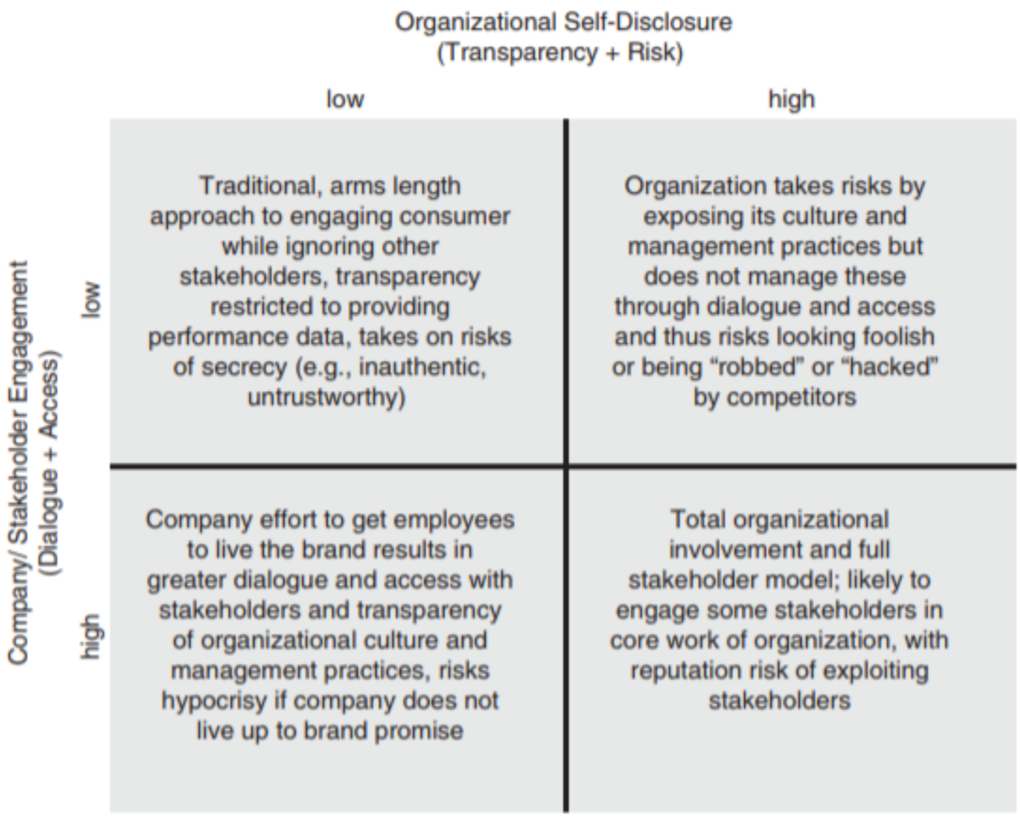

Figure 3. An integrated framework for co-creation (Hatch & Schultz, 2010).

The effect of inside brand organisation can sharpen on tourism and neighbourliness delegates' ability to demonstrate stamp solid practices. A model (see Figure 4), which joins check data spread, part clearness, stamp obligation and brand solid lead is proposed, as the different levels of impact on agent's responses are researched (King, 2010). A quantitative research approach was gotten, achieving the progression of a self-administered online examination instrument. Using a national database of organization labourers, respondents were welcome to appreciate the online audit, realizing the fulfilment of 137 examinations. While all ways were significant in the general model, contrasts were found when examining at cutting edge and organization models. The results suggest that the tourism and settlement agent advertise is not homogeneous. Inside brand organisation decidedly influences all specialists and the role clarity was found to be one of the key dimensions affecting the brand knowledge dimension. The top management is advised to endeavour to make brand-committed front-line specialists, while the organization agents should be asked to apply their brand image knowledge and skills, thusly "demonstrating others how it is done" and promote the transformational leadership (King, 2010).

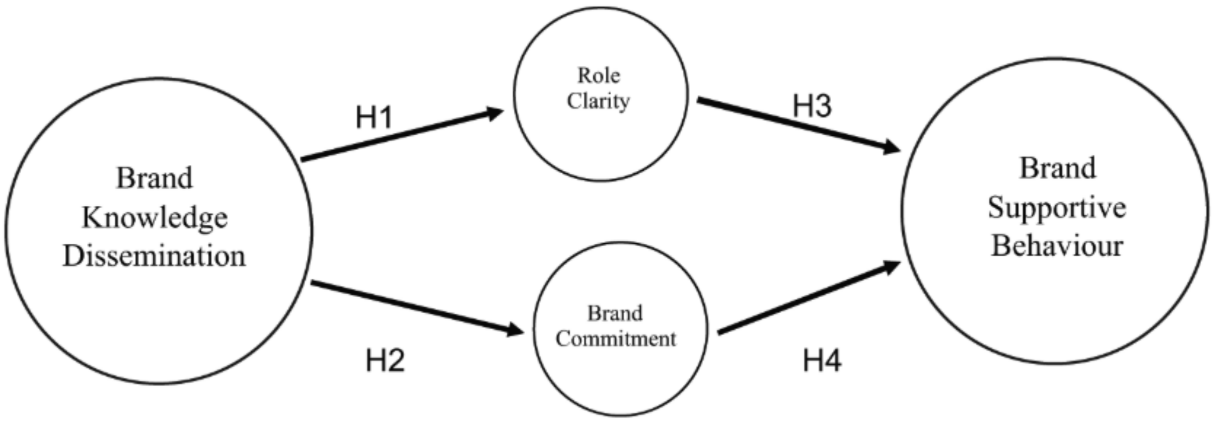

Figure 4. The effect of brand knowledge dissemination (King, 2010).

3.2 Employer Brand Image

The race for a business to be seen diversely has just increased as of late for the most part because of the accessibility of various chances and shortage of good quality ability in the developing markets. Business marketing is quick rising a potential instrument to convey the potential workers as well as to the current representatives that the offer of the present boss supersedes their rivals. Taken an interest by 240 administrators from different organisations the investigation demonstrates the significance of overseeing business marketing picture for existing representatives through featuring the contrast between the current and favoured levels of manager qualities. It additionally features the connection between manager marketing characteristics and occupation related states of mind indicating how these qualities affect them (Priyadarshi, 2011).

Jiang and Lu (2011) look to clear up the procedure that leads representatives and planned candidates to be pulled in to stay with the association or apply for work offer in privately owned businesses in Zhejiang, China. The study applies ideas from advertising to individual's administration, especially the idea of brand value. It proposes, based on a writing audit and starter talk with information in three privately owned businesses in Hangzhou, Zhejiang, that imminent candidates and workers assess work offers or authoritative positions construct both in light of hierarchical engaging quality and on employee-based value observations. These findings at that point display a model of the connection amongst engaging quality and employee-based value observations for future research in China, proposing the specific significance of the measurements "monetary esteem", "improvement esteem" and "social esteem" for Chinese representatives (Jiang & Iles, 2011). The connections amongst engaging quality and employee-based value observations for both Chinese workers, work searchers and candidates are drawn. The private economy is huge to China, representing 65 for every penny of total national output and 56 for every penny of aggregate assessment income. For Zhejiang, a private economy-dominated region, ability enrolment and turnover are issues that prevent future improvement. Engaging quality and employee-based value observations may assume a key part in aims to acknowledge an occupation offer, and as a go between and a key variable in the underlying enrolment (Jiang & Iles, 2011). The study draws on fundamental considerations in China to propose a structure for future research to illuminate the part of organizational attractiveness and employee-based value observations in Chinese occupation decision expectations and practices. Enrolment messages and inside marketing interchanges should center round employee-based value observations in order to impact organizational attractiveness observations and employment goals in China. Social, monetary and advancement esteem are recommended as especially vital measurements of employee-based value observations in China. The conceptual model (see Figure 5) illustrated the factors that play the role of mediators for strengthening the brand equity and raising the brand attractiveness (Jiang & Iles, 2011).

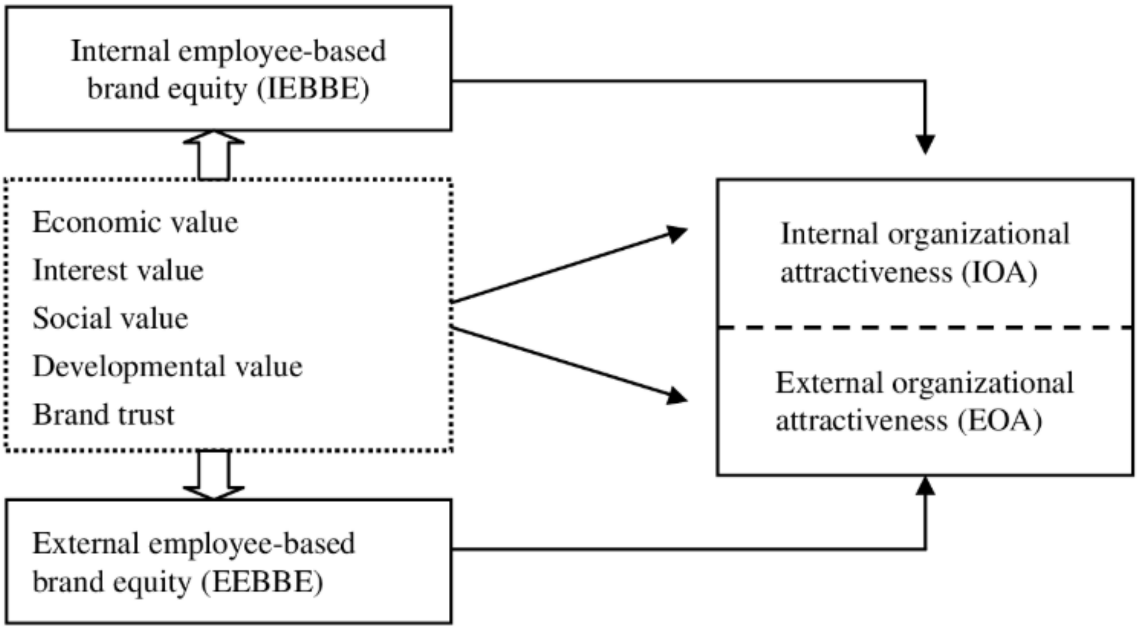

Figure 5. Factors affecting IEBBE and IOA in China (Jiang & Iles, 2011).

The employer brand image is directly connected to the recruitment process, which are reflected in the study that addresses the challenges in attracting and retaining the right talent to the healthcare organizations in Finland. (Heilmann, 2010). The research suggests five key factors and actions that empower employers to strengthen their attractiveness among the potential candidates with the correct attitude, profiles and matching sets of skills. The favourable working conditions as well as the work-life balance should be promoted through the recruitment marketing, as well as the working conditions themselves should be updated and improved according to the issues in focus. One of the key components of the successful retention and recruitment of new talents features the use of the Internet and digital channels to promote the cooperation between diverse institutions in the same field on market, as well as to raising the brand's' visibility through various recruitment events and the modernizing the recruitment process (Heilmann, 2010).

There is logical accord that workers' mentalities fundamentally affect clients' encounters so it is important to identify how to make positive representative states of mind that are important for the formation of the administration marketing (Schlager, Bodderas, Maas, & Luc Cachelin, 2011). Experimental information was gathered from an example (n=2,189) of an overall working insurance agency. Information examination was performed utilizing auxiliary condition displaying. In the first place, the discoveries support the possibility of a connection between the apparent manager brand and administration marketing. Second, the impact of specific drivers for worker states of mind is resolved. Research depends on information from just a single organization (Schlager et al., 2011). Besides, client results are not examined straightforwardly. In this way, look into should be taken further by researching the production of an administration marketing, all the while investigating workers' states of mind and clients' encounters. Impacting client encounters is an unpredictable procedure that includes collaborations among a few partner gatherings. With a specific end goal to raise proficiency, it is recommended that organizations center around making a solid business marketing as this establishes an effective method for benefit marketing (Schlager et al., 2011).

3.3 Employer Branding

In many created economies, changing socio economics and financial conditions have offered ascend to progressively focused work markets, where rivalry for good representatives is solid. Thus, vital interests in drawing in reasonably qualified and gifted workers are suggested. One such system is boss marketing. Manager marketing with regards to enlistment is the bundle of mental, monetary, and useful advantages that potential workers connect with work with a specific organization. Information of these observations can assist associations with creating an alluring and focused business marketing. Using data financial matters and flagging hypothesis, we look at the nature and results of boss marketing. Profundity interviews uncover that activity searchers assess: the appeal of managers in view of any past direct work encounters with the business or in the part; the lucidity, believability, and consistency of the potential bosses' image signals; impression of the businesses' image ventures; and view of the businesses' item or administration marketing portfolio (Wilden, Gudergan, & Lings, 2010).

The corporate marketing idea puts an accentuation on representatives' demeanours and practices. This has offered ascend to interior marketing and manager marketing, which contend for a closer arrangement between the workers' qualities and those of the corporate brand. Notwithstanding, few examinations have endeavoured to give a stage by which the two ideas could be synergised to accomplish a solid, reliable corporate brand (Foster, Punjaisri, & Cheng, 2010). The investigation through the research was made in order to exhibit how the three ideas of marketing are interrelated through another structure. Three groups of branding (corporate marketing, inner marketing, and business marketing) were chosen for audit and examination as far as their ramifications for the proposed system that conceptualizes the connections between the three areas of the research (see Figure 6).

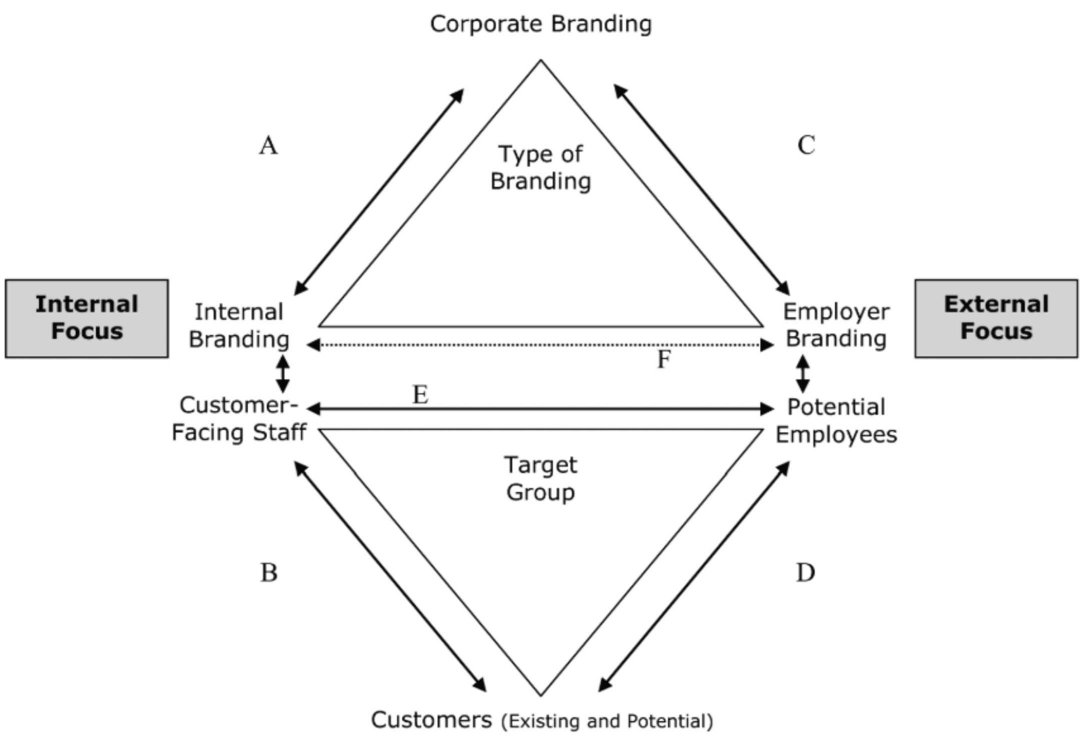

Figure 6. Correlations between internal, external and corporate branding (Foster, Punjaisri, & Cheng, 2010)

The audit of the writing features the significance of boss marketing and inside marketing, and its capability to help the corporate brand-building activities, while keeping up their uniqueness in the writing. It likewise reveals insight as far as the interrelationships among the three ideas of marketing. It is highly important to illustrate ad understand the interconnections between each of the three components as this knowledge can provide a powerful tool for the companies to use the right instruments for strengthening the areas that need more focus and combining the sectors that support each others development. (Foster et al., 2010).

Human resources play one of the most important roles for strengthening the corporation's competitiveness on the market, while attracting the right talents becomes an issue that needs to be addressed. However, it is not always clear what motivation can be found behind the applicant's will to apply to the certain position, or prioritize certain organizations on the market. The perceptions on three Norway's well-known engineering organization were researched using the data from students of high institutions and showed the main trends and factors affecting the choice of the potential employer (Sivertzen, Nilsen, & Olafsen, 2013). The proposed diagram (see Figure 7) , which was used as a research model and foundation for the findings, shows the primary impacts on the company's brand image that is directly connected with the motivations of the potential candidates to apply.

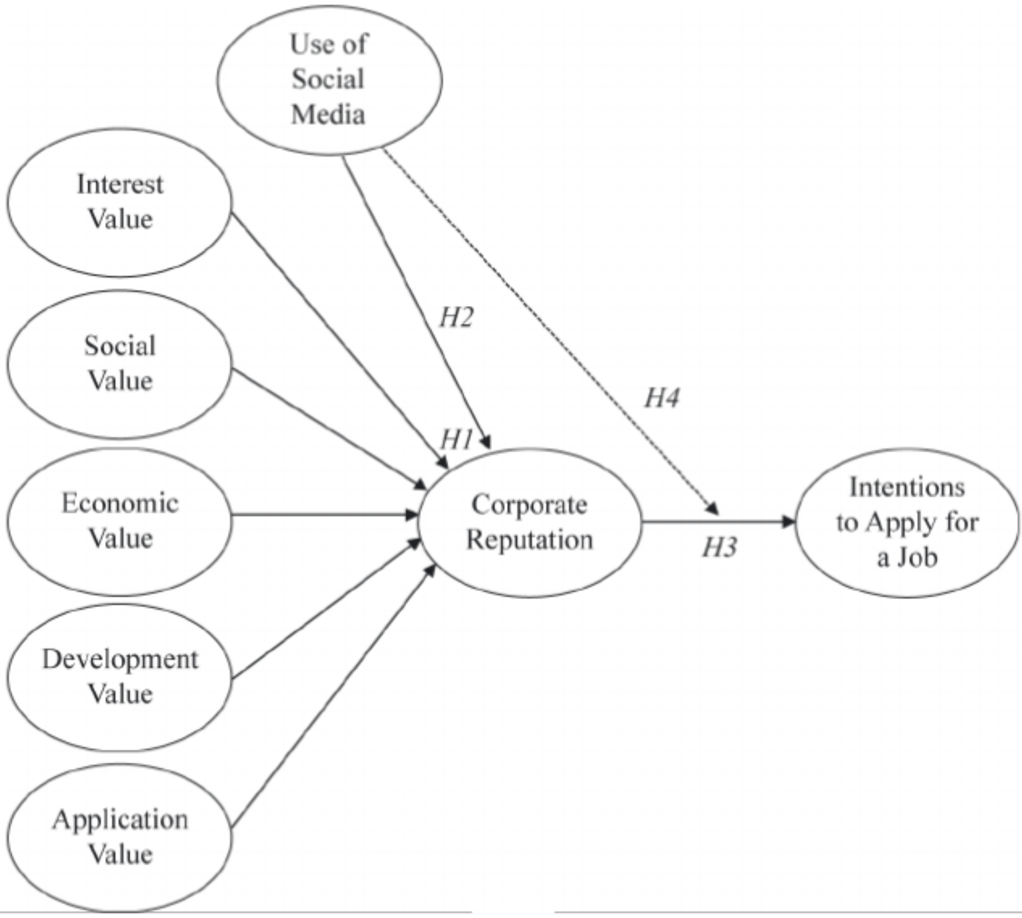

Figure 7. Factors influencing the corporate reputation (Sivertzen, Nilsen, & Olafsen, 2013).

In particular, the outcomes recommend that development esteem, mental esteem, application esteem, and the utilization of online life emphatically identify with corporate notoriety, which thusly is decidedly connected to aims to apply for work. Mental esteem, which is the most grounded indicator, is additionally specifically identified with aims to apply for an occupation. The non-monetary motivations are set as a focus for strengthening the reputation of the firm, while the financial compensation and similar monetary bonuses were found to not have any positive effect on the brand image when used as a key motivation factor. (Sivertzen et al., 2013).

Formulating the efficient strategies for the employer branding highly depends on the understanding of student and recent graduates' perceptions of the ideal potential employer, which includes several factors being the most preferred among the potential candidates. The main attributes include the awareness of the brand image name and its visibility throughout the social channels, the corporate culture and the compensation matters (Leekha Chhabra & Sharma, 2014).

These factors are clearly illustrated in the Figure 8 below:

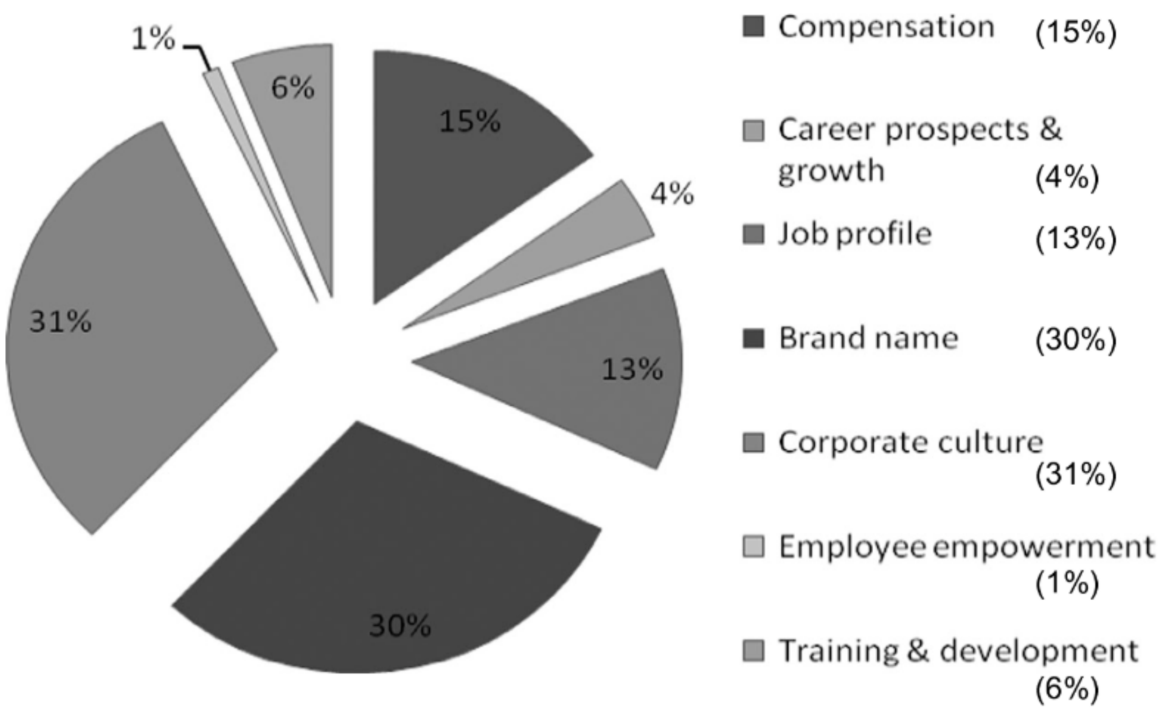

Figure 8. Preferred organizational attributes among potential applicants (Leekha Chhabra & Sharma, 2014).

Opposed to the studies mentioned above, the monetary motivations can play the important role for potential candidates in some countries, such as India that acted as a case market for the research. It is extremely important for the large organizations to invest in the research activities in order to draw the conclusions according to their case market and target audience preferences. The analysis of the company's strategy, as well as the vision and the propositions should be made prior the communication of the brand message to the potential candidates, which can facilitate the organization with the correct and clear strategy to communicate to right talents (Leekha Chhabra & Sharma, 2014).

Employee Value Proposition (EVP)

The broad concept of the marketing system with numerous key participants was considered inside the framework of the Service-Dominant (S-D) rationale. The value proposition needs to be distributed to the various stakeholder groups and therefore requires the advanced analysis of the target groups in focus prior the actual strategy implementation. This analysis and identification of the stakeholder groups can be done in five key steps that are featured in the following model (Frow & Payne, 2011). A five-step procedure allows to empower trustful and efficient relations between the stakeholder groups and the organization by using the value proposition (see Figure 9).

(1) Identify stakeholders.
(2) Determine core values.
(3) Facilitate dialogue and knowledge sharing.
(4) Identify value co-creation opportunities.
(5) Co-create stakeholders VPs.

Figure 9. 5-step process of facilitating successful value proposition formation (Frow & Payne, 2011).

Most of the businesses are developing their operations in the highly competitive environment that features many groups of stakeholders, however not all the entities are often acknowledged by the organization, which makes it complicated to create the value proposition. The identification of the stakeholder groups plays essential role in the value proposition creation and stakeholder relationship opportunities (Frow & Payne, 2011).

The S-D logic mentioned above can be analysed from the perspective of six key stakeholder markets when anticipating the value proposition strategy (see Figure 10):

Figure 10. Six-market stakeholder model (Frow & Payne, 2011).

The marketing exchange and the process of bringing both of the sides to the well-communicated benefit structure can lead to the most efficient formulation of value proposition (Frow, Varey, & Payne, 2011). Cases are incorporated to indicate the examples of the actions aimed to build the effective relationships with various stakeholder markets such as (in the influence markets) the assistance in the environmental standards and practises development from the side of the industrial company when the manufacturer ensures high sustainability standards. Another great example is illustrated in the frame of customer markets, while the company expects honest and transparent answers to the distributed quality survey, as well as the willingness to knowledge sharing, in order to have the ability to focus on improving business' weaknesses to reach common objectives and benefits (Frow et al., 2011).

3.4 Employee Expectations, Experience, and Advocacy

The concept of employee expectations is directly connected to the levels of employee turnover in various industries, while the studies on the hotel and hospitality area in particular are illustrating the topic more in detail. The strong correlation between increasing turnover rates among the employees and high costs for the organization is drawn, even though management turnover can also be seen from the advantageous side when facilitating change, innovative management techniques and activities. Therefore, it is crucial for the company to invest in the analysis and improvement of the employee experiences and to identify the factors that are the top impacts for the levels of employee satisfaction (Yang, Wan, & Fu, 2012). The primary reason for the employee's motivation to change the employer tens to be the difference between the expectations and the actual experience from working in the company, and the level of expectations needs to be identified. The majority of the hotel workers who participated in the survey marked the career advancement motivation as one of the main reasons to leave the current job (80%) with a great part of them having the offers from the competitors on the market (70%), which means the significant loss of competitive advantage for the organization in focus. The main challenge faced by the management for improving the retention strategies and identifying employee expectations is to engage employees in opinion sharing. Trust building techniques are needed, as well as the high level of professionalism among the management that can introduce mentoring programs and trustful and secure discussions (Yang, Wan, & Fu, 2012).

Corporate practises of promoting the value proposition to various groups as well as fulfilling their expectations have brought the ethical issues to the point, while the higher demand for the corporate social responsibility (CSR) practises. The traditional focus of the CSR activities includes the perspective of the external stakeholders, however, the latest study investigates those practises and actions from the less explored aspect - internal stakeholders, which are employees and members of the case organization (Mason & Simmons, 2013). It is important to differentiate between CSR and ethical business practice (EBP), conceptualizing the latter as the internal manifestation of CSR as represented by an organization's values and vision, strategy and policy, systems and procedures, and people management practices. The main points for the organization to analyse while preparing the value propositions for the stakeholders' groups and taking in consideration ethicality, are to ensure that the ethical business practices are communicated transparently to the employees and the members of the organization. What is more, they include identifying the extent to which these practises match to the employee expectations and how these relations affect the motivation and commitment of the workers (Mason & Simmons, 2013).

In the constantly changing and extremely competitive business environment that is enhanced by the globalization processes, the corporations face challenges to maintain their strong employer brand throughout their expansion and development. One of the most significant issues in this area is the the difficulties in introducing the efficient merger and acquisition (M&A) strategy. According to the estimations, around 70-80 % of all the acquisitions do not lead to the increase of the profitability and strengthening the competitive advantage of the firm. Human Resource Management plays the key role in establishing the adherent strategy as there were five primary interventions research and three of them showed to be under the area of human research. The main difficulties that the company might face during the M&A practises are lack of ability to maintain the level of financial performance, decrease in productivity, intercultural challenges, lack of ability to retain the key talent and the conflicting leadership and management styles. The strong connection is identified when researching HR management area in relations to the acquisitions and their efficiency (Rizvi, 2011). A favourable correlation was drawn between the companies with strong corporate culture and high-quality performance and their human resource practises. As HR management lays such a significant role in the strategy of the firm, it can empower organizational growth and development to a great extent, while strengthening its knowledge-base, key talents community and innovativeness (Rizvi, 2011).

Following the subject of primary Human Resource Management practises, performance appraisals (PA) were found to be one of the most important factors affecting the attractiveness of the employer (Brown, Hyatt, & Benson, 2010). When companies do not invest in developing and implementing the sufficient framework for the process of performance appraisals, which leads to the low quality of them, the strong negative effect can be seen with the correlation to three major areas. The low-quality PA can directly lead to the decreasing job commitment among the current employees, constantly decreasing job satisfaction as well as increasing motivations to change the employer and quit the current position in the company (Brown et al., 2010). In order to keep the PA process on a high quality, the investments by the company should be made and the target employee groups analysed as the highly-skilled workers produce the demand for the higher-quality PA. Moreover, the big picture of appraisal processes should be seen by the organization management in order to have the possibility to control its overall quality rather than focusing on the specific issues (Brown et al., 2010).

Dimotakis, Scott, and Koopman (2011) have identified that job satisfaction and workplace wellbeing depend significantly on the interpersonal interactions at their workplace during the daily routines. The 380 day-level data points that were provided by the workers who have participated in the study, demonstrated that the positive experience from the interpersonal communications during the work days are associated with the overall satisfaction from the workplace and promotes the increased quality of the work-life balance. Hierarchical linear modelling (HLM) responses have shown that interpersonal interactions with the favourable experience result in positive effect on the general state of wellbeing at the working place, neglecting the possible negative experiences that took place during the same period of time and reducing the fluctuations of the employee satisfaction from the day-to-day operations (Dimotakis et al., 2011).

According to the research results of the social and behavioural studies, individuals also tend to sum up the negative and positive experience through the period of time to make a conclusion whether the individual can feel the state of high level of satisfaction or not. The key factor impacting the employee perspective on the job satisfaction features the comparison between the expectations and the actual experience, and the extent to which they match from the individual's point of view. Five primary dimensions can be used or developing the attractive workplace conditions, which include the feeling of authority and the right for decision-making, personal growth and development opportunities, monetary compensations for the work overtime, and flexible and innovative management strategies to fix the existing problems (Oraman, Unakıtan, & Selen, 2011).

Employee engagement (EE) takes the vital place in the latest development of human resource management practises and has been implemented by the majority of worldwide companies as a concept that facilitates the growth of competitive advantage and strengthening the company's brand image. As employee engagement was researched to be a dominant part of the efficient HR strategy, it is highly important to educate and coach the individuals on the leadership positions about this factor, while many professionals tend to lack in the clear understanding of it (Arrowsmith & Parker, 2013). Based on the case study among the employees of NZ Post, it was investigated that the engagement in the working process can definitely have a positive effect on the performance levels. However, the overall concept of EE might face the scepticism and the lack of motivation to follow the suggested practices as many employees are not eager to change the way of working process. The key principle to resolve this issue is to facilitate the change, which can be only made when the company invests in highly professional leaders that promote agility and flexibility of the working process (Arrowsmith & Parker, 2013).

The organizational change can be empowered by the internal communications between the employees, as the successful and transparent connection of the members of the organization empowers them to create new relationships, participate in the knowledge-sharing process and take part in creating and developing strong corporate culture. The heart of the trustful and efficient internal communication is seen to be the transformational leadership, which was identified as the key driving power of this communication. (Men, 2014). The positive outcomes of the professional transformational leaders are caused by the nature of this leadership, which promotes the concept of Management by Walking Around. This technique features the individual approach to every employee, that tends to raise the job satisfaction and facilitate work-life balance and wellbeing. Transformational leadership includes the practices for the personal feedback as well as delegating the important tasks, which results in the employees feeling more valued in the organization and having more decision-making power and ability for a change. The collaboration and support is valued, as well as the process of the individual goal setting and motivation strategies development, which makes transformational leadership one of the most important instruments to strengthen and maintain employer attractiveness. (Men, 2014).

The focus on the transformational leadership also leads to the fact that when the employees see that their interests are protected and a favour is done for them, they display positive behaviours in return. This correlation is highly important when facing the problem of high employee turnover in the hotel industry, which can be improved significantly by the effect of employee advocacy as the voluntary turnover intention can be caused by such factors as the high level of job stress(Akgunduz & Sanli, 2017). Data was collected from hotels in the Turkish cities of Antalya, Istanbul, and Mersin and showed that perceived organizational support has a significant positive effect on hotel employees' job satisfaction and has a significant negative effect on their turnover intention. Although employee advocacy has a significant positive effect on hotel employees’ job engagement, it does not have a significant effect on their turnover intention. On the basis of these findings, the primary recommendation to the management was drawn, which focuses on providing the wellbeing of the employees regardless of their current performance. Even though the level of performance and efficiency might be decreasing, it is crucial to still adhere to the successful human resource management practices and continue providing all possible conditions for the comfortable and attractive working environment (Akgunduz & Sanli, 2017).

Employee advocacy is seen to be especially adherent for the service sector, as it was proved during studies of the case company: international airline. Nowadays, when the information is highly accessible through the social and The Internet channels, the awareness of company’s actions and employment procedures has reached very high levels, making the employees more informed about the company’s attitudes towards employee satisfaction. Job satisfaction tends to be one of the primary factors affecting the business profitability in the service sector, as the level of employee satisfaction is connected directly to the commitment and, in turn, to the customer satisfaction levels. (Yeh, 2014). Employee advocacy was research to be the primary factor affecting the flight attendants’ job satisfaction positively and have several implications on the company’s profitability apart from the increased customer satisfaction. Employee advocacy promotes the feeling responsibility for the company’s welfare among the workers as well as motivated to the constant contributions to the development as the team of employees strongly believes that they will be rewarded for the initiatives. By acting according to the guidelines set by the firm, employees follow the idea of social approval, which contributes positively to the overall performance within the company (Yeh, 2014).

The service employee engagement proves to have the positive effect on the decreasing levels of employee turnover. The studies also support the theory that the employee engagement is directly connected to the customers’ satisfaction (Menguc, Auh, Fisher, & Haddad, 2013). Figure 11 shows the model that examines the relationships between these factors and illustrates how feedback and support mechanisms affect the engagement at the workplace, while also taking in consideration employee authority. Supervisory support (H1) has showed positive relation to the engagement, wile supervisory feedback (H2) featured the opposite effect when high levels of autonomy (H6) are involved (Menguc et al., 2013).

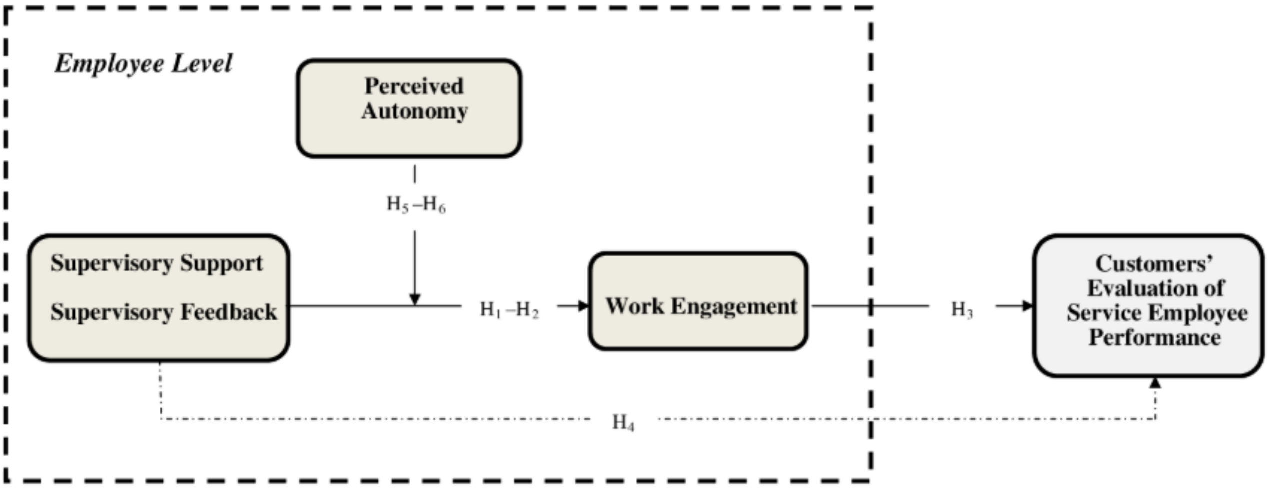

Figure 11. Conceptual model of factors impacting employee performance (Menguc et al., 2013).

In the era of the constantly changing business environment, the employees' reaction to change in the organization can be seen as major factors affecting the overall employee attitudes and satisfaction. Change that is happening on various levels of organization or the one that features several change processes that happen parallel leads to the main challenges for the professionals managing these processes as well as causes the need to educate the management to handle, analyse and predict various employee reactions effectively (Stensaker & Meyer, 2011). The experiences can motivate the employees to be more capable of managing the organizational change and can also vary depending on the employee position. However, the reaction for the change processes different significantly between several groups of employees, as part of them has shown enthusiasm towards the changing practises and part of the sample group has reacted passively as their experience did not include managing the fast paced change. The effective leadership practises can provide the educational and motivational aspects needed to improve the capabilities of the employees to react to the change and show agility and flexibility in the working processes, increasing the loyalty to the organization and raising the level of job satisfaction (Stensaker & Meyer, 2011)

3.5 Employer Attractiveness and Employer of Choice (EOC)

Many organizations across the globe have faced the the difficulties to attract the right talent and retain current professionals in the company, as the recruitment market is becoming more and more challenging each year, motivating firms to seek for the innovative retention management and employer branding strategies to b able to stand out in the competitive environment. The companies need to have clear understanding of what employer of choice (EOC) concept means to young talents that can become potential candidates for companies' positions to address the issues mentioned above (Sedighi & Loosemore, 2012). According to the opinions of university students the main factors playing significant role in the employer of choice vision are identified. High-quality relationships at the workplace, the possibilities for learning and development, and the prospects to develop the talent through highly motivating workplace environment are seen as the most important aspects when considering the potential employers. To strengthen the employer brand image and attractiveness, it lays a significant role to promote the coaching and leadership practises, career advancement opportunities and well-communicated and supported company culture (Sedighi & Loosemore, 2012).

What elements of the job offering can impact the potential candidates' motivation to choose the certain employer in the competitive environment? Apart from the monetary motivations and the strong base salary conditions, it is important to understand which non-financial factors and to which extent might influence the perception and attractiveness of the employer brand. Non-financial rewards include the variety and innovativeness of assignments, workplace wellbeing, possibilities for continuous learning and self-development, as well as social appreciation and the prospects for career advancements (Schlechter, Thompson, & Bussin, 2015). There is a selection of three fundamental sections that have a significant impact on retaining the talent inside of the organization: learning, work-life balance and career advancement opportunities. Even though their promotion through the job offering and employer branding makes the company more competitive on the market, no specification was identified if one of those factors or specific combination of elements brings more positive results to talent attraction. However, gender needs to be considered when targeting the job offers as female applicants tend to seek more presence of non-financial rewards in company’s offer rather than their male colleagues, while it is also important for females to be offered the full combination of all the three components. Therefore, the focus and emphasis on non-financial rewards can facilitate the successful recruitment process for the organizations searching for more female team members (Schlechter et al., 2015).

The role of gender has been questioned in the process of building the EOC profile, which is an important factor that might impact building the relationship between employer and employees and developing the strategy to match workers’ expectations (Bellou, Rigopoulou, & Kehagias, 2015). The findings suggest that female employees have shown the higher level of expectations in comparison to their male colleagues, mostly focusing on the relationships inside the organization, social responsibility and the possibilities for decision-making, development of the talent and personal growth (Bellou et al., 2015). In order to reflect the environment where women are perceiving the working life as the requirement to sacrifice some parts of their childcare and family responsibility, it is important to take these aspects to the high attention when building up the EOC profile, so it promotes the work-life balance actively (Bellou et al., 2015).

The employer branding is seen as an effective tool to attract and retain the right talent, and at the same time the strong brand image can reflect several more advantages for the organization that invests in employer branding activities. The main examples include reducing the costs for the recruitment processes and other HR processes such as employee retention, wellbeing practises. The workers’ loyalty is increased as a result of those actions, as well as increased efficiency and commitment to work, which results in higher customer satisfaction. Therefore, employer branding as a strategy creates the flow of positive effects on the company’s position on the market and creates greater possibilities for higher financial results. What is emphasized, is the importance employer branding as it was found to produce double amount of influence on attracting the right talent when compared to the general image of an organization (Wilska, 2014).

In the last decades, workplace branding took one of the most important place in the company’s positioning and strategy on the market, which generated increased attention to the role of the ratings in creating the successful employer brand image. As the topic of employer branding still lacks in consistent theoretical frameworks to make the strong foundation for the successful strategies, it is possible to draw several dimensions that are mostly rated through the "Best Employer" surveys: comprehensive talent management systems, physical workspace, feeling of being valued in organization, innovative and modern benefits and bonuses, trustful leadership, transparency and communication, performance management as well as integrated HR practises that are flexible and relevant. The high position in the ratings tens to provide a large competitive advantage for the organization while globalization brings the challenge for it to maintain the strong brand image throughout the expansion to worldwide markets (Love & Singh, 2011).

Corporate culture and the talents management, retention strategies and employee engagement practises are empowered by the employer branding strategy, which importance as a topic is continuously increasing for multinational enterprises (MNEs). The strategic human resource management (SHRM) framework needs to be identified in the relation to the various governance models in order to make it more clear for the companies how to link theoretical findings with the practical implications. It is not yet obvious for the researchers which effect employer branding might have on company's reputation and brand awareness and what are the optimal ways to implement it in the competitive business environment. There issues are described as "wicked problems" in the management field and can be solved by applying the SHRM logic (Martin, Gollan, & Grigg, 2011). These problems need to be articulated and understood before they can be addressed and the companies should invest enough in the research initiatives to pinpoint current issues according to their market position and environment. The model of human resource management and employer branding and how they potentially correlate with corporate governance theories is created (see Table 1), which allows to understand the needed employer branding practises according to the context (Martin et al., 2011).

Theories of Governance	Business ethics perspectives	Underpinning Strategic Management Theory	Implications for SHRM and Organizational Climate Governance	Implications for Role of HR
Traditional Shareholder Value Model Aim: to explain how shareholder maximize returns on their investment	Egoist Ethics, focusing on maximizing self-interest and desires of markets and senior executives	Neo-classical economics and classical strategic management.	Unitary view of firm Focus on returns on human capital and 'hard' HRM, incl. cost to income ratios and flexibility 'Exclusive' talent management policy, Leader-centric view of organization	HR as guardians of talent management and advisers on value-adding core employees No/limited role in board selection, development and remuneration HR focus on cost control, with limited strategic role
Newer Shareholder Value Theories **Stewardship Theory and Enlightened Shareholder Value Model** Aim: Concern to rescue shareholder value	Egoist Ethics tempered by: Kantian duty to treat people with human dignity, and morally correct actions on the part of senior executives.	Dynamic capabilities Resource-based view of strategy	Essentially unitary theory of the firm. Leaders as guardians of shareholder value, but with duties to act as stewards 'Soft' HRM privileging employee engagement Balance between 'exclusive' and 'inclusive' talent management policies Reputation of firm as employer seen as key issue Relaxed business case for CSR	HR as guardians of enlightened/sophisticated approach to HRM HR as guardians of corporate culture HR as guardians of leadership development and potential role in board development
Stakeholder Theory Aim: Broader understanding of effectiveness by recognizing wide range of legitimate interests in firm over economic and non-economic goals and values	Utilitarianism – the greatest good for the greatest majority importance of upholding social contracts	Institutional theory and new institutional economics Contingency theory	Essentially pluralist theory of the firm Focus on employees as key stakeholders with rights and as 'subjects-within-themselves' Soft and hard power and HRM can both be justified in different circumstances Fairness and tolerance as key principles Distributed leadership model Reputation of firm for social legitimacy as a core concern	HR as promoters of pluralism, including economic and non-economic goals HR as promoters of corporate citizenship and ethical policies HR as promoters of distributed leadership
Context-dependent Organizational Theory Aim: To show that different corporate governance practices and goals may be more or less effective/acceptable in different contexts No universal governance practices	Relativism, with morality and ethics seen as context-dependent	Organizational sociology Contingency theory and national business systems theory Resource-based theory and dynamic capabilities Open systems	'No one best way' of organizing corporate governance and HRM	HR needs to be sensitive to context and contributors to cost effectiveness, contingent and complementary HR policies and practices

Table 1. Linking main theories of governance through business ethics and strategic management to SHRM (Martin et al., 2011).

Employer branding popularity as a powerful marketing instrument keeps increasing in the business environment, while more and more organizations face the challenges to stand out from the competitors attracting the best candidates and promoting its employer of choice image to them. One of the tools for brand awareness promotion are the rankings where employers compete for the highest position of the best employer, which are completed through various surveys across the region, target age group or the industry. These surveys have shown to have an extremely positive impact of company's positioning from the perspective of students and recent graduates, and to promote its job offers to the most matching and qualified candidate profiles. As more and more organizations make the decision to invest in participating in those surveys, it becomes more challenging for other members of the industry to maintain their strong position in the ranking

(Saini, Rai, & Chaudhary, 2014). The Best Employer Rankings increase the brand name and image awareness greatly and were confirmed to have some positive correlations with the potential candidates' motivation to apply. According to the study in the Indian context, which took in consideration the period of four years, the organizations that have appeared in the high ranking positions over the long-term period gained more attention from the potential candidates and the talents with the right sets of skills and qualifications that match organization's current values and strategy. The companies should not only pay increasing attention to improving and raising their employer brand awareness, but also invest intensively in maintaining and strengthening the current position as the long-term approach tends to have the most positive impact (Saini et al., 2014).

As a stigmatized group, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender (LGBT) individuals are vulnerable to employment discrimination and receive little legal protection. They have had to cope with discrimination and engage in identity management to conceal their sexual identity. Using data from a large survey of postsecondary students, the researchers found that LGBT individuals, after controlling for age, visible minority status, and major of study, reported lower salary expectations than heterosexual individuals. LGBT individuals were also more likely than their heterosexual counterparts to espouse "altruistic" work values and to indicate a career choice in the non-profit sector. The researchers suggest that "altruism" may be an important work value that is related to a career choice in the public and non-profit sectors (Ng, Schweitzer, & Lyons, 2012).

One of the most powerful assets in the organization is talent, as the individuals with high level of qualification and skills lead the company steadily to the sustainable economic growth and development. However, the talents currently employed in the company require to be treated according to the latest retention management and talent management practises in order to ensure that they share the values of organization and are engaged in the corporate culture. Employer branding is being defined the concept that is situated in the heard of the company, concentrating the fundamental value and unique mission around external and, especially, internal stakeholders - its employees. Employees are the most important internal stakeholders as they play a vital role in the growth and sustainability of the organization. The members of the organization tend to be very loyal to the workplace that promotes high level of transparency and honesty, while focusing on the open, friendly and helpful community where employees can feel accepted, valued and socially appreciated. Innovativeness and creativeness were found to be one of main factors to keep the employees from switching the employers long-term as well, while variety of assignments supports workplace's openness to change and growth (Sehgal & Malati, 2013).

In the increasingly competitive employment environment, the the efficient recruitment strategy plays a key role in gaining competitive advantage. The Figure 12 depicts the conceptual model developed to illustrate the employer branding activities on the employee retention, that can assist in keeping the right talent inside the organization by raising the job satisfaction levels (Tanwar & Prasad, 2016).

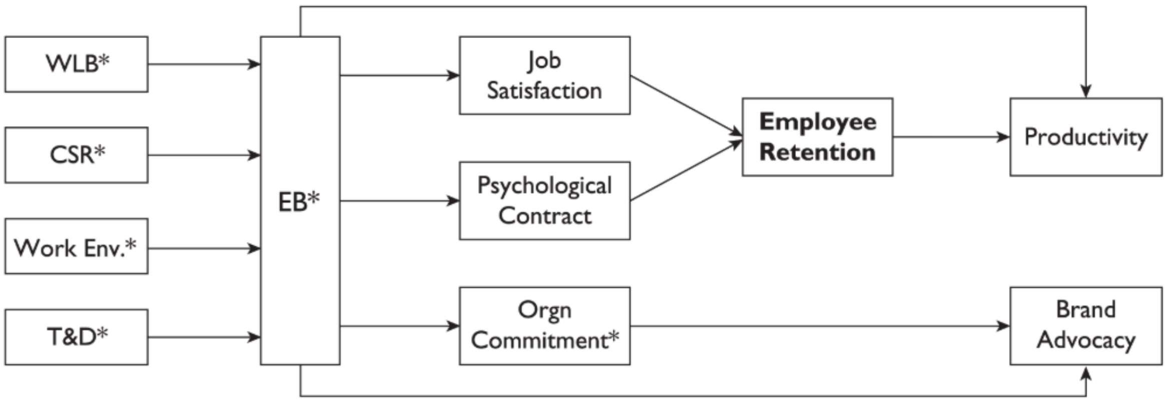

Figure 12. Employer branding framework (Tanwar & Prasad, 2016).

(Note: WLB - work life balance, CSR - corporate social responsibility, Work env. - work environment, EB - employer branding, Orgn commitment - organizational commitment, T&D - training and development)

These are the four dimensions that contribute to the employer branding, and this system creates five possible outcomes with employee retention being the key and the centre.

In addition to the conceptual model, it is very important for the organization's human research management professionals to adhere to the primary dimensions that can form the employees perception of an employer and provide the framework with the guidelines, which shows the possible areas of focus. The attributes are listed (see Table 2), and with the assistance of the analysis the conclusions can be drawn which areas represent the weaknesses of organizational structure and need certain focus on, taking in consideration the firm's current position on the market (Tanwar & Prasad, 2016).

S. No.	Dimensions (employer branding)	Themes (attributes)
1	Work Environment	a. Global exposure b. Helpful and friendly co-workers c. Safe work environment
2	Corporate Social Responsibility	a. Stringent code of conduct b. Initiatives including health, education and environment
3	Work–life Balance	a. Flexi-working b. Work from home c. Fun events
4	Training and Development	a. Online training facility b. Learning and development programmes c. Orientation and training of new recruits
S. No.	**Outcomes (employer branding)**	**Themes (attributes)**
1	Job Satisfaction	a. Benefit structure b. Fair management
2	Psychological Contract	a. Fulfilment of obligations/expectations
3	Organizational Commitment	a. Compensation structure b. Growth opportunities
4	Intention to Stay/Retention of Employees	a. Employees' intention to stay with the organization for coming years.
5	Productivity	a. Increase in performance level
6	Brand Advocacy	a. Positive word of mouth b. Best possible information about the organization c. Social media for brand promotion

Table 2: Summary of EB outcomes and antecedents: outcomes and themes (attributes) (Tanwar & Prasad, 2016).

The figures presented below illustrate how the employer branding values can be perceived and identified when using the two perspectives. Internal employer branding, which aims to reach the needs and adhere to the goals of retaining the currently employed professionals differs significantly from the external employer branding that seeks the most efficient ways to strengthen the attractiveness of the workplace among the potential candidates. The values depicted illustrate the main areas that the efficient strategy of employer branding should focus on when differentiating between two target groups: internal and external (Sengupta, Bamel, & Singh, 2015).

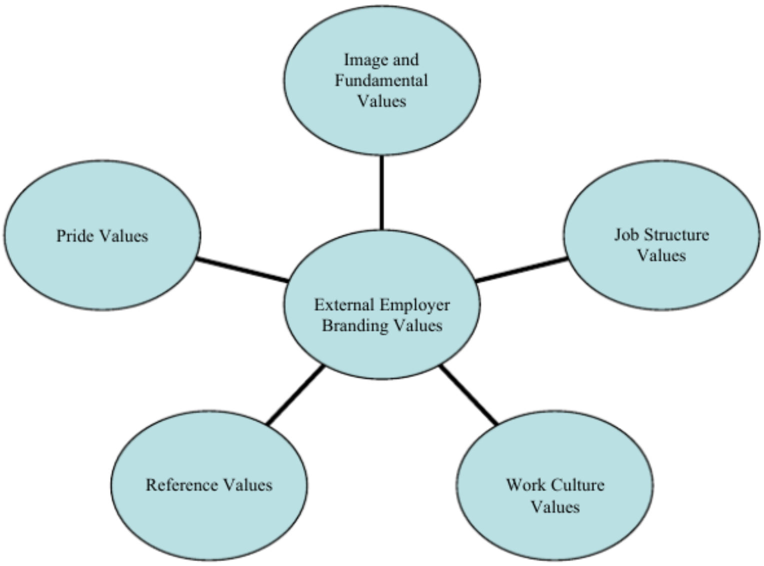

Figure 13. Value proposition model for external employer branding (Sengupta, Bamel, & Singh, 2015).

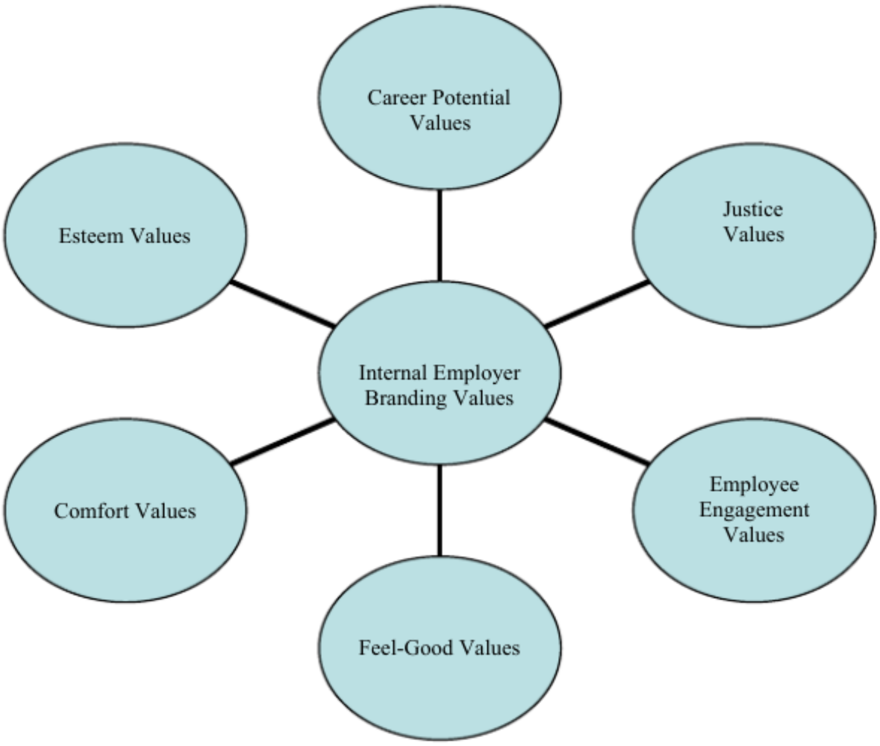

Figure 14. Value proposition model for internal employer branding (Sengupta, Bamel, & Singh, 2015).

4 Methodology

This chapter is designed to show how the study was conducted. In the next section information is being presented regarding the research methodology and design. Following this, research instruments being used for the completion of the study are described and analysed taking in consideration both of their strengths and weaknesses, as well as the description of population and sampling. These sections will be followed by the overview regarding data collection and data analysis, respectively. The final three major sections of the chapter are related and address ethical considerations, assumptions, limitations, and delimitations.

4.1 Research Approach and Methodological Choices

The present study is being conducted using a mixed methods approach, which has increased in popularity during the past two decades as researchers have become more aware of the advantages and disadvantages associated with quantitative and qualitative approaches independently, prompting them to become accepting of a combination of both approaches to create a mixed methods analysis (Neuman, 2013). It is noted that the complexity of the triangulation approach requires careful consideration in the planning process for such studies. It is crucial to pay attention to timing, which should be an important consideration for quantitative and qualitative sections based on the goals to be met through the conduction of each element of the section. As a result, in consideration of these goals, quantitative and qualitative elements of the study may be conducted through sequential or concurrent methods. In sequential methods, the first stage of data collection is designed to assist in informing the second stage. On the other hand, the second stage of data collected may be used for interpretative purposes of data collected during the first stage. In concurrent methods, there is a time reduction to the data collection period, often making this methodology more efficient. There are also concerns regarding the weight of each stage in data collection. For example, despite an equal weight between the stages, it is more common that a certain stage is emphasized based on logic guiding the study. Studies that emphasize deductive logic tend to weight the quantitative stage more heavily to explain the phenomenon, while studies that emphasize inductive logic tend to weight the qualitative stage more heavily (Neuman, 2013).

One popular approach is sequential explanatory. This approach is conducted by first collecting and analysing quantitative data, using the results to inform the qualitative stage. In most cases, the qualitative stage helps the researcher in understanding unexpected results (as well as outliers) that may have arisen in the quantitative stage. This approach is commonly used by those researchers that are more comfortable with the quantitative data collection and analysis procedures, prompting weight to be primarily on quantitative findings (Flick, 2015). On the other hand, the sequential exploratory approach has more emphasis placed on an initial qualitative phase, designed to establish insight for the situation that has been examined. In this case, extensive qualitative research is used to generate testable hypotheses and new knowledge. The secondary quantitative stage is used for the examination of the phenomenon in a generalizable way. A common application is to conduct qualitative research on a particular phenomenon of interest or a special population, then use the information gained by the qualitative stage to develop an appropriate instrument for gathering quantitative data (Flick, 2015).

Because sequential approaches use one data collection/analysis stage to inform the next, these approaches are time-consuming. Therefore, in cases where there are time constraints, many researchers use concurrent triangulation, allowing both the qualitative and quantitative stages to be collected simultaneously. This approach – concurrent triangulation – was used in the present study. This is because this approach allowed equal weight to be given to the individual stages, allowing the data from the individual stages to be interpreted concurrently in order to determine if there is agreement through the data collected by the individual approaches (Panneerselvam, 2014). When reporting the results of this type of study, the researcher typically presents the statistical results, using quotations from the qualitative stage for support/explanations. While this approach is the most common for mixed methods research, it does present challenges due to the need for the design of equally strong research analyses and the resultant challenges that may exist from result integration, especially in cases where the data is contradictory (Jonker & Pennink, 2010). As noted, the concurrent triangulation approach was utilised in the present study because of time constraints and the most accurate applicability to the objectives of the present study.

4.2 Research Design

The present study was conducted as a case study based on Ericsson Sweden using interviews for qualitative data collection and surveys for quantitative data collection. A case study refers to a research approach that involves an in-depth examination of a subject and related contextual conditions. Case studies may be produced through the following of a formal research method, which is likely to lead to a result found in academic research journals and/or professional meetings and conferences. Case study research has been an important element in different disciplines from psychology to administrative sciences (Ridder, 2017).

When completing case study research, the 'case' under investigation may occur to an action, event, individual, or organisation (as in the present research) that exists in a specific time and place. Importantly, case studies are beneficial in that they can be conducted using mixed methods approaches, as done in the present study. It has been suggested that case study research should be defined as a 'strategy' or empirical inquiry that allows for the investigation of a phenomenon of interest within a real-life context (Welch, Piekkari, Plakoyiannaki, & Paavilainen-Mäntymäki, 2011). This suggestion is highly applicable to the present study because of the analysis of Ericsson Sweden from the perspective of students and current employees. It has also been noted that case study research may involve single and multiple cases, qualitative and quantitative evidence, multiple sources of evidence, and benefits from previous theoretical proposition development. Moreover, it is important to not confuse case studies with qualitative research because case studies may be based on a mix of qualitative and quantitative research. Since the present study is being conducted as a single-subject case study, the statistical framework for making inferences from quantitative data is already established (Welch et al., 2011).

There are four common case study approaches (Ridder, 2017; Welch et al., 2011). The first is the 'no theory first' case study, similar to work conducted by Eisenhardt (1989). The second is the 'gaps and holes' case study, which is based on the guidelines and positivist assumptions adopted by Yin (2013). The third is the 'social construction of reality' case study, which is based on work by Stake (1995). The final is the 'identification of anomalies' case study, which is based on work by Burawoy (1998). These approaches are beneficial for different types of applications based on unique ontological and epistemological assumptions, leading to substantial methodological differences on the approaches used. The present study is based on the 'gaps and holes' approach, where the present study is designed to fill in the 'gaps' in understanding of perceptions internally and externally of Ericsson Sweden's brand image.

In most situations, a typical case is not rich in information, which made Ericsson Sweden an important selection because it would lead to the revelation of circumstances (perceptions). Sampling, therefore, is based on information-oriented sampling methods, as opposed to random sampling. Moreover, outlier cases tend to be more revealing than representative cases (Soy, 2015). Thus, the case may be selected because of the interest in the case or related circumstances, such as the transition of Ericsson Sweden from telecom to software company, or the level of local knowledge held by the researcher. As such, there are three types of cases: (1) key cases; (2) outlier cases; and (3) local knowledge cases (Hancock & Algozzine, 2016). Regardless of the case type, there is a distinction between the case study subject and object, where the subject is lens that the object is being viewed through and the object is the theoretical focus, or analytical frame. For the present study, the theoretical focus is brand image, where the subject is Ericsson Sweden.

Population and Sampling

There were two separate populations under consideration for the current study. The first population was employees from Ericsson Sweden. The sample from this population consisted of 7 company representatives for interviews (qualitative data collection). The second population was college students or recent graduates. The sample from this population was expected to be at least 100 students. All participants were required to be studying or be recent graduates from the IT or tech management programs in Swedish universities.

4.3 Research Instruments

The following subchapter provides the overview of research instruments used for the data collection. The disadvantages and advantages of each instrument are also taken into consideration and described.

Qualitative Section

The qualitative research instrument is in the form of an interview (see Appendix 1 for questions). The interview research instrument was used because it is, essentially, a conversation, where the researcher asks questions to elicit information from the participant. While the present study is conducted using one-on-one interviews, it is also possible to conduct interviews through focus groups (groups of participants and one leader, usually the researcher). Interview responses may also be compared to survey responses, as done in the present study, which have more anonymity and typically closed-ended (where opinions are not given by participants). Interviews are helpful because of the development of themes based on the point of view of participants (Bjørnholt & Farstad, 2014). Interviews have unique characteristics, such as being a more personal form of research, establishing a direct relationship between the interviewer and interviewee, provides the opportunity for follow up questions, typically easier for the interviewee (especially when based on giving opinions, impressions, or perceptions), are time and resource intensive, reduce conflicts through face-to-face interactions, and measurement is based, in part, on the interviewer (Brinkmann, 2014).

Interviews require sensitivity and tactfulness from the researcher. One of the most important, as well as hardest to learn, skills to have for effective interviews is the ability correctly interpret the answers. The interviewer (typically, the researcher) must be able to understand the interview content on three different levels. First, the interviewer must get clearly the actual words of the interviewee. Second, the interviewer must get or listen to the subtext of the interviewee. Third, the interviewer must pay high attention to the flow of the interview to assess participant perception of the interview. Therefore, interpretation and understanding skills for interviews are more focused than typical for normal conversations, making recording or getting written answers beneficial for interviewers when participants responds to questions for accurate transcription and data analysis (Frels & Onwuegbuzie, 2013).

These points are also enhanced by asking follow-up and clarification questions. This is also known as a semi-structured interview, where there is a set of predetermined questions, but can be modified for individual situations or to obtain more information on interesting points. It is important that follow-up questions be asked because they may encourage participants to provide more elaboration, enabling the researcher to acquire a more comprehensive understanding of the subject matter. Clarification questions are important because they reduce confusion. If the narrative, details, or chronology is unclear, the transcript is potentially inaccurate, making these questions important for ensuring that the transcripts are accurate for data analysis purposes (Brinkmann, 2014).

It is also recognised that the interviewer must be respectful of boundaries, where the interviewer must explore the topic, but not provide the atmosphere of pressure for the participants. This way the respondent will be encouraged to participate in the knowledge-sharing and provide transparent and honest opinions when it is ensured that the manner of the interview is sensitive and respectful. Another important aspect is to take in consideration natural and comfortable environment for the processes of data collection so that the respondent does not experience the feeling of being “under experiment”. Taking in consideration this matter, the defensive reactions from the respondent might be avoided when following a comfortable pace of the interview and not exceeding the reasonable amount of follow up question. Therefore, the interviewer needs to remember about balance and interview respondents privacy and wellbeing. This concept is related to the need to ensure that the participant feels comfortable throughout the interview process. This is because the interview represents an unusual dynamic where participants are requested to provide personal/emotional information to a complete stranger (Frels & Onwuegbuzie, 2013).

Interviews have multiple strengths and weaknesses. In fact, one of the greatest advantage (strength) of interviews is the depth and details that can be gained from the interviewee. Interviews are beneficial because a picture can be developed for a specific event, explain perceptions of the event, and give other social cues (voice, body language, and intonation), which may assist the interviewer through the provision of additional extra information rather than verbal answer, showing hidden inter-relationships between people, emotions, and objects, which cannot be obtained through quantitative research methods (Xu & Storr, 2012).

Qualitative interviews are advantageous because the questions can be tailored in order to obtain in-depth information needed for the research study. This enables researchers to obtain information about specific events and insights of interior experiences, particularly participant perceptions, interpretations of these perceptions, and the way that events affect the thoughts and feelings of participants. These components enable the researcher to understand circumstances surrounding the event (such as the process), as opposed to the event and reactions to the event. This allows for greater clarity in reporting results and the provision of a greater understanding of the experiences of participants and a greater opportunity of temporary identification with the participants (Pezalla, Pettigrew, & Miller-Day, 2012).

Interviews are not always beneficial and does have disadvantages. For example, the planning of the interview may become complicated, such as recruitment of participants, plans for meeting times and locations, and availability of participants. During the interview, there is a potential weakness in that the interviewer may miss some information because of the multi-tasking that must be conducted by the interviewer, in that the interviewer must ensure the comfort of the participant, maintain eye contact, record as much information as possible, and be prepared with follow-up questions. Following the interview, the coding process has its own disadvantages. For example, coding is often time consuming and often requires multiple people, making the process expensive. Qualitative research is not easily integrated with quantitative research, where it is common to find more missing data in qualitative research than quantitative research.

Quantitative Section

The quantitative research instrument is in the form of a survey (see Appendix 3 for questions). Surveys are typically conducted using a questionnaire, as done in the present study. The goal of surveys is to obtain statistical inferences about the population under study (Fowler Jr, 2013). In the present study, the statistical references are within the student population regarding the perceptions held about the brand image of Ericsson Sweden.

It is noted that statistical inferences are highly dependent upon the questions asked. Methodological challenges of a survey involve decision making activities regarding sampling, data collection, question evaluation and testing, mode for the survey and data collection, ensuring accuracy and internal consistency, adjustment of survey estimates for the correction of identified errors (Rossi, Wright, & Anderson, 2013). It is also important to note that the goal of a survey is not to describe the sample, but the population from which the sample is drawn, allowing for generalisation, which is dependent upon sample representativeness. There are difficulties in obtaining a representative sample, such as selection bias, which results when the procedures used for sample selection results in over- and/or under-representation of a significant portion of the population. Selection bias is minimised in many cases through the use of stratified random sampling, which occurs when the population is divided into groups (known as strata) and random samples are drawn from the strata on a proportional basis (Rossi et al., 2013).

Surveys can be administered in different ways, but the mode of delivery is commonly impacted by cost, target population coverage, flexibility, participant willingness to participate, and response accuracy. The mode of delivery leads to mode effects regarding the answering by participants and have different advantages. The most common delivery modes of surveys are telephone, phone, online, in-home, intercept, and hybrids (Rossi et al., 2013). Although the present study is a mixed methods analysis, it is cross-section because the sample is drawn from the relevant population and studied once, allowing for the respective population to be described at that point in time, yet does not allow for insights to be drawn as to population characteristic causes because the design is predictive and correlational (Rea & Parker, 2014).

Questionnaires are the most common research instrument used for survey research and were utilised in the present study. However, the results may be worthless is the questionnaire is not adequately created. Thus, questionnaires are more effective when they produce reliable and valid demographic variable measures, as well as yield reliable and valid individual disparities generated by self-report scales (Nardi, 2018).

A common measurement in survey research include demographic variables, used to depict characteristics of people surveyed. These may include ethnicity, age, and/or socioeconomic status, as well as others. Moreover, surveys are commonly used to assess attitudes, preferences, and perceptions of individuals through self-report scales, such as Likert scales, to measure opinions/judgements regarding different items on the scale. At the same time, self-report scales are beneficial for examining disparity among individuals on scale items, and are usually presented within questionnaire form (Nardi, 2018).

Consistency is a primary characteristic in reliability in self-report scales, suggesting that a reliable self-report scale has consistent results. Reliability can be measured through a test-retest reliability calculation, which involves conducting the same questionnaire within a large sample at two different times. For reliability to be found, participants are not required to have identical scores on the test, but their position in score distribution should be similar. It is expected that self-report measures are more reliable when there are many items in the measurement of a construct. It is important to remember that more reliability in the measurements can be reached by increasing the extent to which the sample varies under the investigation in focus. Clear and easy to understand instructions that are properly structured show the positive effect on the reliability of the results after the surveys or questionnaires are completed. Moreover, it is important to ensure that all possible distractions during the response process are minimized. The concept of validity is expressed by the outcome when the questionnaire measures were applied as planned and have reached the results when the desired subject is measured according to the plan (Nardi, 2018).

Typically, the questionnaire is developed by a set number of questions that must be answered in a set format. There is a distinction between open- and closed-ended questions, where open-ended questions allow for the formulation of unique answers by the participant and closed-ended questions has a participant select from a predetermined set of answers. It has been argued that the options for the respondents to choose in the questions that are close-ended need to be mutually exclusive and exhaustive. This type of questions can be classified by four types of response scales. The first is dichotomous, which provides the participant with two options. The second is nominal-polytomous, which provides the participant with more than two unordered options. The third is ordinal-polytomous, which provides the participant with more than two ordered options. The final is bound or continuous, which provides the participant with a continuous scale (Marsden & Wright, 2010).

The question sequence is also important, especially in that the questions need to have a logical flow. For the best response rates, it is important that questions flow from least sensitive to most sensitive, leading from factual, behavioural, to attitudinal, as well as from more general to more specific. The typical flow for questionnaire construction based on the order of questions asked involves screens, warm-ups, transitions, skips, difficult, and classification (Marsden & Wright, 2010). Screens are used to find out if the questionnaire should be completed by the potential participant. Warm-ups involve simple questions that are designed to capture the interest of the participant in the survey and may have no relationship to the research objectives, while transition type of questions ensures that there is a flow, which motivates to follow the process and the structure of the research. Skips are those questions that give instructions, such as directing a participant to different questions based on a yes/no response. The primary rule regarding difficult questions is to place them closer to the finishing stages of the questionnaire as the participant tends to already be in “response mode”. Moreover, when using online questionnaires, the progress bar is beneficial because it provides information to the participant regarding their progress. When difficult questions are placed near the end, the participants are typically more willing to answer them. Classification questions or demographic questions should be at the end because they may feel too personal and make the participant uncomfortable, as well as unwilling to finish the questionnaire. Some questionnaires, however, use demographic questions as warm-ups (Marsden & Wright, 2010).

4.4 Data Collection

This subchapter explains the data collection methods used in the process of this research study, both for the qualitative method and the quantitative method.

Qualitative Section

Qualitative data collection occurred though the conduction of interviews with 7 management representatives of Ericsson Sweden. First, verbal permission was obtained from the company itself. The company was also requested to provide email addresses for management. The potential participants were contacted by email with an invitation to participate. If the potential participant replied expressing willingness to participate, the questionnaire with the questions was sent out by the e-mail, including the short question about the position and experience in the company. The participant was also informed about the purpose of the stud and confidentiality before the start of the questionnaire. If clarification was needed, follow-up questions were also sent out after the response was received.

Quantitative Section

In the beginning of the response collection, the invitation to participate (see Appendix 4) was posted at the IT university in places where students commonly congregate, such as the cafeteria. Some of the students were invited to take part in the questionnaire by the researcher. Moreover, the survey was also sent out through the university mailing lists and recent graduates mailing lists, making it possible to reach the alumni as well. The invitation to participate included a link so that students or young professionals could participate. At the first stage of participation after following the link, the respondents were given a brief information about their rights, confidentiality and the purpose of the following research survey. It was expected that at least 100 students and recent graduates would respond.

4.5 Data Analysis

The following subchapter describes how the data analysis was conducted after the responses were successfully collected from the needed number of participants.

Qualitative Section

The interviews were conducted through the email conversation by the researcher with participant permission for research study purposes to publish their answers along with the position and years of experience in the organization. After the response was obtained and checked by the researcher for obvious errors (such as spelling errors, etc.), it was carefully reviewed in case the clarification questions were needed. Participants were provided with 5 business days to reply to the initial questionnaire and 3 business days to clarify the points that were not clear enough for the researcher.

The responses were analysed using thematic analysis, which is one of the most common analysis techniques used in qualitative research. Thematic analysis is beneficial because it emphasizes the finding of, examination of, and recording of patterns (also known as ‘themes’) from collected data. These patterns, or themes, are important for the provision of a description of the phenomenon of interest and are typically associated with specific research questions. The thematic analysis approach is composed of a variety of approaches, as opposed to a singular approach. Moreover, there are different versions of thematic analysis based on different philosophical and conceptual assumptions. This means that the different forms of thematic analysis have different procedures. The most commonly thematic analysis format utilised is the one by Braun and Clarke (2006) and is used in the present study. The approach by Braun and Clarke (2006) is based on a coding process that encompasses six phases for the creation of meaningful patterns.

A theme is a level of patterned response that is related to the research question. A theme is determined based on prevalence. However, this concept does not mean that the theme is based on frequency of occurrence, but in space both within and across the data set. An ideal theme occurs many times a cross the data set, yet a high frequency does not equate to greater importance for understanding data. Thus, researcher judgement is critical in determining crucial themes. There are potential data analysis pitfalls when the research question is used for coding, instead of creating new codes or if adequate examples are not provided from the data. Themes are best when they provide an understanding of the overall picture of the results (Guest & MacQueen, 2012).

The first phase in thematic analysis is to become familiar with the data. This involves creating a potential list of codes in a reflexivity journal, including a description of representations of code and where/how the code is established prior to reading the data. Active analysis of data will assist in finding meanings/patterns within the data set. Therefore, this phase in thematic analysis involves reading and re-reading data until the researcher is familiar with the contents. During this process, the researcher will engage in note-taking activities for developing codes and describing overt patterns or repetitious issues. Also during this stage, the researcher must identify/mark data that addresses research questions/objectives (Guest & MacQueen, 2012).

The second phase in thematic analysis is the generation of initial codes. This is done through listing recurring patterns and allows for a systematic organisation process, as well as the collection of meaningful data based on research questions/objectives. The coding process involves inductive analysis and is not a linear process, but is a cyclical process, where codes emerge throughout the process. The cyclical process can be defined as the back and forth process of the data analysis, which is completed multiple times until the themes of the data are derived. It is important to surpass surface meanings to make sense of the data and create an accurate narrative of the meaning of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). It is not expected that the coding process will be completed on the first attempt. Instead, through each pass, researchers need to refine codes through the elimination of, combination of, or splitting of potential codes. Start codes are based on participant terminology and may be used as a reference point. Yet, dependability is increased when concrete codes are based on dialogue and descriptive. The development of these codes will facilitate the ability of the researcher to locate data later in the process and justify their inclusion. The initial coding allows the researcher to reorganise data based on ideas obtained during the process (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The third phase of thematic analysis involves searching for themes. In this phase, the researcher strives to determine what theme is most effective for the research questions/objectives, which leads to the analysis of potential codes. This phase involves the examination of the way that codes combine for overarching theme development, allowing the researcher to develop a list of themes, as well as the focus on broader patterns, which includes combining coded data with proposed themes. During this phase, it is also important to consider the relationships formed between codes and between different theme levels (Guest & MacQueen, 2012). Themes are not the same as codes because themes are phrases or sentences for the identification of data, aimed at describing coding outcomes for analytic reflection. Themes are those ideas/descriptions that may explain causal events, statements, and morals from the interviews. There may also be sub-themes derived from the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The fourth phase of thematic analysis involves reviewing themes. In this phase, the researcher searches for data designed to support/refute the proposed theory, allowing for further expansion and revision of themes. It is expected that during this phase, some themes may collapse into one another and others may need to be placed in smaller units. There are two levels under this phase that enables the refining and reviewing of themes. Overlapping themes may yield an important source of information, as well as the development of new patterns/issues within the data set. Deviations for existing codes may show that a code may not exist. Essentially, codes are important because they relate data to the conception of that concept, allowing the researcher to focus on interesting aspects of the codes and why/how they meld together (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The fifth phase of the thematic analysis involves the definition and naming of themes that will be shown in the final analysis. This phase is important because it aids with the researcher in the analysis of the data in the individual themes. Thus, this phase focuses showing how the individual themes impact the overall picture to be conveyed through the final analysis. Typically, this phase shows what data aspects are being captured, why they are captured, and why they are interesting in the grand scheme of the research study (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The sixth phase of the thematic analysis involves producing the report. This phase involves writing the final report based on the entire process undergone for data analysis. This also involves the themes that have the greatest and most meaningful contributes for answering research questions and meeting the research objectives. This phase involves the conveyance of the story of the data in a manner that convinces the reader of validity and merit of the analysis. It is also important that the analysis be clear, concise, and logical (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Quantitative Section

The questionnaire consisted of two parts: (1) demographic information and (2) a Likert scale. The first part was analysed based on frequencies and percentages. The second part was based on descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, mean, and standard deviation) and the chi square test of independence, based on a 0.05 alpha.

4.6 Research Ethics and Limitations

Ethical Considerations

Privacy was the major concern of the present study. For qualitative data, all the respondents were informed that only their position and the experience in the organization will be used along with the responses. This provided comfortable environment for the participants to provide unbiased responses. It was also important for all participants – qualitative and quantitative – be aware that their responses would not influence their current jobs (qualitative) or potential jobs (quantitative). Therefore, in the introduction to the questionnaires, the participant was assured that their responses would remain anonymous and that they could opt out of the study at any time.

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

It is assumed that in order to obtain the most comprehensive results, a mixed methods analysis is the most appropriate for the present study. The use of an interview was selected in order to obtain in-depth responses regarding the internal perceptions of employees regarding the brand image of Ericsson Sweden. On the other hand, the use of the questionnaire was selected to obtain a wide-spread sample response regarding how other people view Ericsson Sweden. This is important because there is a talent war across the globe and if the company cannot attract and retain talent, it will have difficulties in remaining sustainable.

5 Research Results

The questions that were presented to the sample regarding the Ericsson brand image and operations were designed to assist in an overall assessment of the company's vision, most recent strategies and market position. More specifically, the questions were designed to provide clarity in regard to what the degree the sample was aware of Ericsson Sweden, and also how the sample perceived Ericsson as a potential employer. The outcomes were generated to compare the internal perceptions of the company from external, young professionals' opinions.

Quantitative Section

The quantitative assessment focused upon the participants' perception of the Ericsson Sweden brand and perspectives of Ericsson as an employer. The participants were presented with closed-end questions in three areas: (1) in respect to Ericsson as a potential employer; (2) in respect to Ericsson's position as an employer; and (3) regarding the primary factors that influence the choice of employer. Based upon responses from Likert scales and averages taken from the total responses, the results were analyzed for trends and potential tendencies.

The demographics for the sample were highly diverse with respect to nationality, age and gender as the participants consisted of students or recent graduates from a total of 16 countries. At the same time, a total of 50 students, or the majority of the sample, were from Sweden.

The age demographic for the sample was composed predominantly of respondents between the ages of 18 and 24 years, at N = 60. The second largest age demographic was 40 respondents that were between the ages of 25 and 30 years. Figure 15 shows the age distribution for the sample:

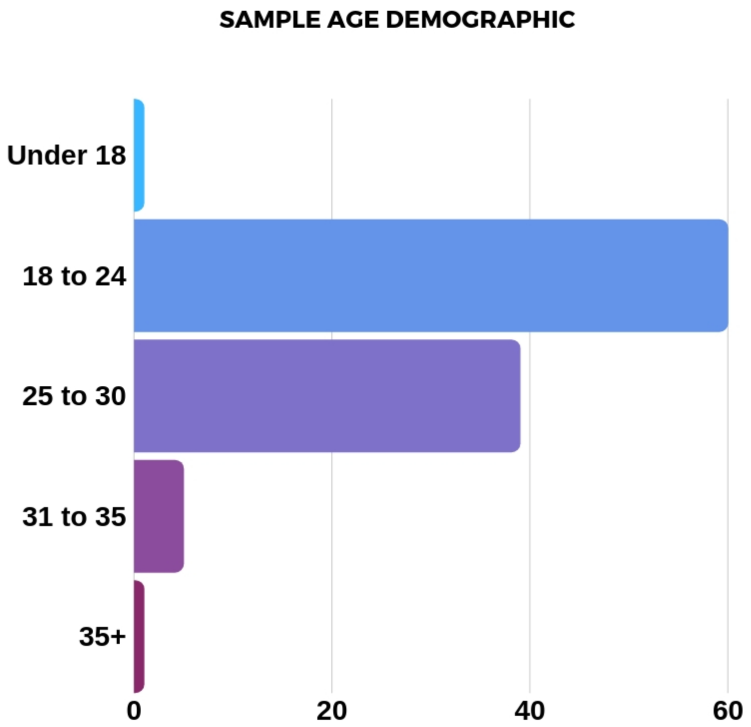

Figure 15. Sample age demographic

The gender demographic of the sample population was comprised of 50 males and 54 females; for a majority of females in a total sample size of N = 105. The education demographic was comprised of freshman, juniors, Masters degree students, and recent graduates from a local university. The majority of the sample, or 65, were either students currently in a Masters degree program; or recent graduates. The remaining 40 respondents were classified as either freshmen or juniors.

The method of sample selection was to invite participants with a technology interest and background to gauge the progress or effect of Ericsson Sweden's transition in specialties, current global perception of the brand, and future expectations in regard to the global talent pool. Questions 5, 6 and 7 were designed to assess how well the current young professional demographic was aware of Ericsson Sweden; the scope of the company's vision and operations; and the attractiveness of the firm as a future employer in the global market. The participants were questioned in regard to their awareness of Ericsson Sweden as a company that they could or would eventually work for. The choice of close-ended responses were "yes", "no", or "I don't know". Figure 16 shows the distribution of awareness responses:

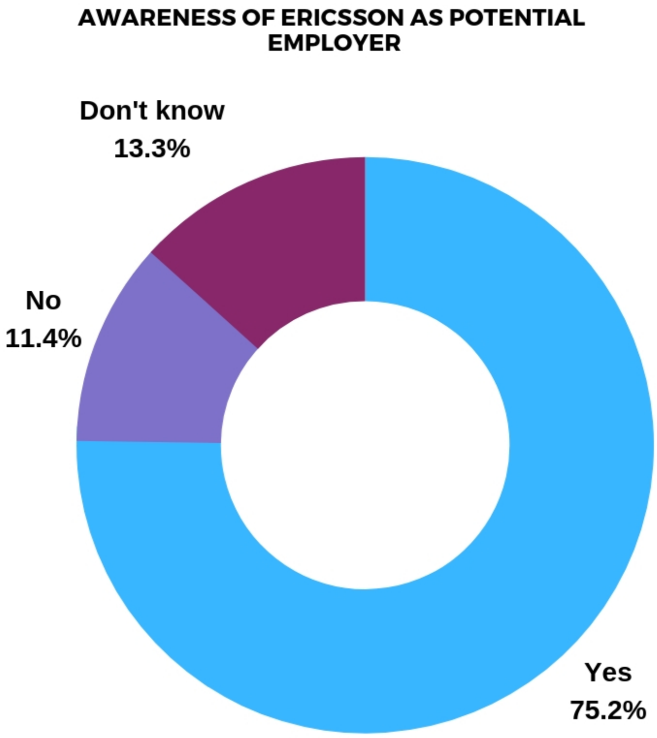

Figure 16. Respondents' awareness of case company as potential employer

The majority of the sample, 75%, or N = 79 respondents, asserted that they were aware of Ericsson Sweden as a sizable, world renown brand that they could or would consider as a potential employer. A total of 12, or 11.4% asserted that they were not aware of Ericsson Sweden as a sizable, world renown brand that they could or would consider as a potential employer. A total of N = 14, or 13.3% asserted that they were undecided as to whether they were considering Ericsson as a potential employer.

Awareness of Ericsson's Position as an Employer

Question 6 of the quantitative analysis was a combination of six topics as to how aware the sample was of Ericsson Sweden as an employer. A Likert scale of 1 to 5 was used as the rating for Ericsson Sweden, with 1 as the least of agreement, and 5 as the highest of agreement. A mean score was calculated for each inquiry in order to compare the responses. Table 3 shows the distribution of responses to each of the inquiries for Question 6:

Awareness of Ericsson's Position as an Employer							
N = 105	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**Total**	**Average**
Brand image is important for me to consider the company as a potential employer	2	10	19	52	22	105	3.78
There is enough information available for me to follow the latest changes in Ericsson's current operations	26	32	30	16	1	105	2.37
Changes in the scope of the company (such as transferring from telecom to software) impact my decision to consider the company as a potential employer	7	18	33	36	11	105	3.25
A changing brand image will discourage me from seeking employment at the company	15	25	35	25	5	105	2.81
I do not understand if Ericsson's scope of operations currently matches my skills.	9	19	22	33	22	105	3.38
Ericsson's vision and values are communicated in a clear way.	16	35	22	26	6	105	2.72
Total	75	139	161	188	67	105	3.05

Likert Scale 1 = least agreeable; 2 = somewhat agreeable; 3 = neutral; 4 = agreeable; 5 = most agreeable.

Table 3. Responses to question 6 of the quantitative survey

The majority of the respondents, 52 total, or 50% asserted that brand image of the firm was very important to them in terms of choice of employment. A total of 22 respondents, or 21% expressed that brand image was extremely important to them in terms of choice of employment. A total of 2 respondents, or less than 1% of the sample asserted that brand image was not at all important to them in terms of their choices for employment. The mean response was a 3.78, which rounded to 4 indicates that overall, the brand image was very important to the sample in terms of potential employment.

The sample was questioned in regard to the amount of information available about Ericsson following transitional changes made to the company's business model. A total of 32, or 34% expressed that sufficient information is not really available to follow the most recent changes in Ericsson's operations. A total of 30, or 29% were neutral in perspectives of how sufficient information is available to follow the most recent changes in Ericsson's operations. A total of 26, or 25% expressed that sufficient information is not available at all to follow the most recent changes in Ericsson's operations. Only 1 of the respondents, or less than 1% totally agreed that sufficient information is available to follow the most recent changes in Ericsson's operations. The mean response was a 2.37, which rounded to 3 indicates that overall, the sample was neutral in regard to the amount of information available about Ericsson following transitional changes made to the company's business model.

The third inquiry was in regard to changes in the scope of Ericsson's business model after the changes and whether the changes affected any consideration for Ericsson as a potential employer. A total of 33, or 31% were neutral in terms of the changes and whether the changes affected any consideration for Ericsson as a potential employer; while 36, or 34% agreed that the changes would affect any consideration for Ericsson as a potential employer. Less than 1% disagreed that the changes would affect any consideration for Ericsson as a potential employer; while 11, or 10% totally agreed that the changes would affect any consideration for Ericsson as a potential employer. The mean response was 3.25, which rounded to 3 reflects an overall neutral perspective of the changes and whether they would affect any consideration for Ericsson as a potential employer

The sample was then asked if Ericsson's brand change would discourage their application to the company for employment. A total of 35, or 33% were neutral and asserted it would neither encourage or discourage their decision to apply. A total of 15, or 14% totally disagreed that the change would discourage their decision. Also significant was that less than 1% totally agreed that Ericsson's brand change would discourage their application to the company. The mean response was 2.81, which rounded to 3 indicates that the sample disagrees or is neutral in regard to the negative effect of Ericsson's brand change on their application to the company for employment.

The sample was questioned in regard to the degree to which they understood if the scope of Ericsson's operations currently match the participants' professional skills. A total of 33, or 31% agreed that they did not understand if the scope of Ericsson's operations currently match their professional skills. Twenty-two, or 21% were neutral in regard to the degree to which they understood if the scope of Ericsson's operations currently match their professional skills. However, 22, or 21% also totally agreed to the same regard. Thus, the trend was positive was this inquiry.

The mean response was 3.38, which rounded to 3, indicates that overall, the sample agreed, but was predominantly neutral in this perspective.

The final inquiry for Question 6 was whether or not the respondents believed that Ericsson's company vision and values are communicated in a clear way. A total of 35, or 33% slightly disagreed that Ericsson's company vision and values are communicated in a clear way, which is a high number and indicator that many of the participants did not agree with or understand the current vision and values. Also significant was that 22 of the respondents, or 21% were neutral and neither agreed or disagreed that Ericsson's company vision and values are communicated in a clear way. The mean response was 2.81, which rounded to 3 indicates that overall, the sample was predominantly neutral in regard to whether the company vision and values are communicated in a clear way.

Factors Influencing the Choice of Potential Employer

Question 7 of the assessment was designed to generate responses in regard to the factors that influence the young professional's choice of potential employer. A total of 7 inquiries were made, the outcomes of which are presented in Table 4:

Factors influencing the choice of potential employer

N = 105	1	2	3	4	5	Total	Average
Competitive base salary is the most important factor for me when choosing Ericsson as the employer	3	18	24	35	25	105	3.58
I care more about ensuring that my needs will be met by my employer than about the brand image	2	12	25	41	25	105	3.71
I believe that Ericsson's brand values match my expectations.	2	10	45	34	14	105	3.46
Ericsson is attractive for me as an employer as its technologies excite me and the variety of tasks encourages creativity and passion.	3	17	38	28	19	105	3.41
Ericsson is attractive for me as an employer as it encourages long-term employment and recognizes my talent	2	15	42	26	20	105	3.45

Ericsson is attractive for me as an employer as it is able to encourage and motivate my engagement	2	18	29	35	21	105	3.52
Ericsson is attractive for me as an employer because of the wide international scope of operations.	2	5	29	34	35	105	3.9
Total	16	95	232	233	159	105	3.58

Likert Scale 1 = least agreeable; 2 = somewhat agreeable; 3 = neutral; 4 = agreeable; 5 = most agreeable.

Table 4. Responses to question 7 of the quantitative survey

A total of 35 respondents, or 33.3% agreed, and 25 respondents, or 24% totally agreed in terms of whether a competitive base salary is the most important factor when choosing Ericsson as the employer. A total of 3 respondents, or less than 1% totally disagreed that a competitive base salary is the most important factor when choosing Ericsson as the employer. The mean response was a 3.58, which rounded to 3.5 indicates that overall, the sample was more neutral in regard to competitive base salary as a factor in choosing an employer.

The second inquiry was in regard to the importance of personal needs as opposed to the firm's brand image in an employment relationship. Forty-one, or 39% asserted that brand image was not as important to them as having their own personal needs met. Twenty-five respondents, or 24% expressed that brand image was not important at all. A total of 25 respondents also expressed that brand image was comparable in importance to them. Only 2 respondents, or less than 1% of the sample asserted that brand image was more important than having their personal needs met. The mean response was a 3.71, which rounded to 4 indicates that overall, the brand image is not at all important in comparison to the employee personal needs.

A total of 45 respondents, or 43% were neutral in terms of whether Ericsson's brand values matched their own. A total of 14 respondents, or 13% totally agreed that Ericsson's brand values matched their expectations. A total of 34 respondents, or 32.3% expressed that Ericsson's brand values very much matched their expectations. A total of 2 respondents, or less than 1% of the sample asserted that Ericsson's brand values did not match their expectations. The mean response was a 3.46, which rounded to 3.5 indicates that overall, that Ericsson's brand values somewhat matched to matched their expectations.

The fourth inquiry was in regard to the attractiveness of Ericsson Sweden as a tech firm. A total of 38 respondents, or 36% were neutral in terms of whether Ericsson's brand values matched their own. The respondents were questioned as to whether Ericsson's technology and diversity in tasks were attractive, exciting, and motivating in terms of creativity and passion. Only 3 totally disagreed with the statement. The mean response was a 3.41, which rounded to 3 indicates that overall, the perspective of the sample was neutral.

The fifth inquiry for Question 7 was in regard to the attractiveness of Ericsson as a long term employer and the importance of the firm's recognition of the employee talent. A total of 35 respondents, or 34% agreed in terms of whether Ericsson would be attractive as a long term employer and the importance of the firm's recognition of the employee talent. Twenty respondents, or 19% totally agreed. Only 2 totally disagreed with the statement. The mean response was a 3.45, which rounded to 3.5 indicates that overall, the sample was neutral and that Ericsson's attractiveness would encourage long term employment due to recognition of talents.

The respondents were questioned in regard to the attractiveness of Ericsson in regard to encouragement and motivation toward employee engagement. Thirty-five respondents, or 34% agreed to this statement; while only 2 disagreed. The mean response was a 3.52, which rounded to 3.5 indicates that overall, the sample was neutral and that Ericsson would be attractive due to encouragement and motivation of employee engagement.

The seventh, and final inquiry for question 7 was in regard to the attractiveness of Ericsson in the contexts of the global scope of the business operations. Thirty-five respondents, or 34% totally agreed; while 34, or 33% mostly agreed that that Ericsson is attractive as an employer due to the international scope of the business operations. The mean response was a 3.9, which rounded to 4 indicates that overall, the sample was in total agreement that Ericsson would be attractive as an employer due to global scope of the business operations.

Qualitative Section

The qualitative analysis consisted of an interview with 7 Ericsson employees to obtain insight regarding Ericsson Sweden's transition from telecom to software and the current state of the company brand. The participants were each asked nine open-ended questions in the contexts of Ericsson Sweden as an employer and the position of the company as a global competitor in IT. This section presents the outcomes of the interviews and describes the trends that can be drawn from the analysed responses. The data collected by the qualitative interviews was examined according to the coding techniques, which has grouped the responses to the trends presented in the following Table 5:

Outcomes for Interview Questions

N = 7	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
What is your position in Ericsson and how many years of experience do you have?	Many; 20 years	OPO; 4 years	Test Archit.; 8 years	Developer; 7 years	Develope r; 1.5 years	Develop er; 1.5 years	Sys Man; BA; 7 yrs
What kind of employer brand is the company attempting to build currently?	CTS	diversity; globlzn.	IIL; BOWL	IIL; CTS	Stable employm ent	IIL; Innov.	Differ.; EVP
What are the challenges with regard to employer branding do you think the company is facing at the moment because of the change?	lack of consum products	talent pool	OSCC	RB	RB	RB	Emply. eng & Adv.
Changing scope of operations might affect and limit the ability of Ericsson to successfully attract and retain new talent	No	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	Yes
Are current brand image, values and company vision communicated clear? Did the company's brand image play an important role when you were considering Ericsson as an employer?	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	No	No
Do you think that Ericsson's brand image is communicated clearly to the people outside the organization as well? Why or why not?	Don't Know	No/Don't Know	No	No	No	Yes	Impro-ving
What makes Ericsson Packet Core in Sweden attractive among other potential employers?	IIL	Global firm	Diversity; BOWL	Global firm; CTS	Innov; Talent pool	Innov.; Global empl.	Brand; Recruit.
Does working in Ericsson matches with your expectations when you were applying to the position?	Yes and No	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No
What actions would help Ericsson to become more attractive as an employer in this period of change?	Trust & Profitabilit y	OSCC; visibility	OSCC; Compet. Salary	OSCC	College Career Fairs	BOWL	OSCC;D igital.

Main trends coding: CTS = Contribution to Society; BOWL = Balance of Work Life; OSCC = Open Source Community Contribution; IIL = International Industry Leadership; RB = Rebranding

Table 5. Coded responses to questions of qualitative interview

The average length of employment for the respondents was 7 years, with a maximum of 20 years and a minimum of 1.5 years. The majority of the sample were Software Developers for Ericsson Packet Core Sweden. The participants were asked what type of employer brand Ericsson is trying to build, such as internationalization, strong competitive salary, long-term and stable employment, diverse projects and a variety of tasks. The most recurring response to the type of brand was a brand of international industry leadership, along with some form of globalization. One respondent asserted that making a great contribution to society was the goal for the brand.

The sample was questioned in regard to challenges Ericsson Sweden faces because of the transition from telecom to software. The most recurring response was the challenge of the company rebranding. A general sentiment was that Ericsson has not implemented a successful strategy for transitioning the brand and informing of the transition. Other perceived challenges included a lack of consumer products and competition for quality talent.

Question four was in regard to whether the employees perceived potential employee challenges due to the changing scope of the company's operations. The majority of the participants, or 67% expressed that they did not believe the changing scope of the company's operations will negatively affect future attempts to recruit talent. Thirty-three percent expressed that they did believe that the changing scope of the company's operations would negatively affect future attempts to recruit talent.

The sample was then asked if they believed the current brand image, values and company vision were being communicated clearly and if t the brand played a role in their own recruitment. Half of the participants expressed that they did not believe the brand image was being communicated clearly; while two asserted that they were not sure. Only one respondent asserted that the they believed the current brand image, values and company vision were being communicated clearly.

Three of the participants asserted that they did not believe that Ericsson's brand image was being communicated clearly outside of the organization. Two asserted that they did not know if the brand image was being communicated clearly outside of the organization. Only one participant asserted that they believed the brand image was being communicated clearly outside of the organization. The sample was then asked what they believed was the primary reason the company was attractive as a potential employer compared to the market. The majority of the participants named the global status of Ericsson as the primary reason the company is attractive as a potential employer compared to others in the market. Innovation and diversity were also named as primary factors that improved the attractiveness of the company as an employer.

Question 8 was an inquiry as to whether the employment experience at Ericsson met the expectations of the employees at the time of application. Half of the sample, or three respondents asserted that Ericsson met or exceeded their expectations as an employer at the time of application. Two responded that the company has not met their expectations. One respondent asserted that in some ways the company has met their expectations, and in some ways it has not.

The final question in the interview was an inquiry of the respondents' opinion of what actions would help Ericsson to become more attractive as an employer in this period of change. The most recurring response was Ericsson's contribution to the open source community. Other responses included a balance of work life, the establishment of trust, greater participation in career fairs, and more competitive salary offerings.

6 Discussion and Conclusions

A qualitative and a quantitative analysis have been conducted. Qualitative data collection was conducted by interviews with 7 management representatives of Ericsson Sweden. The quantitative analysis was conducted through a survey of a sample of 105 students and recent graduates. This section presents a discussion of the outcomes and any trends that were identified from the data analysis. The chapter features the quotes from the qualitative interviews with company representatives.

Awareness of Ericsson Brand Image

Sweden has a track record of producing high numbers of successful global firms and international brands (Larsson, Tarnovskaya & Brousseau, 2003). Moreover, past assessments of company rankings as employers have shown that Ericsson Sweden is considered one of the most attractive employer in the contexts of field of study and by country (Universum, 2017). Less than a quarter of the students and recent graduates conceded that the Ericsson brand values matched their expectations. More than one-third expressed no opinion of the company at all. The praise for the company came from the international scale of business operations. Awareness of the Ericsson brand was the focus of the first set of inquiries; and also how the participants perceived the presentation of the Ericsson brand as an employer.   The employer brand image has historically been associated with the firm and the employees, to include employer attractiveness, employee self esteem, loyalty, and trust (Kashive & Khanna 2017). The quantitative analysis outcomes for awareness indicated that Ericsson's brand image plays an important role as a potential employer to the sample; and that the company brand image has become ambiguous in some respects since the transition. Some expressed that the brand image and vision are projected externally with much more detail and effort than internally. Many of the respondents asserted that they were not fully aware of what the brand image stood for since the company transition from telecom to software. However, the participants also asserted that overall, the company brand image would not prevent application for employment at Ericsson. Visionary leadership is a component of corporate strategies to maintain competitiveness and profitability in global markets (Kantabutra & Avery, 2010). The inquiries in Question 6 of the survey were designed to solicit the participants' awareness of the Ericsson vision and values and how they compared to personal expectation from an employer. The awareness inquiries also encompassed an investigation of company vision and values perceptions in terms of communication. The sample responses indicated that a clear understanding has not been established in regard to the company's current vision and values, following the transition.

- ✓ "We need to adapt with the new changes, we need to educated our employee and leaders about changes, learn the changes..., compare it how we do it."

The company has not clearly established the new aims and objectives internally. Moreover, a clear understanding of how the company's scope of operations match the employees' skills has not been established. Therefore, the employees' overall awareness of Ericsson's position as an employer is low.

The brand image is symbolic of the firm and adds value beyond the firm's core operations and overall performance (Dean et al 2016). Therefore, employee awareness of the brand is an important component of the fulfillment of the company vision, aim and objectives. Twenty-four percent of the sample asserted that brand image was not at all important, which is likely a reflection of the low age of the group.

The most positive response to the Awareness of Ericsson's Position in an Employee survey was in regard to the importance of brand image. The participants acknowledged the value of brand image; however, they did not provide positive indications in regard to the Ericsson brand. An employee asserted that the company must improve the overall Employee Value Proposition (EVP) through improved employee engagement and advocacy channels.

The least positive response was to whether a sufficient amount of information is available about Ericsson which reflect the most current company transitions. The lack of clarity and available information are believed to detract from Ericsson Sweden's capacity to attract quality talent. One respondent supported that the Gothenburg Brand Ambassador has brought improvement to this area; however, the responses collectively indicated that more improvement in information sharing, internally and externally, is needful.

Factors Influencing the Choice of Potential Employer

Factors that affect Ericsson's potential as an employer were the focus of the second set of inquiries in the survey. The global tech firm encounters a diversity of challenges in the contexts of differentiation, competition, and branding of intangible products (Garas, Mahran & Mohamed, 2016). A competitive base salary was identified as the most significant factor in the consideration of Ericsson as an employer. Only 21 people out of 105 disagreed outright that a competitive base salary is a most important consideration in the employment relationship. However, this outcome is to be expected for the employees from most any firm.

Larsson, Tarnovskaya & Brousseau (2003) supported that individuals perceive notions of 'career' differently whereas some view employment as a lifetime commitment to a profession and a brand; while others view an employer as a rung in the corporate ladder. A 2016 Deloitte Millennials Survey showed that millennials desire a good, balanced work life, and opportunities for advancement most out of 14 benefits of work (Gardiner, 2018). The participants for this study also expressed that having their personal needs met was more important to them than the employer brand image. These responses coincide with the assertion that brand image would not hinder any consideration to apply for employment at Ericsson.

Nylander (2018) argued that the firm has the power to change the young population's perception of the brand image. However, Erkmen (2018) presented that the success of the firm is dependent upon the degree to which the firm's brand delivers all that is promised. The current vision, aims and values of Ericsson are not fully clear to the employees. For those who are aware of the current vision and values, a significant percentage do not perceive them to be compatible with personal visions or expectations. Kashive & Khanna (2017) supported that when the employee is content with the employer, employee behaviour exceeds the expectations of the job description. More than half of the sample expressed no opinion or disagreed that Ericsson's values match their expectations in an employer. However, a number expressed that Ericsson could be a source of motivation and encouragement for the employees.

A large percentage of the negative responses toward Ericsson as an employer were due to a lack of information more so than from negative experiences. In the previous section, many conceded that they were had not been made fully aware of the company vision and values following the transition from telecom to software. The students and recent graduates seemed to base most opinions on Ericsson Sweden's position in the global market and opportunities to work in different countries. Oskaybas & Gumrukcu (2014) compared the firm's challenge to attract new talent to that of attracting new consumers to the firm's bottom line. Moreover, brand equity places an increasingly important role in the selection of employers by recent graduates. However, the brand image of the firm holds different degrees of importance to young professionals; particularly when compared to other aspects of work.

Information sharing has been a recurring theme in both the survey responses and the interview analyses for this study. Ericsson faced difficulties to communicate the rebranding changes effectively to the public and to its employees, which deprived either of the capacity to generate reasonable expectations. Folkesson, Johansson and Henningsson (2018) presented that when the firm’s brand is no longer consistent with what has been promised, the outcomes include a negative effect on the brand. This would affect recommendation in regard to securing long term recruitment and differentiating Ericsson from its competitors.

A significant percentage of the feedback in regard to Ericsson’s potential as an employer consisted of suggestions for more involvement in the area of Open Source Community Contribution. Four out of 6 employees asserted that Ericsson Sweden could improve employer attractiveness through increased Open Source Community contribution.

- ✓ “Work more with modern programming languages, Open Source tools, contribute more to open source society and present on major IT forums”

However, Ericsson Sweden has been aggressively reaching out in this aspect for the past few years. For example, Ericsson was sponsor and host of the Linux Open Source Mini Summit in October 2017 (Ethirajulu, 2017). Moreover, the transition in technologies has opened new doors of opportunity in research and design that will draw the attention of recent graduates who pursue work environments filled with demands for creativity and innovation.

The most positive response to the Factors Influencing the Choice of Employer survey questions was in regard to Ericsson as a global tech firm, and a building of the brand locally and globally. Respondents from both the survey and the interviews asserted that Ericsson’s global presence was a positive in terms of competition in the job market and a positive brand image.

- ✓ “Some areas that we are focusing on when trying to build our perception is diversity and internationalization.”

The global presence gave international students more options in regard to places to work. Sixty-nine percent of the sample agreed to some degree with a score of 3.9. The score was also the highest compared to all of the survey questions.

The least positive response was to the Ericsson as a source of inspiration for creativity and passion, compared to a lack of a match or recognition of skills or talents. The survey outcomes indicated that the students and recent graduates did not perceive the Ericsson brand as a potential source of creative, innovative employment. It was unclear of the opinions in regard to creativity and innovation were based upon the old brand image or the most recent one. The reasons for their responses were not available as the survey questions were closed ended. However, some did agree with the option that they did not possess sufficient information to rate Ericsson Sweden in any respect regarding their expectations.

The students and recent graduates expressed a perception of Ericsson Sweden as somewhat behind-the-times in terms of technological innovation and engagement with the technology communities. The overall perception of the company was neutral, the students neither agreed or disagreed to the inquiries about Ericsson Sweden. The most important concerns were competitive salaries and a balanced work life.

As expected, the employees who participated in the interviews had much more detailed information regarding the internal operations of the company and suggestions for improvement. However, many expressed that they had little or no knowledge of the external efforts to rebrand the company. All of the interviewees agreed that Ericsson Sweden seemed to be building a brand image for long term employment but with less focus on contributions to society and diversity. The majority of the participants in the interviews agreed that Ericsson's brand image was still in need of rebranding, along with other adjustments to accommodate the transition.

6.1 Conclusions

The transition of the tech firm nature of work has become common as technology advances and the global population becomes more adept at machine learning (Gardiner, 2016). However, re-branding, or the transition is more complex than changing the nature of the work; but rather includes an effective communication of the changes to the brand through information sharing and marketing (Folkesson, Johanson & Henningsson 2018). It was expected that the collected data would provide an assessment of Ericsson Sweden as an employer from the perspective of students and employee representatives that would provide insight into how Ericsson may effectively adapt the marketing strategy to attract quality potential talent. It has also been designed to identify ways to further promote a positive image of Ericsson Sweden as an employer. The following chapter features the answers to the research questions that were set to reach the purpose of the present study. Following them, the mind map (see Figure) illustrating the mentioned recommendations and areas of improvement is presented.

1. What is the current perception of Ericsson as an employer from the perspective of students and recent graduates in Sweden, and how it differs from the case company's internal vision?

The collection of data among the students of IT universities in Sweden and recent-graduates of the same field has shown that the respondents do not have the updated brand image of Ericsson in their minds when choosing the potential employers.

- ✓ "Main challenge from my point of view is to re-brand the company and get rid of old image (producing only telecom hardware and mobile phones) so that it is not only employees that are aware of pure software company but the rest of IT community, especially new talents."

The case company is still seen as the one, producing the telecommunication hardware and phones, rather than the one focusing on software and bringing the latest technology to the market of IT solutions. This perception from the student perspective opposites the company's current strategy and development plans on the market from the internal perspective. However, the global presence of the firm and its internationalization opportunities were found to be the points that both external and internal respondents agree on, which provides a strong fundamental for the further branding actions as the strengths need to be maintained over time to avoid having them lost during the transition process.

- ✓ "I think lack of Ericsson products/services visibility in peoples life is a bigger limitation."

The global scope of operations has been one of Ericsson's fundamentals for many decades, which still leads to the conclusion that the new brand image was not communicated effectively to the members outside the organization, and the products has not been visible enough in the daily life.

2. What are the possible reasons behind Ericsson losing its position and popularity in employer ratings in Sweden?

The employer brand image was not seen as a subject of high importance by the students, which also followed the confidence in no significant impact of changing brand image on the choice of potential employers. However, the communication of company's values plays the key role in advertising the workplace among the potential candidates in current competitive environment, and the lack of clear communication has caused the situation when Ericsson's position in the ratings started to gradually decrease in Sweden.

- ✓ "...find ways to communicate what we do and the kind of opportunities that are available in the company"

The current company's strategy with its benefits, unique career opportunities and experiences should be communicated clearly to young talents in order to stand out from the competitors on the recruitment market.

3. What adjustments to the branding and marketing strategies can be done in order to raise employer brand awareness among potential applicants and strengthen its position as an attractive workplace among young talents on the market?

The primary strengths that were noticed by both external and internal respondents were found out to be the strong base salary along with the global presence.

- ✓ "We are in the technology forefront, as well as the process/method forefront. We successfully develop and deploy complex products globally. That knowledge is attractive and valid for many employers."

Therefore, the strengths should be maintained by being emphasised in the branding activities, which can feature more events towards the international potential candidates and focus on the worldwide career possibilities along with the international experience in daily working life. The information sharing processes should be improved both internally and externally in order to raise employer image awareness. Internally, the brand image was communicated successfully during the interview stage with the potential employees but is not involved in the employees' further working processes. As many agree on the improvements due to the Brand Ambassador team actions, its activities can be expanded towards branding not only externally, but also to the members of organization. The benefits for participating in the team's development can be introduced to engage the members of diverse departments in the process. Internal communication channels can be also reviewed in order to provide the regular updates to all levels of employees about the current changes and the latest improvements.

- ✓ "The approach to building a strong employer brand has changed over the last few years—as has its impact on hiring and who's responsible for overseeing it. Employee engagement and advocacy is very important."

Employee engagement and employee advocacy channels are the key elements of the successful implementation of internal branding, as well as the training regarding the perception and reaction to change, if needed.

Externally, the primary mission is to analyse the system of current values and develop the strong value proposition, which then will be communicated to the potential candidates. The strong employer brand is not only important to maintain the position of an attractive workplace but mainly to have a possibility to attract and retain the right talent and the candidates with the profiles matching the current strategy and the needed sets of skills and knowledge. Open Source Community contribution plays the significant role in increasing the awareness of Ericsson's current values and operations, as well as the participation in major IT forums and student fairs, which have been seen one of the main channels for communication with potential candidates.

- ✓ "I'd say that they should send more technical people to career fairs at technical universities … It is also nice to actually meet people you might end up working with."

- ✓ "People are far more likely to trust a company based on what its employee's experience and what current employees have to say than on what is recruitment advertising about the company."

However, it is crucial to shift the focus from using the students ambassadors as representatives to engaging current employees into the career fairs. As real-life working experience tends to produce more trust to the employer branding, it is important that actual members of the organization can have the possibility to share their experiences to the public. Recognition of unique talent, variety of interesting working assignments and projects, creativity were seen as the most important factors for students to consider the employer the most attractive but the same characteristics were seen as lacking in Ericsson’s image according the the young talents. Therefore, it is important to introduce new training experiences that are unique from the competitors as well as improve the current educational activities, and communicate them clearly to the external candidates. The advantages of the international working environment, great work-life balance practises and reward systems should also be identified and promoted intensively among the potential applicants. Digital channels and the presence on the social media can be the subjects that need a closer attention to, while these actions will also facilitate the messaging of Ericsson’s corporate values and correct targeting of it.

The following mind-map illustrates the summary of the recommendations given after the conclusions have been draw and shows possible actions and improvements that can be implemented by the company’s branding department in order to strengthen the employer brand image (see Figure 17).

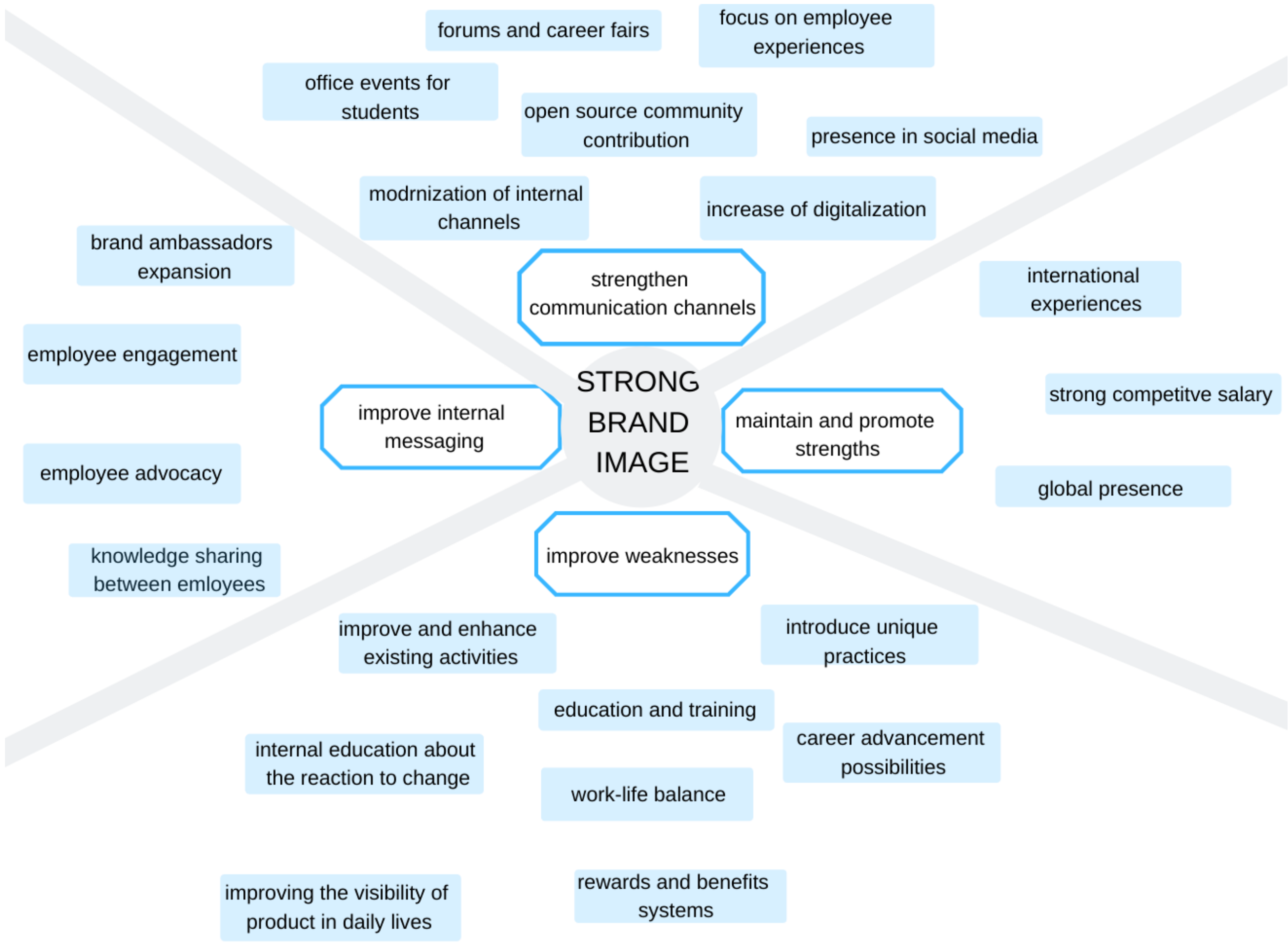

Figure 17. Areas of improvement to strengthen company's brand image

6.2 Assessment of Research Process and Quality

The research study has been completed using the data collection from the number of the respondents according to the initial research process plan. However, the primary challenge in the data collection was the requirement for a large sample for the quantitative section of data collection, which appeared to be slightly more complicated than planned. As the quantitative study requires a large population sample, the time framework should be adjusted accordingly, taking in consideration the limitations for reaching the target group (students and recent graduates). One of the main reasons is the lack of access to the university internal mailing lists or any databases, which is caused by the latest GDPR legal framework. Therefore, the responses should be collected manually and the appropriate timing for the goals should be set. Moreover, it is crucial to take confidentiality in the consideration when dealing with the opinion questionnaires about the potential employer. In the process of conducting the research, the author has paid close attention to making the process of data collection as comfortable as possible for the respondents. However, keeping the respondents informed about the anonymity of the surveys can be underestimated and should be stated in every invitation for the participants.

Reliability and Validity of Findings

A survey and interviews were administered to two sample populations to generate content and data for analysis. Both the survey and interview research instruments have been identified as widely used, relevant, reliable and valid (Taherdoost, 20169). This section provides an assessment of the validity and reliability of the method, content, and the outcomes for this study.

The validity of this study consists of a consideration of how much the scoring from the selected samples represent the population of IT students and recent graduates; and the employees of Ericsson Sweden (Bajpal & Bajpal, 2014). The majority of the participants were of Swedish nationality; however, several nationalities were represented. The majority were also between the ages of 18 and 24 years old, and the sample was fairly divided between male and female. The education demographic consisted of students currently in a Masters degree program; or recent graduates from the IT university. The experience among the employees who participated in the interviews was fairly divided as some had years of experience in more than one position, while others had little more than one year. Thus, it is deemed that the research method and sampling used for this study is valid.

The reliability of the outcomes of this study consist of the consistency in data collection, analysis and interpretation. Two types of data collection were used: a qualitative interview of Ericsson employees; and a quantitative collection of responses from a random sample of students and recent graduates in the IT field. The dual nature of the data collection approach increases the accuracy of the results generated from the open-ended questions from the interview content and the closed-end questions used to collect the survey responses (Bajpal & Bajpal, 2014). Therefore, it can be concluded that the research method and sampling used for this study is reliable.

In addition to the previous considerations, reliability and validity are both related to quality. As a result, a modified version of Downs and Black's (1998) quality matrix was used (see Appendix 2). The research instruments were provided to 20 participants to check for clarity and ease of understanding. These participants are not included in the final results but were only used for ensuring the research instruments were acceptable for use. With the responses of the questions, Cronbach's alpha was calculated to ensure that the research instruments were reliable and valid, deemed to be so if the Cronbach's alpha result was over 0.70.

6.3 Recommendations for Future Research

The subject covered in this research paper includes a large number of concepts and covers general assumptions about company's brand image, focusing on a broad picture rather than specific perspectives. As the case company plays a significant role on the market, there are many opportunities to narrow-down the research regarding its image as an employer and review separate target groups such as foreign potential applicants or female young professionals in technological and IT industry. Moreover, the adjustment of Ericsson's brand image can be assessed from the long-term perspective and analyse taking in consideration rapidly changing market and business environment.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Interview questions for case company's representatives

1. What is your position in Ericsson and how many years of experience do you have?
2. In your opinion, what kind of employer brand is the company attempting to build currently? Can you notice its focus on some particular areas (such as internationalization, strong competitive salary, long-term and stable employment, diverse projects and a variety of tasks?
3. Ericsson Packet Core in Sweden is now more of a software company rather than a telecom company. What are the challenges (with regard to employer branding) do you think the company is facing at the moment because of this change?
4. Do you think that the changing scope of operations might affect and limit the ability of Ericsson to successfully attract and retain new talent?
5. For you as for an employee, are a current brand image, values and company vision communicated clearly? Did the company's brand image play an important role when you were considering Ericsson as an employer?
6. Do you think that Ericsson's brand image is communicated clearly to the people outside the organization as well? Why or why not?
7. What do you think is the reason that makes Ericsson Packet Core in Sweden attractive among other potential employers?
8. Can you say that your experience of working in Ericsson matches with your expectations when you were applying to the position?
9. From your point of view, what actions would help Ericsson to become more attractive as an employer in this period of change?

Appendix 2. Modified quality matrix

The modified quality matrix is based on Downs and Black (1998) questionnaire for assurance of quality in research instruments. While this matrix is commonly used for the medical field, it can be adapted, as done in the present study, for other disciplines. To begin with, the scoring for each question is either 0 or 1, where 0 = not applicable or no and 1 = yes. The results for each question are summed. Therefore, there will be 20 responses per question. The highest score per question is 20. The responses will also be summed for the overall matrix for all participants and averaged to determine the average overall score, as well as using the sum of the individual questions to determine Cronbach's alpha. The overall score is ranked as 0 to 5 = poor quality; 6 to 10 = moderate quality; 11 to 15 = high quality; and 16 to 20 = superior quality.

Question/Statement	0 (NA/No)	1 (Yes)
The research instrument has a logical flow.		
The research instrument makes sense.		
The research instrument is easy to answer.		
The research instrument is clear.		
The research instrument can be responded to quickly.		

Appendix 3. Survey questions for the students and recent graduates

This appendix includes the questions for the quantitative research instrument: questionnaire for students and recent graduates in Sweden in IT field. It consists of two parts – demographic data and a Likert scale questions

Demographics section:

1. Gender
2. Studies Completed
3. Age
4. Country
5. Are you considering Ericsson as a potential employer?

Sections based on A Likert Scale:

Directions: Please provide the most accurate response on scale of 1 to 5, where 1 = least agreeable; 2 = somewhat agreeable; 3 = neutral; 4 = agreeable; 5 = most agreeable.

6. Awareness of Ericsson's position as an employer:

- Brand image is important for me to consider the company as a potential employer
- There is enough information available for me to follow the latest changes in Ericsson's current operations
- Changes in the scope of the company (such as transferring from telecom to software) impact my decision to consider the company as a potential employer
- A changing brand image will discourage me from seeking employment at the company
- I do not understand if Ericsson's scope of operations currently matches my skills
- Ericsson's vision and values are communicated in a clear way

7. Factors influencing the choice of potential employer:

- Competitive base salary is the most important factor for me when choosing Ericsson as the employer
- I care more about ensuring that my needs will be met by my employer than about the brand image
- I believe that Ericsson's brand values match my expectations
- Ericsson is attractive for me as an employer as its technologies excite me and the variety of tasks encourages creativity and passion
- Ericsson is attractive for me as an employer as it encourages long-term employment and recognizes my talent
- Ericsson is attractive for me as an employer as it is able to encourage and motivate my engagement
- Ericsson is attractive for me as an employer because of the wide international scope of operations

Appendix 4. Invitation to participate / introduction for participants

The following appendix contains a copy of the printed and electronic introductory information for quantitative and qualitative participants in order to briefly explain the background and the purpose of the study.

“Ericsson Packet Core in Sweden is now more of a software company rather than telecom company. As a result, the brand image needs to be updated regarding the latest changes in the company’s strategy and position on the market. However, it is unclear how students and recent graduates perceive Ericsson as an employer based on the company’s current vision and strategic goals. Company management has noted that the internal vision of the company might differ with the external perception. To address concerns regarding the differences in perceptions, the primary purpose of the present study is to determine if Ericsson is considered to be an attractive workplace for young professionals, as well as identify differences between the perception of Ericsson’s current brand image of students, as compared to employees. It is expected that the collected data will include an assessment of Ericsson as an employer from the perspective of students, perceptions of current brand activities by management representatives, and proposals on ways to effectively adapt the marketing strategy in order to attract potential talent and promote a positive image of Ericsson as an employer.

All participants have the right to privacy. The data will be aggregated and only you will know your unique responses. All participants have the right to decline to participate further in the study by exiting the questionnaire. Neither students or post-graduates will have direct employment benefits from the conduction of the present study, nor will your participation yield negative feedback from either school or company. The survey will be used for research purposes for Bachelor's student thesis.”