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Attraction of young sales professionals through employer branding

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ABSTRACT:

Yksi yritysten suurimmista haasteista nykypäivänä on houkutella ja sitouttaa osaavaa henkilökuntaa. Kilpailu osaajista kovenee ja samanaikaisesti nuoret Y-sukupolven edustajat arvioivat kriittisesti potentiaalisia työnantajia jo ennen hakupäätöstä. Kilpailu osaajista on erityisen kovaa nuorten ammattilaisten keskuudessa, ja ammattitaitoiset myyjät ovat välttämättömyys lähes jokaiselle yritykselle. Työnantajamielikuvamarkkinointi nähdään yhtenä tärkeänä strategisena työkaluna nuorten osaajien houkuttelussa, sillä työnantajamielikuvalla on löydetty olevan suora vaikutus siihen, kuinka houkuttelevana työnantaja koetaan. Tästä huolimatta työnantajamielikuvamarkkinoinnista myyjien osaajamarkkinoilla on rajallinen määrä kirjallisuutta. Tämän lisäksi, kohderyhmän ollessa nuoret ammattilaiset, uusia sukupolvia tulee työmarkkinoille jatkuvasti, ja on tärkeää ottaa huomioon eri sukupolvien tarpeet. Tämä tutkimus on toteutettu Y-sukupolven edustajien näkökulmasta, sillä aiempien tutkimusten mukaan, väestörakenteen muutosten myötä, he ovat työelämän tulevaisuus.

Tämän tutkimuksen tarkoituksena on selvittää, miten nuoria myyntialan ammattilaisia voidaan houkutella työnantajamielikuvamarkkinoinnin avulla ja mikä houkuttelee näitä Y-sukupolven edustajia myynnin pariin. Tutkimusmetodina käytettiin laadullista menetelmää ja tutkimus toteutettiin haastattelemalla kahdeksaa uransa alkuvaiheessa olevaa myyntialan ammattilaista. Tutkimusongelman selvittämiseen käytettiin seuraavia tutkimuskysymyksiä: 'Miten työnantajamielikuva vaikuttaa nuorten myyntiammattilaisten halukkuuteen hakea yritykseen töihin?' ja 'Mitkä tekijät houkuttelevat nuoria ammattilaisia myynnin pariin?'. Kirjallisuus työnantajamielikuvamarkkinoinnista ja nuorten ammattilaisten rekrytoinnista toimivat työn teoreettisina viitekehyksinä. Kirjallisuuden avulla käsiteltiin myös Y-sukupolveen liitettäviä ominaispiirteitä. Tulokset on analysoitu abduktiivisesti, eli osittain aineistosta päättelemällä ja osittain hyödyntämällä aikaisempia teorioita ja tutkimuksia.

Tutkimuksen tulokset osoittavat, että työnantajan brändillä on merkittävä rooli osaajien houkuttelemisessa. Nuoret myyntialan ammattilaiset kokevat vetovoimaiseksi ne yritykset, joilla on vahva ja positiivinen työnantajabrändi. Y-sukupolven edustajille on tärkeää työskennellä yrityksessä, joka jakaa heidän arvonsa ja yrityskulttuurilla on suuri vaikutus hakijan käsitykseen yrityksestä työnantajana. Nuoret ammattilaiset selvittävät työnantajasta tietoja etukäteen ja sillä, miten nykyiset työntekijät puhuvat työnantajasta, on suuri vaikutus siihen, kuinka houkuttelevana työnantaja koetaan. Myyntityö nähdään kiinnostavana erityisesti roolin itsenäisyyden ja sen tarjoamien ansaintamahdollisuuksien takia. Näiden lisäksi myyntityö nähdään erinomaisena tapana aloittaa ura yritysmaailmassa ja nuoret ammattilaiset hakeutuvat myynnin pariin työn oletettujen verkostoitumismahdollisuuksien takia. Tutkimuksen tulokset osoittavat, että houkutellakseen nuoria myynnin ammattilaisia, yritysten kannattaisi panostaa vahvan työnantajabrändin rakentamiseen sekä varmistaa positiivinen työntekijäkokemus.

Contents

1   Introduction

Nowadays, one of the business management's greatest challenge is to attract and retain skilled personnel. The competition for talent is becoming more and more intense and, at the same time, millennials are more willing than ever to switch employers if their expectations are not met or even exceeded. Employer branding is seen as one of the key strategic tools to fight the war for talent as the employer brand image is said to have a direct impact on how appealing an organization is perceived and how willing people are to apply. Two of the main factors resulting in highly competitive candidate markets, or the "war for talent" as many writers tend to say, are demographic shift and the mismatch between what people choose to study and the skills the companies need. (Björkman, Evans & Pucik, 2016; Rosethorn, 2009; Mosley, 2014.) Labor markets are experiencing an extensive demographic shift as the global workforce is aging and new generations will be taking over. According to predictions, in 2025 75% of the global workforce are millennials. (Hobart & Sendek, 2014.) Millennials are not like any other generation before them and for companies to succeed, it is crucial to attract, hire and retain them. As the needs of the labor market are changing, and the skills today's candidates have, do not match these needs, the competition for talent intensifies. To recruit skilled employees, companies need to focus on increasing their attractiveness. The importance of employer brand and reputation is of high importance and companies need to strategically work on their employer brand to differentiate themselves from competitors.

This first chapter of the thesis begins by presenting the background and motives of the research, as well as the research gap in the field. This is followed by the introduction of the research questions and the delimitations of the study. After that, the key concepts are explained, and the structure of the thesis is presented.

1.1   Study background

With worldwide skill shortages, companies across the globe have faced the challenge of attracting new employees with the desired skills and competencies (Björkman et al.,

2016, p. 23). In practice, this means that companies have more open job positions than there are available candidates. Nowadays companies have to often "sell" themselves to the job seekers – not the other way around. (YPAI, 2018, p. 13.) The demand-supply imbalance is particularly pronounced in the market for young professionals (Björkman et al., 2016, p. 172). Today's labor market is undergoing an enormous shift with the economic growth, increasing demand for new roles and skills, and the mismatch between what people choose to study and what is needed in the labor market. Additionally, especially in Europe, the demographic trend of the population aging and baby boomers retiring at a higher rate than graduates are entering the labor markets has had a major impact on the available workforce. By 2030, in most European countries the proportion of older employees (55 to 64 years) will rise to 55% of the overall labor force. The changes in the labor market have resulted in a shortage of qualified job candidates for open positions and this has led to a 'war for talent' that is only expected to rise in the upcoming years. (Björkman et al., p. 23; Rosethorn, 2009, p. 829; YPAI Europe, 2019, p. 3).

As the attraction of qualified candidates is becoming increasingly more competitive, it is crucial for companies to consciously brand their firm to potential and existing employees. The challenge for organizations is to differentiate themselves from their competitors to attract and retain talents. (Knox & Freeman, 2006, p. 695; Rosethorn, 2009, p. 82). Even though one solution for organizations could be to train the required skills and competencies inhouse, many employers should focus more on strategically attracting the available workforce. (YPAI, 2018, p. 5.) The findings of researches conducted by consulting companies also highlight the importance of an employer's brand. Manpower group Solutions (2016) surveyed nearly 4500 job seekers globally to better understand candidate preferences. More than half of the candidates see the brand and reputation of the potential employer of high importance and one in five candidates is mainly motivated by brands and the brands are seen as one of the top three motivators for their career choices. (Manpower, 2016, p. 3). Recruitment media LinkedIn surveyed 2250 recruiters to gain a deeper understanding of the impacts a strong employer brand may have on the cost per hire. The findings of their research show that, on average, the cost

per hire was two times lower in companies that have a strong employer brand. (Gultekin, 2011.) However, as the competition of the knowledgeable personnel is tougher than ever, a famous brand is not enough. Companies have to consider and communicate the differentiating factors that attract the right talent. (YPAI, 2018, p. 16.)

The existing literature (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Björkman, 2016; YPAI, 2018) supports the assumption that a strong employer brand is of high importance. Shavitz (2017), Ingram et al. (2015) and Williams (2017) support this assumption and especially emphasizes the importance of it from the perspective of attracting salespeople. Great salespeople are difficult to find, and the market is competitive. Good salespeople are a necessity to any successful business and the importance of hiring sales talent is high. However, finding and hiring of these sales talents can be challenging. (Ingram et al., 2015, 14; Williams, 2017; Shavitz, 2017.) For companies to be able to attract sales talents, they need to understand the reasons why people are attracted to sales. (Jobber & Lancster, 2006, p. 382.) From the demographic perspective, an organization's future success is dependent on their ability to attract millennials. Millennials, meaning people born between the early 1980s and the late 1990s think, act and react differently to any other age group. For companies to attract and retain top talent, it is crucial to understand the Millennials. (Espinoza & Ukleja, 2015, p. 13; Hobart & Sendek, 2014, p. 13; Evans, 2016, 3; Rosethorn, 2009, pp. 14,18.).

Employer branding is a widely researched topic and some researches about sales personnel recruitment can be found. However, hardly any studies are combining these two and focusing on employer branding especially from the sales talent perspective. Additionally, as the demographic changes emphasize the importance of millennial talent attraction, this thesis aims at contributing to the understanding of what are the factors attracting the millennial talents in the sales field. Moreover, the focus of this thesis is on the young professionals with 0-5 years of work experience after graduation, and therefore, some of the older studies might not be applicable as the targeted talent and their preferences continuously evolve. The purpose of this study is to reduce the research gap of employer branding in the context of young sales professionals. This thesis aims at

building upon and extending the employer branding literature. In the following subchapter, the research questions presented and explained.

1.2 Research question and objectives

The objective of this thesis is to investigate how young sales professionals perceive potential employers and how employer's brand impacts on their willingness to apply. Moreover, to better understand how to attract these sales talents, this study explores what attracts young professionals to sales. The purpose of this thesis is culminated into the following research question:

"How to attract young sales professionals through employer branding?"

The research question is supported by the following sub-questions, guiding both the theoretical and the empirical part of the research:

"How does the employer brand of a company impact on young sales professionals' willingness to apply?"

"What are the key factors attracting young professionals to sales?"

By answering these research questions, the author aims to contribute to the knowledge base within employer branding. The following subchapter will continue to explain the research by describing the limitations of the study.

1.3 Delimitations

The theory of the present study will focus on employer branding and employee attraction. Deep understanding of these topics is crucial to answer the research question. The underlying concepts of recruitment and selection are also presented but the empirical part of the study will focus is strictly in the attraction part to maintain relevancy. Also,

as important as it is to attract top talents to an organization it is to retain them (Björkman, et al., 2016, p. 23). Everything that enhances the employee experience can be expected to lead to a better employer brand through word-of-mouth. (Rosethorn, 2009, p. 20.) However, due to the focus of this master's thesis, the perspective of talent retention is excluded from the scope.

With regard to the empirical part of this thesis, several limitations can be identified. One of the key limitations is on the point of view as this thesis will only focus on how external employer brands are perceived by sales talent. The study is done from the candidate's point of view, examining employer brand's impact on the young sales professional's willingness to apply. What is excluded is the employer's perspective on the topic as well as the experiences of a more experienced candidate. Moreover, the key factors attracting these candidates to begin their career in sales are examined to completely understand how to attract these talents. The scope of the targeted talents is young professionals at the starting point of their career. Young professionals, as a concept in this context, are people with 0-5 years of work experience after graduation (YPAI, 2018, pp. 6-7). People with more than five years of work experience after graduation are excluded. The focus group is also limited by generation, and this thesis focuses only on millennials. Millennials, also known as the generation Y, consist of people born between the early 1980s and the late 1990s think. (Evans, 2016, p. 3.) Young professionals of other generations are excluded from the scope of this thesis. By focusing on the millennial sales talents at the beginning of their career, this thesis aims at providing a comprehensive insight to talent attraction in the competitive talent market of young sales potentials.

1.4   Key Concepts

In this chapter, the key concepts of the study are introduced. This is done to increase clarity and to explain the terminology that is used throughout the thesis.

Employer brand:

Employer brand is the full range of thoughts and feelings that people associate with the company as an employer (Mosley, 2014, p. 4). Employer brand establishes the identity of the firm as an employer. It is the differentiation of a company's characteristics as an employer compared to its competitors and it highlights the different aspects of the firm's employment offerings. (Backaus & Tikoo, 2004, p. 502).

Employer branding:

Employer branding is defined as a targeted, long-term strategy to manage the awareness and perceptions of employees, potential employees and related stakeholders with regards to a particular firm. (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004, p. 501). Berthon, Ewing and Hah (2005, p. 153) define employer branding as the sum of company efforts to communicate their desirability as a place to work to their existing and prospective employees.

Employer attractiveness:

According to Berthon et al. (2005, p. 156) employer attractiveness is the conceived benefits that a potential employee sees in working for a specific organization. Employee attractiveness is closely related to employer brand as, generally speaking, the more attractive an employer is observed to be by potential employees, the stronger and positive that organization's employer brand is. (Berthon et al., 2005, p. 156.)

Brand awareness:

Brand awareness is related to the strength of the brand in people's minds. It reflects people's ability to recall the brand under different conditions (Keller, 2009, p. 143).

Young professionals:

Young professionals are defined as people with 0-5 years of work experience after graduation (YPAI, 2018, pp. 6-7).

Millennials:

Millennials, also referred to as the Generation Y, are the people born between the early 1980s and the late 1990s (Evans, 2016, p. 3).

1.5   Structure of the study

The **first** chapter of the thesis presents Introduction to the study. It will give an overview to the topic, identify the research gap and justify the need for the research. The research question and objectives are presented, and the key definitions and the structure of the thesis are explained. The delimitations of the research are also presented in this chapter.

The **second** chapter that will introduce the theories behind employer branding. The existing literature and fundamental theories regarding branding, employer branding and recruitment marketing are reviewed.

The **third** chapter of the thesis focuses on explaining the targeted talent market from a theoretical point of view. The generation Y and the unique characteristics of it are presented and discussed. The targeted talent is also presented from the perspective of sales field. Finally, the third chapter will provide a conclusion of the theory.

The **fourth** chapter explains the research methodology. The research approach and method are defined and justified. The data collection and analysis methods are presented, and an overview of the case companies is presented. Lastly, the reliability, validity and the ethics of the study are evaluated. The purpose of this chapter is to increase traceability and transparency of the research.

The **fifth** chapter presents the findings of the study. The results of the interviews are presented, analyzed and discussed. The theory is compared to the findings and possible similarities, differences and conflicts are described.

The **sixth** and final chapter of the research will provide a conclusion of the key findings of this research. In this chapter, theoretical contributions and managerial implications are given, limitations of the research are discussed and suggestions for future research ideas are provided.

2 Employer brand

As introduced in the first chapter, talent attraction is becoming increasingly challenging in the highly competitive candidate market. To succeed in the 'war for talent' companies need to focus more on employer branding to appeal to the right target audiences. This chapter focuses on employer branding and on the related concepts such as employee value proposition and recruitment marketing. At first, the term employer brand is explained and different definitions to it are presented compared and reviewed. This is followed by a brief introduction to the underlying branding theories to build a solid foundation for the research. Next, the chapter focuses on employer branding in practice and discusses the implementation of it and the benefits of it. The final part of the chapter will focus on recruitment marketing and other channels for employer branding.

2.1 Defining employer brand

This chapter will provide a definition to the concept of employer brand. There is not only one commonly acknowledged definition to employer brand (Mosley, 2014, pp. 3-4). Employer brand as a term was first conceptualized by Ambler & Barrow (1996) as they applied branding techniques to human resource management. Ewing et al. (2002) define the term as the functional, economic and psychological benefits provided by the employment and labeled with the employing company. Ewing et al. (2002, pp. 11-12.) Walker (2007, p. 3) also focuses on the positive and more regulated aspect of employer brand as he defines it as a set of mainly intangible qualities that differentiates the company as an employer. It is an employment experience promise that is created to appeal to the kind of people who would most likely succeed and prosper in the organizational culture of that company. (Walker, 2007, p. 3.) The practice of employer branding has developed notably over past years and it is increasingly recognized as a key tool in creating competitive advantage (Mosley, 2014, p. 8).

Employer brand as defined by Mosley (2014, pp. 4, 9) is the full range of thoughts and feelings, both positive and negative, that people associate with the company. Based on this definition, every company has an employer brand, whether they actively work on it or not. From this perspective, employer brand is ultimately based on people's perceptions. Whether the firm actively identifies and plans their employer branding strategies or not, people will anyway create their interpretation of it and thus, every company has an employer brand. The brand image of a company is in the eye of the beholder - in simplified terms, it is an image of the company that is built based on information from all different sources. (Knox & Freeman, 2006, p. 697; Mosley, 2014, pp. 3-9). This perception-based definition is argued to be valuable since it gives a more realistic measure of the organization's reputation and brand as an employer. Employer brand can also be viewed as a multidimensional entity where different aspects of corporate brand have an impact on each other. Customer brand is traditionally expected to increase customer attraction and employer brand is expected to attract employees. However, Mosley (2007) presented an integrated brand model connecting all of the different dimensions of a brand. Figure 1 below illustrates the integrated brand model.
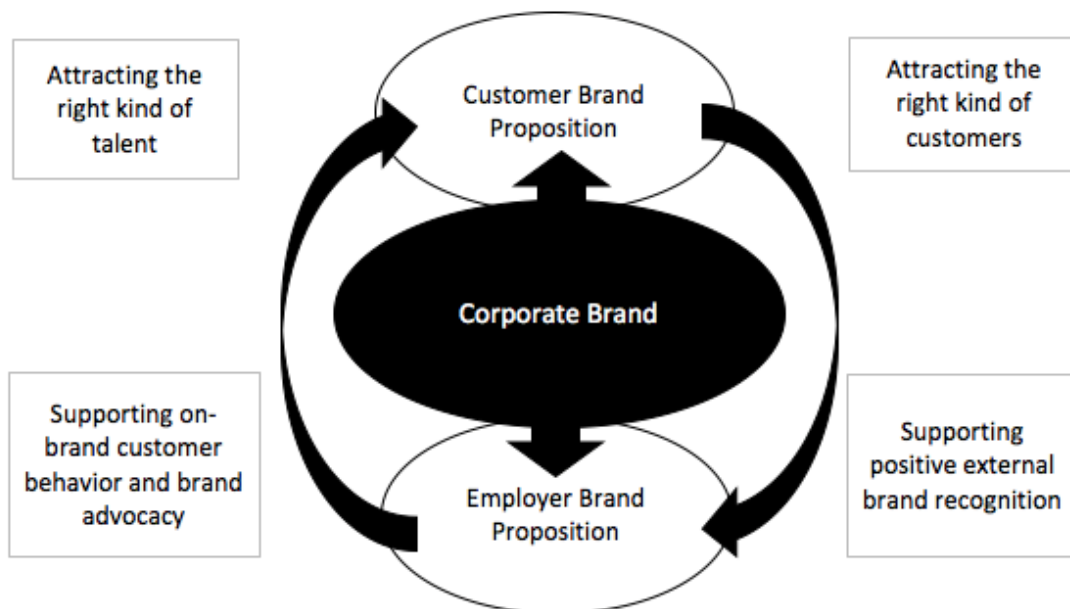

Figure 1. Integrated Brand Model (Mosley, 2007, p. 130)

Backhaus & Tikoo (2004, p. 501) take both internal and external employer branding into account in their definition:

Employer Branding represents a firm's efforts to promote, both within and outside the firm, a clear view of what makes it different and desirable as an employer.

This definition is widely acknowledged and gives a thorough description of how the general concept of branding is strategically applied to human resource management. External employer branding focuses on attracting talents to join the organization whereas the internal employer branding aims to increase employee engagement. (Backhaus & Tikoo 2004, p. 501.) Rosethorn (2009, pp. 19-20) supports the all-round definition to the concept by defining it as a two-way deal between a company and its employees. Employer brand is the reason people choose to join a company and the reasons they choose to stay.

As this review implicates, employer brand can be defined in various ways. Some distinct internal and external employer brand from each other while some tie these two together. Others might describe it as something that every company has whether actively working on it or not and some define it as a strategic tool that is regulated solely by the employing company. Additionally, the connection between customer and employer brand is discussed and the corporate brand's impact on employer brand is arguably strong. What all the definitions have in common is that a positive employer brand is beneficial for every company and therefore it should be pursued. In the context of this thesis, a combination of different definitions to employer brand is being used. Employer brand in this thesis comprises external employer brand with an assumption that every company has an employer brand whether strategically working on it or not. Corporate brand's strong impact on employer brand is acknowledged throughout this thesis but not investigated further. In the following subchapter, the branding theories are presented and explained.

2.2 Branding

To fully grasp employer brand, it is important to understand the underlying branding theories from where the idea of it is originally derived. This chapter gives a brief introduction to branding in general and into building brand image and brand awareness. Brands exist in the hearts and minds of people and they have the power to captivate, interest and communicate (Rosethorn, 2009, p. 73). The marketing environment has changed enormously from what it was 50, 30 or perhaps even as little as 10 years ago and branding has become a key marketing priority for most companies (Keller, 2009, p. 139). Brand, as defined by The American Marketing Association, is a name, term, sign, symbol or design, or a combination of them, intended to identify the goods or services of a seller to differentiate it from their competitors (Kotler, 2000, p. 404). Aaker (1991, p. 68-79) defines branding as the image of a product, organization, person or symbol. Kotler (2000, p. 394) defines a product in business context to be either a physical object, information or experiences that are offered to market to fulfil a want or a need. Knox & Freeman (2006, p. 697) define brand as a multidimensional entity and as a consumer's understanding of a product. When applied to recruitment, the consumers are the potential candidates, and the brand is the recruiters as they are the ones advocating the company's values and attributes during the recruitment process.

According to Keller (2009, p. 140), one major benefit of building a strong brand is the increase it has on the effectiveness of other marketing activities a company performs. In general, this means that as a result of a strong brand, consumers are more receptive to the additional communications of a brand and they are more likely to process these communications more favorably. This will also increase the likelihood of the consumer recalling the marketing communications of a company. (Keller, 2009, p. 140). A strong brand will also help build corporate image and associations, making the process of launching new brands easier (Kotler, 2000, pp. 407-408). According to Keller (2009, pp. 142-143), customer-based brand is determined by the brand knowledge in the consumer's mind in response to their marketing for the brand. Thus, brand knowledge is

not the facts about the brand but rather the thoughts, feelings, perceptions, images, experiences that become linked to the brand in the minds of the consumers. (Keller, 2009, p. 143.) Corporate brand is closely connected to employer brand and their values and purposes should be aligned all along (Mosley 2014, p. 35).

If a brand and its identity define how a company wants their brand to be viewed, the brand image describe how the brand is actually viewed (Aaker, 1991, pp. 68-79). A favorable brand image is created by linking positive associations to the brand through attributes and benefits. In addition to marketing activities, associations of brands can be developed for example through internet, word-of-mouth, personal assumptions or other personal identifications with the brand. (Keller 2013, pp. 76-79). Brand image affects people's attitudes and behaviors, and a positive image can create support for a company. Image is a mixture of appearances and actions and these two need to be aligned. Brand image combined with performance is what defines a successful corporate brand. (Ind, 1997, p. 2). By successfully building the brand image and positioning the brand, a company can create competitive advantage and give the customer a "reason why" to buy the product or service. This can lead to the customer recalling the brand in a situation beneficial for the company. Market research about target customers and competitors as well as understanding how the brand differs from others is required in brand positioning. (Keller, 2013, pp. 68-79).

Brand awareness refers to the level of existence a brand has on consumers' minds. It can be measured according to the extent to which the consumer remembers the brand. (Aaker, 1996, p. 10.) Brand awareness is the expectation that the customer can recognize the brand and that they can recall it when asked about a specific product class. Creating brand awareness is the first step to be taken in creating brand equity, as a brand image will not exist without awareness. (Keller, 2013, pp. 73-76). A brand name can work as a guarantee of quality from the seller to the consumer about the services they offer. A well-known and familiar brand reduces the risk of the buyer and makes the decision-making process simpler. Customers tend to prefer those brands that are known and familiar to them and thus, the importance of brand awareness is of high importance. (Patil,

2017, p. 15). Anything that causes the consumer to notice the brand can help increase brand awareness. With an awareness of a brand name the company can typically attach other attributes to it. Brand awareness is the ability of the potential buyer to recognize the brand. This can vary from being completely unaware of the brand to top-of-mind awareness and the assumption that the brand is the only one in its category. (Aaker, 1991, pp. 61-63.) The Figure 2 below illustrates the different levels of brand awareness.

Top of Mind

Brand Recall

Brand Recognition

Unaware of Brand
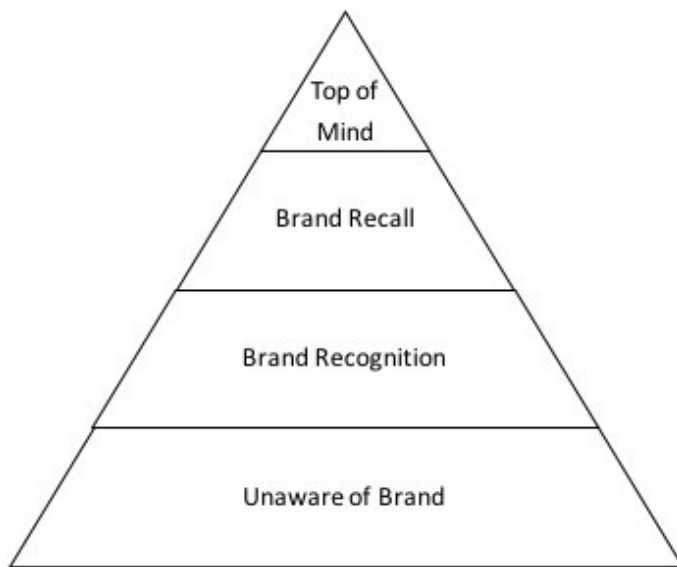
Figure 2. Brand awareness pyramid (Aaker, 1991).

Building brand awareness and taking care of the company brand image can make people more aware of a company and view it more favorably. A positive brand image can create interest towards an organization, and it can help both in customer and employee attraction. The following chapter will focus on how companies should utilize branding in the employment context.

2.3 Employer branding

The importance of brands has long been recognized in the field of marketing and HR has clearly been influenced by the insights from the field (Björkman et al., 2016, p. 23).

Brands are amongst the firm's most valuable assets and as a result brand management is a key activity in many firms. Although firms commonly focus their branding efforts towards developing product and corporate brands, branding should also be used in the area of human resource management. Branding has relevance in the context of employment and employer branding, and it can be highly useful in the increasingly knowledge-based economy where skilled employees are often in short supply. (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004, pp. 501, 502; Ewing et al., 2002, p. 7.) The socioeconomic shift of industrialized nations developing from producing economies to service economies has resulted in a situation where the value of an organization is less about the hard assets and more about the intellectual assets – their people. As a result, it can be said that a company's primary responsibility has shifted from management of capital to management of talent and this has an enormous relevance to employer branding.   (Rosethorn, 2009, pp. 12-15.)

As previously stated, an employer brand can be defined to be something every company has whether actively working on it or not. Employer branding refers to a more active approach and views it as a tool for strategic HR. The aim of employer branding is to enhance how people perceive an organization as an employer. The objective is to differentiate the company from their competitors and become more attractive employer. (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004, pp. 502, 506.) Employer branding and attracting talent in practice means marketing the firm to recruits. If the company succeeds in creating a distinctive image in the recruitment market, they can attract exclusively the right kind of people. (Björkman et al., 2016, p. 181.) Employer branding offers companies a way to integrate their HR strategy and company brand and differentiate their organization in the labor market through it. (Walker, 2007, p. 3)

Candidates are more likely to apply to a well-known company that has a good reputation and sometimes the brand of an employer can even determine whether the candidate is interested in familiarizing themselves with the job advert or not. Companies should be well of their reputation and brand and have a strategic approach to it. (YPAI, 2018, p.

13.). A recent global study has found that an average of 56 percent of job seekers see the employer's brand and reputation more important now than they did five years ago (Wolper, 2016, p. 14). To survive the fierce competition of skilled staff, a growing number of companies need to focus on advertising their company to create an employer brand (Ewing, Pitt, Bussy & Berthon, 2002, p. 3). However, strategic employer branding should not be only limited to advertising. If a company limits their employer branding activities to recruitment advertisement campaigns, the focus is on drawing attention and presenting the organization in the most appealing way possible. This limited approach involves substantial risk of missed opportunities and the risk that the way a brand is presented loses the touch with brand reality. (Mosley, 2014, p. 7.) The branding activities can only work if true and accurate. Employer branding is not about creating a nice brand image but about attracting people with a story that is appealing, unique and, most importantly, true. (Rosethorn, 2009, p. 74).

Employer branding is typically seen as a result of the marketing communications of a company. However, it has also been argued that interpersonal communications between company's employees and its external stakeholders is even of higher importance and the truthful insights of the current employees can be even more influential to the company's brand image than any marketing communications provided by the company's marketing. Employee word of mouth is an influential factor in shaping employer brand and the impact of employee advocacy is significantly strengthened by social media. (Mosley 2014, p. 177; Knox & Freeman 2006: pp. 697, 699.) Prospective employees tend to develop their associations of an employer based on information that is not employer controlled. Effective employer branding takes an active approach by identifying the preferred brand associations and aiming to develop these associations. (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004, p. 506). Majority of firms have a combination of positive, negative and neutral associations and companies should keep in mind that it is impossible to please everyone. What is important is that the right people have a positive impression of your company. The ultimate sign of successful employer branding is strongly engaged

workforce. (Mosley, 2014, pp. 96, 108, 156). The following chapter will further describe employer branding in practice as it presents different strategies and techniques to it.

2.3.1 Employer branding techniques

In this chapter, different techniques to employer branding are presented and their relationship with HR and marketing strategies are discussed.

Delivering a consistent and distinctive employer brand experience demands commitment and courage. Depending on the company's level of employer brand awareness and preferences, a firm can determine how to allocate their budgets and which employer branding activities should be prioritized. (Rosethorn, 2009, pp. 88.). Nearly all companies in the market are looking for talent and getting people's attention and differentiating your organization from the competitors can be a huge challenge in itself. (Rosethorn, 2009, p. 73). The Figure 3 below represents employer brand strategy and how it should be aligned with people management strategy, marketing strategy, corporate strategy and HR strategy. Employer brand strategy should represent customer and corporate brand promotions of the company as well as support the HR and talent management of an organization. Often times these different departments are not in close cooperation in organizations and the role of employer branding is to unify all three. (Mosley, 2014, p. 49.)
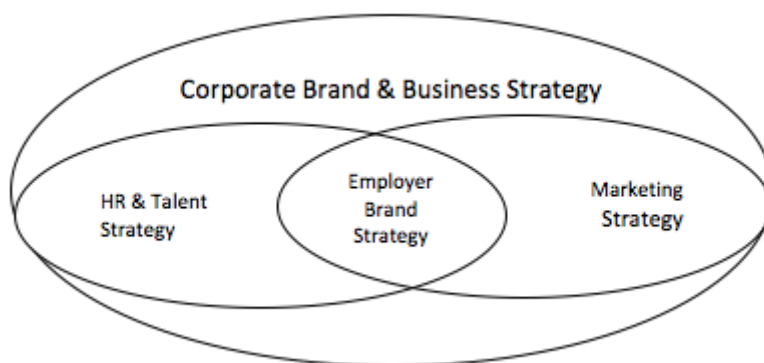

Figure 3. Integrated strategy model (Mosley, 2014, p. 49).

The first thing to consider before creating an employer branding strategy is to understand what the organization's target audience is; what kind of people with what qualities are they aiming to reach. The targeted talent market needs to be carefully analyzed and segmented. (Björkman et al., 2016, p. 181; Hobart & Sendek, 2014, p. 247.) After clarifying the desired target audience, companies should reflect on their current reputation and the level of familiarity their target audiences have of them. Companies need to identify how well known is their organization and how familiar are people with the organization as an employer. Reflection of whether the employer brand image is attracting the right kind of talent or not is also needed at this point. (Björkman et al., 2016, p. 181; Mosley, 2014, pp. 119-121.) This should be followed by a competitor analysis. It is useful for organizations to analyze the main competitors and how they are presenting themselves to targeted talents. Finally, companies should identify and implement their core positioning – the qualities they want to be known for as an employer. (Mosley, 2014, p. 152.) If the company manages to successfully create a unique image in the recruitment market, they can expect to attract the right kind of candidates. Employee attraction is based on the same principles as customer attraction. (Björkman et al., 2016, p. 181.)

Ewing et al. (2002, pp. 13-15) have identified three different employer branding techniques by category as follows.

1. **Transnational**
"We have a X billion $ revenue, have offices in Y countries and employ Z people."
2. **Mission to Mars**
"What we do is exciting, join us to be ahead of others!"
3. **The "local"**
"See our skilled employees – if you believe you would be a good fit, join us!".

Table 1. Employer branding categories. (Ewing et al., 2002, pp. 13-15).

The "Transnational" approach aims to attract through status, global networks, success and greatness. This sort of an organization aims at promising the candidate stability and mobility within the company. The employment proposition is that the company is big, well-known and stable making it a respected and admired employer. The "Mission to Mars" technique aims to appeal by provoking excitement through new experiences. The organization/industry might for example be relatively new and not that well established. The employer needs to create awareness and reduce any possible psychological risks the lack of familiarity creates. Potential employees might be hesitant to work for a company they or their peers have not heard of. The "Local" approach aims to appeal through similarity. This technique uses the advertising technique of source similarity. The company uses existing employees to attract potential new ones. The aim here is to reduce any perceived risks and show the kind of people that have previously prospered in the organization – if the candidate profiles themselves to be like-minded, the risk of making a bad decision is immediately smaller. (Ewing et al., 2002, pp. 13-15). Honesty is a key factor in developing an attractive and authentic employer brand and having an appealing and truthful employee value proposition is crucial. The following chapter presents employee value proposition as a concept and in practice.

2.3.2 Employee Value Proposition

Most companies understand their value proposition as a business but might have difficulties in defining what differentiates them as an employer (Hobart & Sendek, 2014, p. 246). As stated earlier, it is beneficial for companies to manage their employer brand and actively work on building as positive and appealing brand as possible. An Employee Value Proposition (EVP) defines how an organization would like to be seen. It is a description of the qualities the company would like to be associated with as an employer. In order to stand out from competitors, an appealing and different EVP needs to be defined. This 'value proposition' should be a compelling reason the talented candidates find a company attractive and thus make them want to work for them. An effective EVP is clear, focused and easily understood. Once defined, EVP gives the company a point of

reference for employer branding and the desired brand associations of the target audience. EVP is used to translate the corporate values in the context of employment and the emphasis is on the brand ideology and culture that is relevant in talent attraction and engagement. (Björkman et al., 2016, p. 23; Rosethorn, 2009, p. 74; Mosley 2014, pp. 7-9).

EVP should be appealing and well differentiated, but most importantly, true. If its primary function is to get attention and present the company in the most attractive way possible, there is a probable risk of brand presentation losing touch with brand reality. This will lead to dissimilarity between recruitment promises and the employment reality. False promises during recruitment process will be discovered fast and can lead to disengaged employees, low retention rate and negative word of mouth which can then conclude to a poor brand image. The purpose of EVP is to translate the corporate values into employment context in a tangible way. It should clarify the company's 'value' to employees and emphasize the aspects that are of greatest relevance to talent attraction. (Mosley 2014, 9, 35.) In addition to the benefits an EVP have on employee, companies should consider how it can be valuable for the organization. A unique EVP a business gives to its employees and potential candidates, once delivered throughout the employee life cycle creates brand strength. This brand strength can help the companies to attract the right kind of talents and increase employee engagement and retention. (Rosethorn, 2009, p. 20.) This results in positive employer brand which then in turn can bring various benefits for companies. The following chapter will discuss these benefits in more detail.

2.3.3   Benefits of employer branding

Studies by LinkedIn (2011) and Knox & Freeman (2006) provide support to the assumption that a strong employer brand can be highly beneficial for companies. The companies that have a strong employer brand had lower hiring costs. There was also a positive correlation between employer brand and the candidates' willingness to apply. (Gultekin,

2011; Knox & Freeman, 2006, pp. 707-710.) However, the benefits of a strong employer brand are enormous and not limited to talent attraction (Knox & Freeman, 2006, pp. 707-710.). Potential applicants are attracted to a firm based on the extent to which they believe it to have the preferred employee related qualities. The Figure 4 below illustrates how employer brand associations and employer image can be seen as the two benefits of employer branding. Potential employees form an image of the employer based on different characteristics associated with it and the end result of employer branding is the employer attractiveness. The lower part of the figure demonstrates the impact employer branding has on its existing employees. Organizational culture and organization identity have an impact on employer brand loyalty and then again this has a positive impact on employee productivity. (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004, p. 505.)
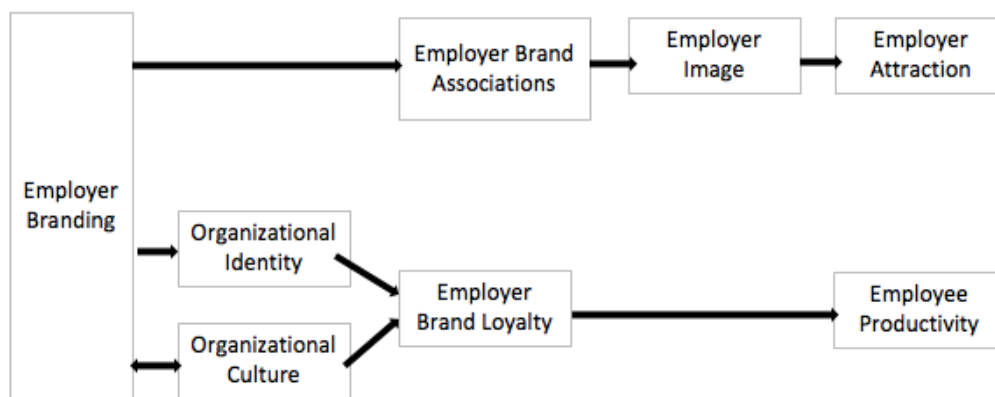
Figure 4. Employer branding framework (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004, p. 505).

Having a well-known company that is seen as a desirable place to work, can benefit an organization in various ways and employer branding can deliver a higher impact on a company's revenue growth than any other HR discipline. (Mosley, 2014, p. 13.) The cost benefits of employer branding come from both the saving opportunities and from the direct and indirect revenue a strong employer brand can bring. (Gultekin, 2011; Mosley, 2014, pp. 12-15.) The table below describes the cost benefits of a strong employer brand:

Focused targeting to the right audience	Rationalized creative spends
With a clear target audience, a company can save time and money by focusing the marketing activities to potential employees.	With well-coordinated recruitment marketing content, a company can make major savings in their creative costs.
Building brand awareness	**Enhanced pulling power**
A strong and positive brand image will enhance the company's reputation which in turn can be taken advantage of in other aspects of marketing activity.	With a strong employer brand, a company can attract passive applicants that do not actively seek for an employment.
Hire experienced employees for less	**Reduce unwanted employee turnover**
Attracting a mid-career candidate to leave their employer and join another usually requires an increase in salary. A company with a strong employer brand is often required to offer less pay raise.	When a company is clear about the kind of people that fit in their organization, and about their employer brand promises, they can expect to have a lower employee turnover rate.

Table 2. Cost benefits of employer branding (Mosley, 2014, pp. 12-15).

The first step of employer branding is to identify the targeted talent. With a focused targeting the company has a clear target audience which leads to savings both in time and money as the marketing activities are efficiently focused from the beginning. Employer branding requires a stable approach to the creative presentation and by focusing the creative resources, a company can make major savings in comparison to having a more localized and ad hoc approach. Employer branding requires a clear and unique brand messaging which builds brand awareness and over time a stronger and more trustworthy reputation. A strong and positive brand image will enhance the company's reputation which in turn can be taken advantage of in other aspects of marketing activity. Investing in employer branding will build a stronger brand that will attract far more attention than an unknown brand. A strong employer enhances the pulling power of a company. In practice this means that a brand will attract a higher number of applications. This will create savings in terms of sourcing costs and with a strong employer brand, a company can attract also passive applicants. A positive experience of an employer brand will boost championing and referral activity which will furthermore widen the talent pool accessible to a company. Especially the attraction of experienced

employees can be challenging and to get people to switch employers often requires an increase in salary. Companies with a strong employer brand are usually required to pay less than companies with a weaker brand. A strong employer brand can also increase employee retention. With a clearly communicated and accurate employer brand promise, the right kind of people are recruited in the first place. (Mosley, 2014, pp. 12-15.)

In addition to the financial benefits a strong employer brand generates, it has a positive impact on a company's performance. A strong employer brand will help the company to hire more top performing employees and with the acquired skills and know-how these talents bring to the company, the overall professional competence of an organization will rise. If a company successfully amplifies their employee satisfaction through recruitment marketing and employee advocacy, anything that improves the overall employment experience should ultimately lead into a stronger employer brand reputation. (Mosley, 2014, pp. 15-17.) By successfully building a positive employer brand, companies can benefit enormously. One great way to enhance employer brand and create brand awareness in practice, is recruitment marketing. The following chapter will explain this topic both theoretically and in practice.

2.4   Recruitment marketing

Recruitment marketing offers a strategic approach to battle the skill shortages (Sheth, 2014, p. 76). Recruitment marketing is often the first touchpoint a candidate has with the employer, its name and logo. Advertisement of jobs has existed for a long time. Previously it has focused on promoting a specific job opening, for example in a local newspaper, whereas nowadays job advertisement can be a part of strategic branding. Before the job advertisements had the intention of attracting suitable candidates for specific open positions but contribute to building brand equity. Earlier job adverts could be easily distinguished from product advertisement and the other way around. Nowadays the lines have become blurred. While recruitment marketing can still generally be used to provide information about a specific job opportunity, it does have an impact on the candidate's perceptions and attitudes not only towards the specific job opening but also

towards the company in general. (Martinez, 2000, p. 57). Attracting talents can simply be defined as marketing the company to the potential recruits. Recruitment marketing can be especially beneficial for companies that are not well-known within the talent market. (Berthon et al., 2005, p. 153; Björkman et al., 2016, pp. 180-181).

Traditionally the marketing department has had its focus on customer marketing and most recruiters have had little to no experience as marketers. While it is good to pay attention to the customer marketing, similar practices should be applied to the recruitment markets to attract talent. Recruitment department needs to build an effective recruitment process that is attentive to the changes in the recruitment markets. (Sheth, 2014, p. 76; Knox & Freeman, 2006, pp. 695, 710.) Companies need to be extremely clear about what they are looking for and define the qualities of their ideal employee. (Mosley 2014, p. 70). With a specific target candidate profile, the firms can apply branding techniques originated from marketing; companies need to think of the potential recruits as customers. After identifying their target audience, companies should analyze and segment the talent markets – they need to understand whether their brand image is attracting the right kind of talent or not. Employee attraction is based on the same principles as customer attraction. (Björkman et al., 2016, p. 181.).

2.4.1 Recruitment marketing techniques

The creative process of recruitment marketing does not drastically differ from consumer marketing (Mosley 2014, p. 144). Sheth (2014, p. 77) suggests that recruiters should collaborate with the marketing department to build a coherent company message before they begin to look for talent. Marketing professionals can provide recruiters with valuable insight of how to take different target audiences into account. Efficient recruitment marketing should follow the same principles as strategic marketing. It is also crucial to take into account the importance of social media and the shift in the digital platforms. Many of the applicant tracking systems are automated to post new job openings to

social media outlets but recruiters need to do more than that to stand out and attract top talents. (Sheth, 2014, p. 77.)

In addition to the traditional platforms, companies have a large variety of channels. They can use for example social media, career pages and different career fairs to appeal to potential candidates. The availability of different platforms gives recruitment marketing the opportunity to do more than simply list a job opportunity. It provides companies a chance to promote their brand, expand their reach and visibility and create a dialogue with the candidates. Recruitment marketing should increasingly use the techniques of the most successful brand-builders. Recruitment marketing can also be bold, creative and strong. The core message of an advert might be recruitment, but it should look and feel like the brand. (Martinez, 2000.) As recruitment marketing is almost exclusively targeted to external audiences meaning that they are likely to have limited to no experience of the company. A large focus should be on attention grabbing headlines and images. (Mosley, 2014, p. 215.) In addition to attention and visibility aspect, recruitment marketing gives the opportunity to focus more on the candidate experience which in turn enhances the company reputation and employer brand. When marketing and HR work together, they can build a unified brand and message. Once established, the company can spread their message and attract a growing number of candidates. (Sheth, 2014, pp. 76, 77.)

To clarify an organization's hiring value proposition, companies could apply a benefit selling technique to recruitment. Companies should be able to finalize the following statements to their recruits:

- *Because of…*
- *You can…*
- *Which means that…*
- *Which really means that…* (Hobart & Sendek, 2014, p. 247.)

Rosethorn (2009, pp. 83, 87) emphasizes the importance of communication when it comes to connecting with the talents. The use of a recruitment marketing model is

presented and the four critical phases in the talent-company communication are described. The Figure 5 below illustrates these communication points:
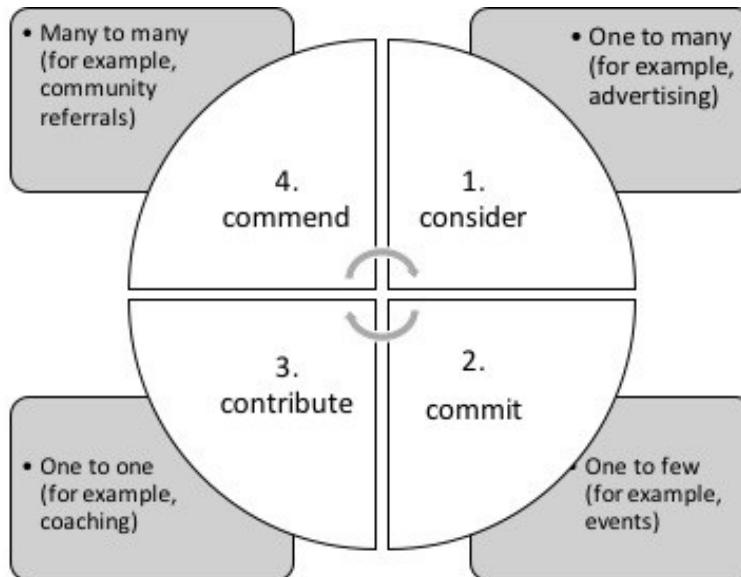
Figure 5. Recruitment marketing framework. (Rosethorn, 2009, p. 87).

The first phase is consideration. The previously completely unaware candidates become considering, meaning that they are actively trying to find out more about the company. During this phase, a company needs to use one-to-many communications such as advertising. The consideration phase is followed by commitment. This is when the candidates seek for information and discover more. They find the company so attractive and distinctive that they want to commit and apply for a role. This is the phase where the candidates have come forward, and the target can be effectively segmented which in turn means that one-to-few communications can already have an impact. An example of one-to-few communications is a targeted event of a smaller audience. After being hired, the candidates are expected to be engaged and contributing to the company mission. In the Contribution stage, the role of the direct manager is of high importance and they work as "brand deliverers" meaning that the one-to-one communication have a high impact. The final stage of the Recruitment marketing framework is the Commend stage. At this point the engaged employees turn into "net promoters" or ambassadors who commend

the company to others. People connect with people, meaning that what the employees of a company have to say can have an enormous impact to how other see the firm as an employer. It is challenging if not impossible for companies to regulate what their employees tell others. The only way to manage the many-to-many communications is to have engaged, passionate employees who boost your reputation. Successful recruitment marketing is honest and authentic. When recruitment marketing is done right, less of the ineffective one-to-many communication is required because the reputation and word-of-mouth will take over. (Rosethorn, 2009, pp. 87-88). One important channel for recruitment marketing and for reinforcing a positive employee word of mouth is social media and the different innovations of it. The following chapter will discuss social media in the context of this thesis.

2.4.2   Employer branding and social media

The remarkable growth of the internet and the different social innovations of it have changed the world. Social media as one of the key innovations of the internet has revolutionized the way people behave; social media is not only used for entertainment and social networking but also for professional networking. (Faseeh & Khan, 2018, p. 1). Technology and the internet are fundamentally changing the way the world interacts and communicates and this has created a major shift in the information symmetries around employment. Nowadays exploring the external job market offers is easy and there are websites providing targeted information on prospective employers which makes the comparison easier for the candidates. Recruitment through internet is rapidly becoming more usual worldwide. Global job search platforms are becoming more common and social networking sites are becoming more popular for recruitment purposes. (Björkman et al., 2016, pp. 173, 180; Keller: 2009, p. 139).

Social media has a crucial role in recruitment and in building an employer brand. Social media gives companies the opportunity to be actively present and visible in the networks of their potential employees. This makes the potential candidates aware of the

organization and its operations. Different networks between companies, schools, students and employees can be expected to rise. (Viitala, Säntti & Säntti, 2014, p. 195). Social media creates transparency and shares the power of influence more evenly as the information is available for everyone at any time. Social media is one of the most central by-products of digitalization and each organization has to develop their own strategic approach towards this phenomenon. (Viitala et al., 2014, p. 200). Even though social media might not be the most popular recruitment tool, it is a rising trend businesses should consider; companies can attract applicants by reaching them through a channel they already spend time in. (Delgado, 2019).

The shift in the employment market is not limited to the availability of candidates, but also in how these candidates behave. Job seekers take advantage of a wide mix of traditional and digital resources when planning their next career move. It is essential for companies to dedicate resources in content creation to not only reach the targeted talent but also engage with them. Especially from an employer branding perspective, it Is important to have content that displays what makes you an attractive employer and what differentiates you from your competitors. If a firm does not use their social media channels correctly, they can risk large financial consequences in recruitment and retaining of talents. LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter and other social media tools are transforming recruitment into a strategic marketing function focused on branding. Staying up to date of the new tools and channels is important in talent attraction. (Delgado, 2019; YPAI, 2018, 13; Deloitte, 2014; Universum 2017.) A growing number of candidates look for jobs in social media. Social media in this context ranges from career-focused LinkedIn to more creative platforms like, for example, Instagram. (Delgado, 2019.)

Candidates evaluate the potential employers on social media and the way a company is presented in different public channels impacts on how favorably a company is perceived. Company reputations are discussed in such a manner and pace that organizations cannot regulate what is being said about them. The digital world means that reputation spreads whether it is positive or not. People easily believe what someone tells

them on social media about what it is like to work for a certain company rather than what the company's career site tells. (Delgado, 2019; YPAI, 2018, p. 13; Deloitte, 2014; Rosethorn 2009, p. 15; Universum 2017.) Employee advocacy has existed for a long time and it has a direct impact on company reputation and employee attraction. However, the importance of it has been amplified by social media. Correspondingly, employee referrals are enhanced by employees' ability to share relevant job adverts to their social and professional networks. Employee referrals are amongst the most important recruitment channels for companies and should be take advantage of in the best way possible. (Mosley, 2014, pp.177-178.) A good reputation can help companies attract employees and when a company is able to become the first choice of job seekers, it has a solid ground for future success and a better starting point compared to its competitors (Aula & Mantere, 2002, pp. 63, 65).

The social media channel that is especially used in the professional environment is LinkedIn. It has become a dominant recruitment channel in the recent years and the growth of it is expected to continue rapidly. Facebook is generally less effective in recruitment, but Facebook is an important channel for employer brand building and generating referrals. While people may not use social media channels directly for seeking jobs, these medias are important career sites as they provide an insight of an organization as an employer. The amount of employee-focused content is increasing, and this is mostly due to the fact that social media is one of the most dominant channels of communication. Companies should aim to present a more personal side of them in order to become more attractive to Generation Y. Companies should continuously stay aware of the new media platforms and evaluate whether or not use them for recruitment and employer branding. Media is continuously evolving, and consumer behavior can change rapidly. (Mosley, 2014, pp. 178-191.) The company content should be true and honest. The younger generations are looking for more realistic content that gives an insight to the company culture and what it would be like to work for the organization. (Universum, 2017.)

Chapter 2 has given an overview to the theory of employer branding – the relatively new HR tool combining the theories of human resource management and branding. The next chapter will explain the targeted talent in more detail by explaining the background of young sales professional recruitment.

3   Attraction of young sales professionals

As mentioned in the introduction, this study focuses on young professionals in the sales industry. Young professional in the context of this thesis is a person with 0-5 years of work experience after graduation. This thesis focuses on millennials as majority of the young professionals of today are from that generation. This chapter will provide an introduction to the generation. Generation Y and different characteristics of this generation are discussed especially from employer branding and recruitment points of view. This is followed by an introduction to the sales field and an emphasis is put to the personnel recruitment and attraction perspectives. Finally, the unique attributes of young professional recruitment are discussed, and a short sum-up of the theory is given before moving onto the next chapter.

In today's business, one of the most important cause of problems in firms is the increase in labor shortage. More people are graduating on global labor market but due to structural problems, this growth alone cannot fill the demand for talents. (Szabo, Szabo & Gabor, 2016, p. 294.) Companies are having difficulties in attracting and retaining young talent, the Generation Y. However, attracting these young talents is crucial for companies as they are the future of work; by 2025, almost 75 percent of the labor force worldwide is Gen Y. (Hobart & Sendek, 2014.) Recruitment of sales personnel is an important factor ultimately resulting to selling success. (Jobber & Lancster, 2006, p. 381.) Salespeople are costly and it is crucial to find the right kind of talent to support the long-term success of a firm. However, sales recruitment does not always get the attention it should from the managers and therefore companies fail to attract the needed talent. (Jobber & Lancster, 2006, p. 382.) Luckily business executives are starting to acknowledge the fact that a good sales team can determine how well the business is going. (Altschuler, 2016, p. 1.) Despite the economic situation, the best and brightest employees are always on high demand by great companies. It takes strategy and imagination to recruit, develop and keep this talent. (Taguchi, 2002, p. 11.) The findings of the consulting companies' reports also provide support to the assumption that the competitive talent market has emphasized companies need to market themselves to the potential employees. Today's

candidates are well aware of their value and the fact that companies need more skilled employees than the labor market has to offer, this situation that is often referred to as the "candidates' market" (YPAI, 2019, p. 3.) The next subchapter will present the targeted talent by generation and a further explanation of millennials as a talent market is given.

3.1 Generation Y

Global aging is having a direct impact on the labour market and the battle for talent is only expected to intensify. In 2025, 75 percent of the global workforce will be from Generation Y, the Millennials, and a large number of the remaining 25 percent will be from the following generation, the Generation Z. An organization's future strength is directly dependent on their ability to attract, retain, motivate and develop millennials. (Espinoza & Ukleja, 2015, p. 13; Evans, 2016, p. 3; Hobart & Sendek, 2014, p. 13.) Millennials, meaning people born between the early 1980s and the late 1990s think, act and react differently to any other age group. (Evans, 2016, p. 3). Generation Y is the future of work and this generation is bringing new ideas to workplaces. Previous generations, Traditionalists, Boomers, and Generation Xers have typically accepted standard practices without a problem, but the Millennials will not accept things without actually agreeing themselves. For companies to attract and retain top talent, it is crucial to understand the Millennials as, from purely demographic perspective, the future talent pool consists of Generation Y and there are not enough Generation X workers to replace the retiring Baby Boomers and Traditionalists. Millennials are not hesitant to change workplaces and it is important for them to find an employer who understands them and shares their values. (Hobart & Sendek, 2014, pp. 13-14; Rosethorn, 2009, pp. 14,18.)

Generation Y has also been referred to as "globals" and "digital natives". The cultural differences between countries have become less prominent and they are more alike around the world than any other generation before. (Espinoza & Ukleja, 2015, p. 11). The young generation of Millennials is an important target for global companies also due

to their ability to adapt to changes and their flexibility. Millennials are described tech-savvy and open to new innovations. (Szabo et al., 2016, p. 294). Technology is an essential part of the millennials and working with it has become the norm for them (Espinoza & Ukleja, 2015, p. 7). When thinking about their career choices, Millennials rank a company's brand as one of the top three motivating factors. These brand-driven people have, thanks to their advanced technical skills, have nearly unlimited access to information about companies. (Manpower, 2015.) The difference of millennials can also be seen in their consumer behaviour – if they want to buy a product, they have done 70% of their prior research already before talking to the salesperson. The same ideology can and should be implemented in recruitment – the candidate has already done their prior research even before applying. (Evans, 2016, p. 3.)

The "google-generation" acknowledges the fact that they spend a large amount of their time at work and it is important for them to feel aligned with their employer's values and culture. Millennials have not needed an authority figure to access information and this has had its impact on the dynamics in their relationship with power. (Espinoza & Ukleja, 2015, p. 11). Generation Y is sensitive for organizational cultures and they are often performance oriented (Szabo et al., 2016, p. 294). Millennials are more optimistic and have higher expectations for their career than generations before them (Espinoza & Ukleja, 2015, p. 8). It is important for millennials to feel appreciated by their employer and they want their contributions to be valued. These performance-oriented people know what they want to achieve in their career, and they need to know how their employer is going to help them get there. If a millennial is dissatisfied with their work or employer, they are not afraid to switch to another company. When it comes to loyalty, millennials focus on their friends and family instead of their employer. If they feel loyalty at work, it is most likely a result of a connection with their colleagues. (Rosethorn, 2009, pp. 14, 18.)

The findings of researches conducted by consulting agencies give further insight into millennials as a talent market. According to Manpower (2015), Universum (2017) and

YPAI (2019), millennials do not rely on the information the potential employer provides them with; they have an instant access to information through social networks and internet. Candidates aim to accurately perceive the values, authenticity and culture of their potential employer. Today's candidates are not automatically applying to big and established companies simply because they have a job opening – the work they do has got to be meaningful. Today's candidates value purpose. (Manpower, 2015; Universum, 2017; YPAI, 2019). The findings of Manpower's study also show that even though majority of Millennials use social media to find information about a company, the most trusted source of information these candidates rely on is the perception of the current employees (Manpower, 2015, pp. 2-8). Millennials are likely to share negative reviews of past employers on social media (Universum, 2017). Millennials are 2.5 times more likely than generation X and baby boomers to share their opinions about employers on social media (Randstad, 2019). In the next chapter, the targeted talent is presented from the perspective of their professional field – the field of sales.

3.2   Attraction of sales talent

After understanding the target audience from the demographic perspective, it is important to comprehend the target talent by profession. In this chapter, the topic of talent attraction is discussed from strictly sales personnel perspective. The demand-supply imbalance is particularly noticeable in the talent market for young professionals. (Björkman et al., 2016, p. 172). Talent in this context represents the individuals who are in a position or a role that has a direct impact on company competitiveness meaning that they are of high-potential and perform well. Employees may be considered as talent regardless of their formal position in the organization; the most important factor is that they are a differentiating factor of the organization. (Björkman et al., 2016, pp. 169-172). Good salespeople are a necessity to any successful business, especially if a company is aiming to grow. The importance of recruiting, hiring and retaining the best talent for sales positions is high. They enable organizational growth and take the business to the next level. However, finding and hiring of these sales talents can be challenging. (Ingram et al., 2015, p. 14; Williams, 2017.)

Jobber & Lancster (2006, p. 384) describe the recruitment and selection process of sales personnel to consist of job description, identification of recruitment methods, designing an application form, interviewing and supplementary selection aids such as tests and role plays. Björkman et al. (2016, 23, pp. 178-179) define recruitment as the practices and activities an organization carries out to identify and attract potential employees and the key question is how to reach out effectively to the potential candidates. Today's researchers and practitioners emphasize the importance of the attraction phase to survive the war for talent. Jobber & Lancster (2006, p. 382) emphasize the need of understanding the targeted sales talent to be able to attract them. Salespeople are often motivated by money and high pay might be one important factor in attracting talented staff. However, it is not the only motivating factor and companies should not assume that money is the only motivating factor. People are often attracted to selling due to the independent nature of the job. Companies should understand the reasons why people are attracted to sales to build an efficient recruitment process.

Companies should determine what qualities they are looking for in a salesperson and this naturally is affected based on the role and the company. However, some unifying factors have been found and, for example, empathy and ego drive are said to be features majority of the successful salespeople share. The ability to understand customers' needs and the need to make a sale are characteristics that are connected to skilled salespeople and it is said that people who have these qualities will be successful in selling anything. (Jobber & Lancster, 2006, p. 387.) In addition to considering which characteristics are required from a sales employee, companies should evaluate whether or not it is essential to have prior work experience, or could the needed skills be trained once the candidate is hired. Companies could benefit from recruiting sales personnel directly from universities as these candidates are likely to be knowledgeable and familiar with relevant technologies. However, companies should keep in mind that these candidates might not see their long-term career in sales, and many might use it as a first step towards marketing or management positions. (Jobber & Lancster, 2006, pp. 386-388.)

The following chapter will describe the targeted talent in more detail. As many people begin their professional career from sales, the chapter describes recruitment of young professionals.

3.3   Recruitment of young professionals

New job roles emerge on a regular basis, often due to digitalization and the demand for new technical skills. With new roles comes a need for a new set of skills and young professionals - students, recent graduates and people beginning their professional career, are an important target group to attract when building a business team meeting future needs. (YPAI, 2019, p. 3.) Graduates act as a key source of highly educated future potential for many companies. Attracting and recruiting graduates can be a demanding activity requiring a lot of the company's resources. Many employers see graduate recruitment as an efficient way of finding new employees with new ideas, high intelligence and the capability to learn quickly. Sometimes graduates possess specific skills and knowledge only taught in particular schools. (Bertman et al., 2015, pp. 215-216.) According to a research conducted by Szabo et al. (2016, p. 295), a large majority of students are planning to begin to work directly after graduation. Graduates often find it difficult to find their first jobs as every position requires prior work experience. Companies should consider whether or not it is important to have prior work experience, or could they train those skills once the person is hired. (Jobber & Lancster, 2006, p. 386) According to Taguchi (2002, p. 27), when planning on recruiting students and graduates, companies should evaluate what schools' best suit their needs and focus their recruitments to those schools. One of the key factors in the decision-making process should be the cultural-fit. From which schools can the company find candidates that would suit their organization.

Bertman et al. (2015) researched graduate recruitment from the employer's perspective. The findings show that especially employers in shortage of skilled personnel were

likely to promote their company and their career possibilities for students. Larger employers often had some connections to different universities to attract talents whereas smaller companies found it challenging to get noticed by the students and they had encountered negative associations of working for a small firm. Many employers had the tendency to recruit when they had an open position rather than creating a predictable annual recruitment cycle. Timing in graduate recruitment is of high importance; if the company starts too early, they might not know their actual needs, or they might lose candidates between the job offer and the starting date. On the other hand, if the recruitment is done too late, the competitors might have already attracted the candidate' with the most potential. (Bertman et al., 2015, pp. 215, 221.)

In 2015 Manpower conducted a survey for 4500 job seekers to further understand today's graduates. The findings of their survey show that today's candidates value employer's brand as one of the top three criteria when considering their next career steps. (Manpower, 2015.) Universum's global student survey provides insight into what Millennials worldwide are looking for in their careers. The findings of this research show that one of the most important factors was 'a good reference for future career'. This suggests that the employer's corporate brand and reputation are the key factors affecting today's student's career choices. (Mosley, 2014, p. 90.) Knox & Freeman (2006, pp. 708-710) also validate the assumption that a strong employer brand has a positive impact on the job application intentions of a candidate. A strong employer brand correlates positively on the graduates' willingness to apply. Another important finding of their research is the fact that many of the students were exhausted from their high workload and thus, likely not wanting to spend a lot of time in filling lengthy application forms. One factor in attracting young professionals might be the level of complexity an application form has. (Knox & Freeman, 2006, pp. 708-710.) While digital channels are important in brand building among students, also events like career fairs, campus presentations and employer sponsored lectures are also included. It is recommended that companies build a continual relationship with the university students through their years of studies, not only at the time of graduation approaching. Leading employers build

relationships with the university career advisors and reach out to potential candidates already at an early stage of their studies. (Mosley, 2014, pp. 182-183.)

3.4   Conclusion of the theory

The theory of this study has presented two core areas; employer branding and young sales professional attraction. In this subchapter, these theoretical viewpoints are summed up, linked to each other and evaluated in the light of the research questions.

Based on existing literature, the importance of employer brand is especially emphasized now that the war for talent is fierce and only expected to intensify. Employers need to strategically plan and execute branding activities also in the field of HR. Based on literature, company's employer brand can have a direct impact on millennials willingness to work for a company. It has been found that there is a positive correlation between employer brand image and the potential employees' willingness to apply to work for the company. (Knox & Freeman, 2006, pp. 707-710.) Candidates are more likely to apply to a well-known company that has a good reputation (YPAI, 2018, p. 13). Mosley (2007, p. 130) describes employer brand as a multidimensional entity in which all the different aspects of a corporate brand have an impact on each other. Meaning that, even though customer brand is expected to increase customer attraction and employer brand is expected to attract employees, they are all interconnected. A well-known customer brand can indirectly attract talents. (Mosley, 2007, p. 130)

Employer's brand is also exceptionally influential in this target group since candidates at the beginning part of their career are looking for good references for their future career. Therefore, a company with a well-known brand can have a positive impact on candidate's willingness to apply. (Mosley, 2014, p. 90.) Today's candidates are brand-driven and when thinking about their career choices, they rank a company's brand as one of the top three motivating factors. (Manpower, 2015.) By building brand awareness and taking care of the company brand image people will become more aware of the company and view it more favorably. The findings of researches conducted by consulting

agencies support the literature as they show that especially millennials evaluate company's brand and what is being said about them when making their career choices. In addition to seeking for opinions of the current employees, job seekers use a large variety of digital resources when planning their careers and they evaluate potential employers on social media. How a company is presented in different public channels can have a direct impact on how favorably a company is perceived and therefore how attractive it is. (Delgado, 2019; YPAI, 2018, p. 13; Deloitte, 2014; Universum, 2017.) Companies can and should focus on strategically building their brand awareness through marketing activities to attract talent. However, even though employer branding is typically seen as a result of the marketing communications, the comments of current employees have a great impact on it. Employee word of mouth is an influential factor in shaping employer brand. (Mosley, 2014, p. 177; Knox & Freeman, 2006, pp. 697, 699.)

Existing literature describes various factors that can attract young sales professionals representing Generation Y. At first, it is important for companies to understand millennials as a generation. Millennials are well aware of the fact that they spend a considerable amount of their time at work and therefore they want to find a place where the organizational culture suits their needs. Millennials want their employer's values to be aligned with their own. Values and company culture of an employer can work as key attractive factors. (Hobart & Sendek, 2014, pp. 13-14; Rosethorn, 2009, pp. 14,18; Szabo et al., 2016, p. 294.). When it comes to attracting specifically salespeople, the general principles of talent attraction do apply but the existing literature describes some unique characteristics. To attract sales potentials, it is important for companies to understand the reasons why people are attracted to sales. Often one key factor is money and high compensation can help attract talented staff. However, usually it is not the only motivator and people are said to be attracted to sales due to unique characteristics of the job. Sales job is traditionally seen as an independent role. Additionally, people are often attracted to sales because it is seen as a great first step for a professional career in business. (Jobber & Lancster, 2006, pp. 382, 386-388.)

The following chapter will present different methodological approaches and will explain and rationalize the methodological choices of this research. The research design and data collection methods are also presented in the next chapter.

4 Methodology

All research is based on the science and philosophy behind research methodology. (Adams, Khan, Raeside, 2014, p. 5). In this chapter, the methodological choices of this study are presented and explained. The first subchapter will explain the research approach which is followed by an introduction to the research method of this thesis. After that, it is explained how the data was collected and analyzed. Finally, the validity and reliability of the study are assessed.

4.1 Research approach

The methodological approach indicates the way the theory is utilized in the research. It is reasonable to consider the reasoning logic in how the scientific information is used. Generally, there are two separate approaches for this reasoning; deductive and inductive. (Adams et al., 2014, p. 9; Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2009, p. 95.) In the deductive research approach, the theory and hypothesis are drawn from the existing literature. In contrast, in the inductive approach the data is first collected after which it is analysed, and the theory is developed. Deductive approach is often used in quantitative research because it is highly structured whereas the inductive approach is utilized in qualitative research due to the flexibility of the approach. (Dubois & Gadde, 2002, p. 554; Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009.) In addition to these two opposing approaches, the combination of deductive and inductive approaches is called abductive approach. Instead of testing or building a theory, this approach aims to develop the existing theories. This approach consists of continuous movement between the empirical part and the theoretical part. During this process, the topic of the research and the theoretical framework of it are reoriented when confronted with the empirical part. (Dubois & Gadde, 2002, p. 554.) The Figure 6 below illustrates these different research approaches and provides comparison between them.
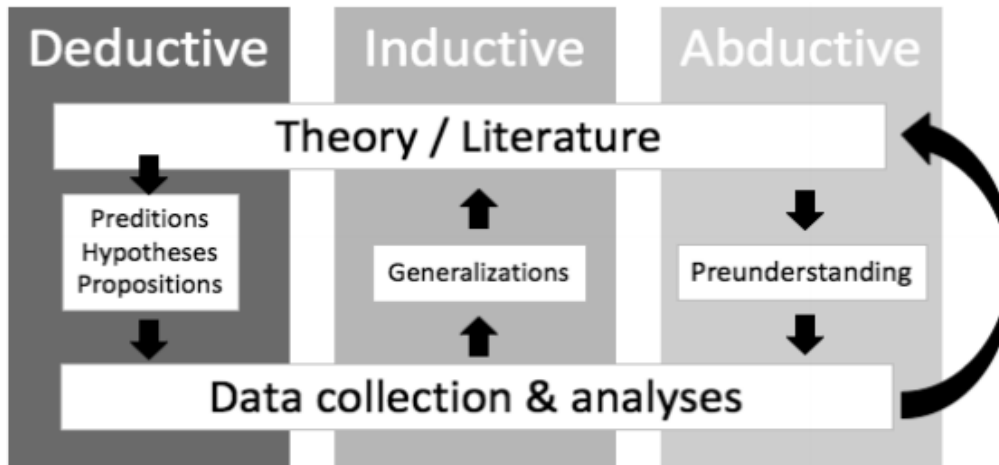
Figure 6. Research approaches (Dubois & Gadde, 2002, p. 554)

The approach to the analysis of this research is abductive. Data is collected to research a phenomenon and the attitudes and sentiments the target group has towards it. Literature about employer branding already exists and this research aims to augment the existing literature. The following subchapter will provide further explanation of the methodology of this thesis by describing the research method.

4.2 Research method

A research method describes the way the research is conducted and implemented. (Adams, Khan, Raeside, 2014, p. 5.) It indicates the data collection technique of the research. Research method should be defined based on the objective of the study as well as the data required to meet the objective. (Quinlan, 2011, p. 218.) Generally, there are two main research methods, which are Quantitative and Qualitative. Quantitative research is based on the standards of a strict research design, numeric measurements and statistical analysis. Qualitative research on the other hand uses non-quantitative data and it aims to explore social relations and describe the experiences of the respondents. This research method is often used for studying the behaviors and attitudes of people and their customs also in the business environment. (Adams et al., 2014, p. 6.) Qualitative data can be more varied and flexible than what the quantitative data offers and thus it is often used when studying the socially formed norms behind a phenomenon.

(Saunders et al., 2016, pp. 568- 569.) Qualitative data can be defined as non-numerical data that is often gathered from spoken and written words, pictures or video. (Saunders et al., 2019, p. 813.) Qualitative research analyzes the meaning behind these words and aims at providing an in-depth analysis about the situation. (Adams et al., 2014, p. 6; Saunders et al., 2019, p. 179.) Qualitative data can often provide a more in-depth view on a subject and it is recommended when researching social interactions. As this research aims primarily at analyzing the opinions and impressions of the millennial sales talents at the beginning of their careers, the qualitative research method is more suitable for this study.

4.3   Data collection

Gathering of data is a highly important aspect of research and the ability to answer the research question is depending on the capability of data collection. Data collection method requires careful consideration and practicality of obtaining the data, as well as the accessibility to the data, should be considered. (Adams et al., 2014, p. 92.) This chapter will outline the data collection methods used in this study.

This research is a mono method qualitative study, which means that it includes one data collection method and one data analysis method. (Saunders et al., 2019, p. 179), The collected data can be secondary, primary or both. Secondary data is material originally collected for a different purpose but is later utilized to a different intention whereas primary data is collected for the specific research problem at hand. Secondary data is often quantitative, but a growing number of qualitative research data is also being shared. (Hox & Boeije, 2005, pp. 593-594). This research will use primary data mainly due to its suitability to the research and due to the fact that this ensures that the research question and the data collected are aligned and consistency is maintained throughout the research. Additionally, as the phenomenon of employer brand is continuously evolving and new young professionals are entering the market, by collecting primary data, this research ensures the information is up to date.

Qualitative data is often required when a research aims to thoroughly understand peo-ple's motivations, feelings and behaviors. (Adams et al., 2014, p. 97.) Qualitative data is based on matters discussed through words and images. Especially in business and man-agement research, face-to-face and telephone interviews are often used as it allows to capture in-depth information. (Adams et al. 2014, p. 97; Saunders et al., 2016, pp. 568-569.) Semi-structured interviews are recommended for getting in-depth information and analysis (Saunders et al., 2009, p. 320). This research is of explanatory nature. Semi-structured interviews with what and how questions suit well this research category as the focus is on understanding a phenomenon (Saunders et al., 2009, pp. 139-140, 320).

In qualitative research, as the objective is to describe a phenomenon rather than making generalizations, the focus should be on the quality of the data instead of the quantity of it. Thus, the research should concentrate on making sure that the people from whom the material is collected from, the interviewees, have enough knowledge and experi-ence on the topic researched. The selection of the interviewees should be cautious and well-reasoned. (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2009, pp. 85-86.) In this research, altogether eight individuals were carefully chosen for the interviews. These interviewees all represent millennials and have less than five years of working experience after graduation. They all work in Business-to-Business sales and have started their professional careers there. They are all familiar with the job market in the sales field and have experience in evalu-ating potential employers for their career decisions as all of them have recently begun their careers in sales. From diversity perspective, five of the interviewees are males and three females and they come from five different organizations.

The data collection method of this research was semi-structured interviews with people from the target group: millennial salespeople at the beginning of their career. Part of the interviews were conducted face to face, and some were held as telephone inter-views. The interview questions were prepared beforehand based on the theoretical background, the research question and the research objectives. The interviews were built around the research questions and the structure was followed throughout the in-terviews but room for free commenting was left at the end of the interview. (See

Appendix 1.) The topic of the interview was described to the interviewees beforehand which gave them the opportunity to orientate themselves to the topic, but prior preparations of the interviewees were not required as the objective was to get an insight of their genuine thoughts and feelings. The length of the interviews varied from 20 minutes to 40 minutes and the length of the interviews varied mainly due to the talkativeness of the interviewees. Each of the interviews were recorded and transcribed for accurate analysis.

4.4   Data analysis

Qualitative data analysis is an intricate process that requires organization of masses of information by summarizing, structuring and categorizing the data. (Saunders et al., 2009, pp. 491-492, 516.) During the data analysis process the author should attempt to detect patterns, identify variations and differences and compare the answers to theory (Adams et al., 2014, p. 152). Data analysis should be done in an objective manner to avoid misled or false interpretations (Saunders et al., 2009, p. 516). The results need to be categorized and analyzed through conceptualization. (Saunders et al., 2016, pp. 568-569.) The research questions and objectives should be taken into account also in the data analysis phase of the research. When analyzing the data, the focus should be on the perspective of the research questions. (Quinlan, 2011, p. 363.)

Data analysis practices can be divided into different groups based on their relationship with the theory. The data analysis practice can be either data-driven, theory-driven or theory-bonded. (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2009, pp. 95-97.) This research will use theory-bonded approach to data analysis, meaning it has linkages to theory and the theoretical framework serves as a guideline in finding new points of view. As mentioned earlier, this thesis will use abductive research approach which provides support to the selection of a theory-bonded data analysis. (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2009, pp. 95-97.) Next, the validity and reliability of this research are analyzed.

4.5   Validity and reliability of the study

It is important that the results of the research provide some information about the particular phenomenon and that some generalizations can be made. This means that new information is provided and that is the whole idea behind conducting a new research. (Adams et al., 2014, p. 252.) Validity and reliability of the study are used as a criterion for ensuring the quality of the data, research design methods and the overall correctness of the study results. These are highly important both in qualitative and in quantitative research. (Adams et al., 2014, p. 245; Saunders et al., 2009, pp. 156-157.)

Reliability refers to the estimate of consistency, meaning that the degree to which the results would be the same if the research is repeated. In other words, reliability means the repeatability of the study – its ability to provide non-random results. (Adams et al., 2014, p. 245.) Reliability can be assessed by asking the following questions (Saunders et al., 2007, p. 149):

1) Would the results be the same on other occasions?
2) Would others make similar observations of the results?
3) Is the data analysis process explained in a transparent manner?

To ensure reliability of this research, the methodological choices of this study are presented in detail. Validity refers to the strength of the study's conclusions and the accuracy of the chosen methodology; are the research methods correctly measuring what they are supposed to. (Adams et al., 2014, p. 247.) Validity describes whether the study describes what it is intended to do and whether the findings are really what they appear to be. (Saunders et al., 2007, p. 150.) Validity of a research might weaken if the interviewees do not feel comfortable sharing their authentic and honest opinions (Saunders et al. 2009, p. 157). To ensure the validity of this research, the interviewees were presented to the topic beforehand. Additionally, the interview questions were carefully aligned with the theory. The first two interviews were used as pilot interviews after which the wording and order of the interview questions were modified once more to

ensure they are aligned with the objectives of this research. To ensure the interviewees feel comfortable sharing their authentic views, complete anonymity was promised. To increase validity, this thesis explains the research methodology, including the phases of data collection and analysis in detail.

The following chapter presents and discusses the results of the empirical data.

5   Findings and discussion

In this chapter the empirical findings of this study are presented, and the findings are contrasted with the observations from the literature and previous researches. The findings of the research are presented in line with the underlying themes and research questions of this thesis. This chapter aims at answering the research question "How to attract young sales professionals through employer branding?" by first answering the sub questions "How does the employer brand of a company impact on salespeople's willingness to apply?" and "What are the key factors attracting young professionals to sales?". This research examines employer branding and its impact on young sales professionals at the beginning part of their career willingness to apply. The research questions focus on understanding the opinions millennial salespeople have on employer attractiveness. The interviews were conducted in the native language of the interviewees which was Finnish in all of the cases. However, the results are presented in English and direct quotations are translated by the author.

5.1   Views on the impact of employer brand on the willingness to apply

As described in the literature, there is a connection between employer brand and candidates' willingness to apply (Gultekin, 2011; Knox & Freeman 2006, pp. 707-710). The interviews provided further evidence to support this argument and the importance of an employer's brand was brought up throughout the interviews. The interviewees noticed a strong connection between an employer's brand and their motivation to apply.

Actually, when I was applying for jobs, I only applied to companies that I knew beforehand.

I knew already during my years as a student that I wanted to work for my current employer someday. They had branded themselves as a modern employer and a fun place to work at as a recent graduate.

When asking what originally made the interviewees begin their professional career in sales at their current employer, numerous interviewees mentioned their employer's brand as an influencing factor. Also, the results of earlier studies conducted by consulting agencies provide support to this assumption and it is connected to their generational characteristics as millennials rank a company's brand as one of the top three motivating factors. (Manpower, 2015.) The interviews showed some individual differences between the interviewees: some were extremely brand oriented whereas for some, it was a positive yet not crucial attribute. However, a large portion of the interviewees admitted having applied for a job merely because of an employer's brand.

The brand of my current employer is what attracted me to my current job. I wanted to work in this organization and, since it is very start-up minded, everyone begins in sales, so I had no choice.

My employer is the market leader in its field and certainly has one of the most well-known brands in the world. Now that I think about it, I must have applied mainly because of the employer's brand.

The external image of a company is crucial in arousing interest in the company but also in making the candidates apply. The interviews provided support to the assumption that a well-known brand attracts talents and lowers the threshold of a candidate to apply. If the brand awareness is high, the candidates are more likely to apply without further consideration and companies with a strong employer brand are also the ones the interviewees first start to look into when applying for jobs. However, these candidates did not completely exclude the possibility of them applying to a less known company, but they did communicate an increased need for further investigation before applying. Based on literature, the habit of prior investigation of employers is strongly related to the characteristics of generation Y. When thinking about their career choices, a millennial candidate has already done their prior research before applying. (Evans 2016, p. 3.)

I believe that a company's employer brand has an enormous impact on my career choices. Of course (when applying for jobs) at first, I look into the companies that I know beforehand and that I believe to offer the kind of work that I enjoy. But still, I do not see a reason why I could not apply for a company that I do not know beforehand. Naturally the threshold is higher to apply for such a company, but it is not out ruled.

According to the interviews, majority of the impact an employer's brand has on attracting these talents, is subconscious and something the interviewees were not able to specifically explain. The candidates did notice the impact brands have on their actions, but they could not point out some exact points of action where it shows. It is seen more as something influencing their conceptions.

When evaluating the brands of potential employers, I reflect on would I like to work for the company and if I do, would I be proud selling the product or service they are marketing. The mental image I get from this reflection is what determines whether I want to apply or not.

Even though each interviewee sees employer brand image and awareness as key influential factors affecting the perceived attractiveness of an employer, majority of the interviewees could work for a company they are not previously familiar with. However, based on the interviews the candidates would be more critical towards these companies and expect more persuasion from the employer's side during the recruitment process. The sales talents acknowledge their value for an organization and expect justification to why they should choose the employer. The expectations for a less known company are higher than they are for a well-known one.

If I were to apply for a company, I am not familiar with, it all comes down to how well they convince me to come and work for them. The company has a big responsibility in raising the unique selling points of why I should work for them and what distinguishes them from other employers.

If they [a less-known company] were to brand themselves as an exceptionally good employer, I could consider applying. If I for example became interested through

their job advertisement and information about the company is otherwise available, I would do a little research on them, and then, if I like what I find, I would apply. But, of course, the job advertisements of a company I am already familiar with, are easier to notice.

Honestly, I find it hard to imagine [applying for an unknown company]. If I did, it would have to be some super-interesting startup.

The importance of a positive employer brand was also emphasized as each of the interviewee could name at least one occasion where they chose not to apply for an otherwise interesting job because of company's employer brand. If the reputation of the company is negative or they are known from their poor management, candidates do not feel interested even though the job role itself would be ideal for them.

I can recall a situation where I did not apply to a quite interesting sales job, because I did not find the company appealing. The field they work at, and what they have been branded themselves to be selling did not seem interesting, and I could not vision myself working in there.

I was sort of headhunted to a company and I did not proceed with them because of the image I had of them as an employer.

Interviews provided strong support to the assumption that an employer brand has a direct impact on today's candidates' willingness to apply. The impact can be both positive and negative. According to both theory and the interviews, one important factor shaping employer brand especially from a millennial perspective, is the organizational culture and values. The following subchapter will describe further the impact company culture and value have on the perceived employer brand.

5.1.1   The impact of company culture and values

As mentioned in the theory, today's candidates acknowledge that they spend a lot of time at work and therefore it is important for them to feel aligned with their employer. Millennials are sensitive for organizational cultures and want an employer who shares

their values. (Hobart & Sendek, 2014, pp. 13-14; Rosethorn, 2009, pp. 14-18; Szabo et al.; Csonka, 2016, p. 294.). In line with this, the interviewed millennial talents recognize that they can be demanding. As one interviewee described, when a millennial is looking for jobs, they think about what they *"need and demand and are willing to give in return"*. The demanding nature of a millennial candidate was already recognized during the literature review of this thesis. Millennials are not hesitant to change workplaces and it is important for them to find an employer who understands them and shares their values. (Hobart & Sendek, 2014, pp. 13-14; Rosethorn, 2009, pp. 14,18.)

Value-based career decisions were strongly present during the interviews. When asked about what they evaluate in potential employers, several interviewees brought up the company culture and values. Before applying, the millennial sales talents find out what kind of a working environment the company has and how their values are reflected in their daily everyday life. Based on interviews, these talents value flexibility and expect trust, responsibility and freedom from their employers. They evaluate the possible inherent benefits and, for example, the ability to affect their own working hours or where they work. Today's candidates value remote work. The flexibility and trust employers are willing to give their employees directly impacts on the company's culture and reflects their values.

The values and ways of working are important for me. I assess what is the company culture like and do they give their employees responsibilities and freedom.

Flexibility of the employer is a necessity. Are the employees able to work from home, and can they affect their working hours. When the employer provides flexibility, they can expect to also receive it from me as an employee.

The set of values of a company matter. How they treat employees, do they enable remote work and what is the working environment like.

Another important aspect, about company culture, that repeatedly arose in the interviews was people. The interviewees want to work with people alike themselves, in an environment where they feel like they belong. This people-oriented way of evaluating

company cultures and moreover, the employer brand, were also recognized in the theory. Especially millennial talent is said to focus on their friends and if they feel loyalty at work it is most likely due to a connection with their colleagues. (Rosethorn, 2009, p. 18.) The perceived employer brand is strongly affected by the reputation of its company culture and personnel. When evaluating companies as potential employers, the interviewed talents find out what kind of people work in there and try to visualize whether or not they believe themselves to fit into the organization.

I chose to apply for a job at my current employer as I had heard that it is a fun environment with great people.

[When applying for jobs] it is important for me to find a group of people I get along with, and that the working environment is something I could see myself fit in.

Several interviewees also brought up situations where the organizational culture had a negative impact on the employer brand in their minds. During interviews, also cases where the sales talents had chosen not to apply solely due to what they had heard of the company's values.

I was contacted on LinkedIn and asked to work for a global company. Based on my research I found out that their values were in conflict with mine and therefore, I had to decline their job offer.

I had heard so much bad things about the company culture and the personnel in there, so I chose not to apply.

As much as the organizational culture and values can be the key attracting factor for the interviewed young sales talents, they can also be the repulsive factor. For the values-based target group of millennial sales talents, it is an important factor shaping the employer's brand in their eyes. Based on interviews, a highly influential source to the insights of an employer's culture are the comments of former and current employees. The

following sub chapter will further explain the concept of employee word of mouth based on the interviews.

5.1.2 Impact of employee word of mouth on the perceived employer brand

According to literature, honest insights of the current employees of a company can be even more influential to company's employer brand than any corporate marketing communications. Employee word of mouth is a significant factor in shaping employer brand and attracting talents. (Mosley 2014, p. 177; Knox & Freeman, 2006, pp. 697-699.) The employer branding activities of a company work only if they are true and accurate. Employer branding is not about creating a nice brand image but about attracting people with a story that is most importantly true. (Rosethorn, 2009, 74). Companies need to define an appealing and truthful EVP to clarify their value to employees. When setting up an EVP, honesty is crucial and misleading promises will lead to disengaged employees which can result in negative employee word of mouth and poor brand image. (Mosley, 2014, pp. 9, 35.)

The comments of current and former employees were also highly valued by the interviewees of the present study, and the importance of employee word of mouth was highlighted all through the interviews. Young sales professionals do not blindly believe what the marketing communications of a company tells them, they look for honest reviews. Several interviewees had chosen their current employers based on comments of the current employees and it was also named as one of the most influential issues they evaluate in potential employers. Every interviewee admitted that the comments of the current employees have an impact on how they view these companies as employers. The significance of employee comments as an attractive factor goes even so far that one interviewee admitted having switched employer solely based on the comments of the employees. Those employees had contacted the interviewee and *"described a working environment I had always pictured myself in"* and therefore, they chose to apply to the company even though they had not planned to change employers.

The comments of the current employees are the most important factor for me. If I were to apply for a company, I would always find out if I have friends working in there and if I do, I would ask for their truthful opinion. Job advertisements and the social media content of a company tell only one part. Employees are the ones who are best to say what the job and the organizational culture are like.

Whether the current employees are happy to work there or feel extremely frustrated, it does have a direct impact on my willingness to apply. It works both ways.

I always try to get an insight of a current employee before applying. That is where the truth comes from, so to speak. Not a single company will advertise their internal crises or grievances because it is harmful for the brand. That is why I do not trust solely the marketing communications of a company.

According to the interviews, the comments of the current employees can have both a positive and a negative impact on their job search behavior. Candidates had opted out of application processes because of the comments they had heard and also, some have decided to not even apply because of the comments of current employees.

I chose not to apply for a job that was otherwise interesting because a friend of mine had worked there and told me that the company's operating methods and internal personnel management were unprofessional.

I was involved in an application process for a sales job but someone I know told me that the organizational culture and atmosphere of the company are not good. Based on those comments, I decided to opt out of the recruitment process.

In addition to the fact that the comments of the current and former employees can negatively affect candidates' application decisions, they can also have a positive impact. Based on the interviews, people had chosen their employers because of what they had heard from their friends.

I applied for my current job almost solely because of what I had heard from my friends. I knew the company beforehand and my friends who worked there told me wonderful things about the employer. Actually, I was not even familiar with the job

description when I applied but it was not important, because I knew I wanted to work for that company.

Based on interviews, candidates' attitude towards the comments they hear is dependent on the source. Interviewees especially trust the experiences and comments of people they know personally. They are aware that someone's personal experiences might differ from reality but still, if they trust the person, they believe there to be some reflection of truth. Interviewees also expressed stronger trust for people senior to them and on employees who have worked for the company for a long time. The interviewees expected to get a more truthful insight to a company from someone who has worked in there for a long period of time.

The comments of current or former employees do have an impact on my willingness to apply but that is very dependent on the source. If it is coming from a good friend of mine whom I trust, then their personal experience affects my perception of the employer.

If someone has worked for the company for tens of years, then I look up to them and listen to their opinions because those are the people who really know what is working well and what is not.

Additionally, the content of the comment affects how big an impact it has on candidates' perception of the employer. Situational experiences of a single person are received more skeptically than comments strongly related to the company's ways of working and the organizational culture.

Individual opinions of an organization do not affect my job search decisions but if there was some perceived problematics related to the company's operating models, then I might reconsider.

Based on literature and researches of consulting agencies, people easily believe what someone tells them on social media about what it is like to work for a certain company. (Delgado, 2019; YPAI, 2018, p. 13; Deloitte, 2014; Rosethorn, 2009, p. 15; Universum,

2017.) However, based on the interviews, the candidates do not blindly believe every-thing that they hear. Even though the comments of the employees are highly valued and, in many cases, even more influential than the marketing communications of a firm, the candidates are cautious about what they hear. They do not trust the opinions and com-ments of a single employee, especially if they do not know the person. Based on the experiences of the interviewees, anonymous comments on internet do not have a strong impact since the source might not be reliable and the person might be biased. The in-terviewees acknowledge that if a single person perceived an employer negatively, the fault might not be at the company's end.

> *I do not trust the views of single former employee, since experiences can always so subjective. Especially if I do not know the commenter personally, for all I know that might be the opinion of one dismissed person.*

One important source for employee referrals is media. Today's candidates look for hon-est reviews of employers and a company's reputation spreads in such a manner and speed that organizations cannot regulate what is being said about them. (Delgado, 2019; YPAI, 2018, p. 13; Deloitte, 2014; Rosethorn, 2009, p. 15; Universum, 2017.) The follow-ing chapter will discuss media and its impact on how young sales professionals view po-tential employers.

5.1.3   Media and the perceived employer attractiveness

As one of the empirical limitations to the interviewed sales talents was generational, also the unique characteristics of this generation affect on how they evaluate the po-tential employers. This generation means people born between the early 1980s and the late 1990s and they are said to act and react differently compared to any other age group (Evans, 2016, p. 3). One important characteristic of a millennial candidate, both based on interviews and the literature, is that they are tech-savvy and thanks to that, they have nearly unlimited access to information. The millennial candidates do extensive research of the potential employers. (Evans, 2016, p. 3.) Millennials do not need an

authority to access information and technology is an essential part of their working. (Espinoza & Ukleja, 2015, pp. 7, 11.) The habit of examining potential employers in different medias was apparent all through the interviews. The candidates' use various channels to create an all-round understanding of a company and then, based on their findings, they might consider applying.

However, when asked about what attracted them to begin their professional career in sales at their current employer, not one of the interviewees mentioned the marketing communications of a company or anything they have seen on media. Several interviewees did mention the employer's brand and they did acknowledge that the brand might impact on their willingness to apply on a subconscious level. Recruitment marketing is not something that the candidates knowingly examine but it has an impact on how favorably they perceive an employer brand and therefore, how eager they are to apply. Literature also supports the assumption that the lines of recruitment marketing have become blurred and instead of it having a direct impact on candidates' perceptions towards a specific job advert but rather the company brand in general. (Martinez, 2000, p. 57.)

> *I am not able to specify what part of a company's marketing communications effects on my decision to apply or not to apply. But it does have an impact on my view of the company and whether or not I wish to work for them at some point.*

Based on the interviews, the candidates do evaluate the external image of the potential employer. They reflect on what kind of an image they give the applicants and how this reflects their values. Literature and consulting reports also support this assumption and candidates are said to evaluate potential employers in different public channels and how a company is presented impacts on how favorably a company is perceived. (Delgado, 2019; YPAI, 2018, p. 13; Deloitte, 2014; Rosethorn 2009, p. 15; Universum, 2017.) Majority of the interviewees admitted evaluating companies' media presence and even those who did not recognize this behavior acknowledged that they most likely do it

subconsciously. These interpretations were said to affect how favorably the candidates perceive the companies as potential employers.

> *I regularly browse through job adverts on LinkedIn and see what other people are saying about them (employers). What I find in media impacts on my thoughts about a company as an employer. I am still just starting my professional career and I want to know what options are out there when, at some point, I want to switch employer.*

> *I follow media and it surely affects my decision to apply. If I were to apply for a job, the marketing communications and media visibility of an organization would surely have a big impact.*

The sales talents interviewed believe that the recruitment marketing of a company would be especially effective if they were actively looking for jobs. The interviewed sales talents browse through different media platforms regularly and the brand activities of a firm do not go unnoticed. The interviews also provided strong support to the assumption that millennials evaluate potential employers also on social media.

> *Companies that are present in the social media channels that I use regularly in my free time… those [companies] stay in my mind even when I am not looking for a job. For example, if I am scrolling through Instagram and I see a job-related post, it might arouse my interest towards the company, and I start reading more about it. Then, when I am looking for a job, I remember that company and might apply.*

Even though social media might not be the most popular recruitment tool, it is a rising trend businesses should consider; companies can attract applicants by reaching them through a channel they already spend time in. (Delgado, 2019). Based on interviews, the sales talents of today are active on social media and what they see in there during their free time impacts on their job searching behavior. When thinking about potential future employers, the interviewees recognized that the social media presence of a company is prominent.

The importance of social media as a strategic employer branding and recruitment marketing tool was also supported by existing literature. It is important for companies to take into account the importance of social media in recruitment marketing. A simple job advert post is not sufficient, and companies need to do more to stand out and attract top talents. (Sheth, 2014, p. 77.) A growing number of candidates look for jobs in social media. Social media in this context ranges from career-focused LinkedIn to more creative platforms like, for example, Instagram. (Delgado, 2019.) The studies conducted by consulting agencies also provide support to this (Delgado, 2019; YPAI, 2018, p. 13; Deloitte, 2014; Universum, 2017). LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter and other social media tools are transforming recruitment into a strategic marketing function focused on branding. Staying up to date of the new tools and channels is important in talent attraction.

The interviewees mentioned different social media channels when asked about the medias they review potential employers in. LinkedIn was most frequently mentioned, but also channels often associated with informal usage, Instagram and Facebook, were brought up. Based on interviews, the sales-specific perspective gives a unique characteristic also in their behavior in media. In addition to social media giving companies another tool to attract talent, the interviewees initiated the negative aspect of it. If a company is active in social media but the created image is off-putting, social media can turn against the company and even expel candidates. Furthermore, the interviewees emphasized that even though social media is one important tool they view potential employers in, they do not accept everything without consideration.

> *Company's presence on social media has some impact on my career decisions but I would not say that it means everything. Individual posts or marketing campaigns are not the most influential factor but more like, the things that are being said about the company in social media. A single social media campaign is not that important for me.*

The importance of company reputation was also recognized in the existing literature. Reputation spreads in the digital world whether it is positive or not. People easily believe

what someone tells them on social media about what it is like to work for a certain company rather than what the company's career site tells. (Delgado, 2019; YPAI, 2018, p. 13; Deloitte, 2014; Rosethorn, 2009, p. 15; Universum, 2017.) The interviewees brought up several times that they not only review the potential employers on social media and what is said about them impacts on their willingness to apply, but also that they often try find an insight of current or former employees of a company in social media before applying. Media and how favorably a company is presented in there affects not only the company's reputation as an employer but also their corporate brand in general. The following chapter will discuss the impact an organization's corporate brand has on young professional attraction specifically in the sales field.

5.1.4   Importance of a brand from the perspective of sales talent

The best kind of a sales organization is the one that can offer me, as the seller, a large potential to make deals. The business itself must be good so that I can expect to make a sale. It is crucial.

Since the targeted group of talents is salespeople in specific, the importance of a positive and well-known brand is further emphasized. The interviews indicate that, the unique characteristics of a sales job highlight the significance of the brand. In addition to the importance of a positive employer brand, salespeople evaluate also the consumer brand since that is what affects their job in practice – how favorably the potential customers view the brand. Interviewees mentioned that they want to work for a well-known company because their products or services are more likely easier to sell. The candidates evaluate this already before applying and brand awareness has a direct impact on their willingness to apply. The integrated brand model presented in the theory section also provided support to the assumption that employer brand is closely connected to the customer brand. The different aspects of a corporate brand have an impact on each other. (Mosley, 2007, p. 130.) Based on the interviews, it can be assumed that the bond between customer brand and employer brand is exceptionally apparent amongst salespeople.

The brand awareness of a company might not be the most important factor, but it does have an impact on my decision to apply. As a salesperson, it is much easier to represent a company that is well-known. It is easier to open a conversation with a customer when they have some kind of an idea of where I am coming from. So, the brand awareness of a company has a direct impact on the sales job in practice and therefore, I would much rather work in a company people are familiar with.

An organization appears appealing to me if it is well-known and has a certain market share in their category. The product range has to be sufficient in order for me to want to sell it.

When applying for sales jobs, the interviewees evaluate potential employers based on how successful a company is in their own segment and what they have to offer. If the product or service to be sold is highly beneficial to the buyer and the company has prior evidence of success, it makes the selling of it easier. Based on the interviews, salespeople want to feel proud of the company they work for and if the brand of a company evokes positive images in others, they feel more comfortable selling it. A well-known company with high a market share in its own segment anticipates good selling potential and that attracts salespeople. When thinking about potential future employers, the salespeople have specific brands in mind and, as one interviewee demonstrated, there are some brands and products that "would be awesome to get to sell".

Furthermore, how well an employer has branded themselves as a sales organization has an impact. The interviewees brought up how they evaluate potential employers based on how good place for salespeople they are. They want to work for a company that is not only successful and well-known in their segment, but that has branded themselves as a sales organization.

I chose my current employer because they had a brand image of being a great place to work in sales. Our sales teams are a highly valued and important part of our business and our salespeople get a lot of respect internally.

In addition to the perception that a strong corporate brand might assure a larger sales potential, young sales professionals also view companies as potential future references. For this reason, as well, a famous brand is viewed more appealing. The following chapter will continue discussing organization's corporate brands impact on young sales professional attraction especially from the perspective of the desired career development.

5.1.5   Importance of employer's brand as a future reference

According to the literature and researches conducted by consulting agencies, candidates at the beginning of their career are looking for good references for their future career. Therefore, a company with a well-known brand can have a positive impact on candidate's willingness to apply. (Mosley, 2014, p. 90; Universum, 2017.) The interviews provided support for this assumption. In addition to all other previously mentioned positive effects brand awareness has on employee attraction, the sales talents at the beginning of their professional career are thinking about what their career development looks like from the outside and employers are viewed as status symbols. Well-known brands look good in the resume and can improve the candidates' market value in the future when they want to advance in their careers.

> *The brand of the company is what originally attracted me because it is so respected by many. Building a career path that seems logical to others matters to me and working in a known company with a recognizable brand looks good in my CV.*

Also, if a company is known for its high standards for their employees, it is seen as an advantage from the perspective of future reference.

> *If a company is known for its top tier staff, an exclusive group of people that not everyone can access, belonging to that group would make me feel proud. Also, I believe it can benefit me in the future.*

Based on literature, companies should align their employer branding strategy with their marketing and HR strategies to create a unified corporate brand and business strategy.

All of these aspects should be viewed as an integrated entity and employer branding is not something to be distinguished from other branding activities. Corporate brand attracts talents. (Mosley, 2014, p. 49.) Interviews provided solid support to this as the corporate brand's impact on young sales professionals' willingness to apply is high.

The next chapter will describe young sales professional attraction in more detail by describing the different factors that attract young professionals to sales.

5.2 Key factors attracting young professionals to sales

For companies to be able to attract salespeople, it is crucial for them to initially understand why people are attracted to sales in general. (Jobber & Lancster, 2006, p. 382.) By understanding the specific target candidate profile, companies can attract talents by applying the branding techniques originated from marketing. Employee attraction follows the same principles as customer attraction. (Björkman et al., 2016, p. 181.) Based on literature, there are numerous reasons people might be attracted to sales. These appealing factors include money and the independency of the role. Additionally, sales job is seen as a great first step for a professional career in business. (Jobber & Lancster, 2006, pp. 382, 386-388.) The interviews provided further insight into the factors attracting people to sales. Naturally, there are person-specific differences and people can be attracted to the same job due to different reasons but similarities between several interviewees were discovered.

5.2.1 Compensation

Being able to influence your own salary is what initially made me apply for sales.

As it was already indicated in the literature review, salespeople are often motivated by money and high pay might be one important factor in them. (Jobber & Lancster, 2006, p. 382.) Based on the interviews, it can be said that salespeople value money highly, and compensation play a big role in making sales jobs appealing for them. The importance of financial compensation was highlighted throughout the interviews. Majority of the

interviewees mentioned compensation as one of the key factors in attracting them to sales in the first place and that is what keeps them interested.

What motivates me the most in my sales job is succeeding. That success then in practice results in good feeling but definitely also money.

Moreover, when applying for sales jobs, the salary model is an important factor these talents evaluate in an employer. The interviewed sales talents expect the salary model in a sales job to be partly if not completely based on commission. The salary model is something that the sales talents also evaluate already when looking for potential employers even before applying. Especially the candidates that were highly driven by financial incentives mentioned that the commission model of the job has to be motivating in order for them to even consider applying. The part of the commission should be considerably bigger than the base salary of the job for it to be encouraging and motivating. In addition to the financial compensation these sales talents expect from their employers, the interviewees also mentioned other benefits as motivating factors. These benefits mentioned included lunch benefits, phone, car and additional free time in the form of a paid vacation.

When applying for sales jobs, in addition to evaluating the employer's image, I find out what kind of salary model they have. I need to know if the commission model is motivating. Like many others, I work in sales because of the money and therefore, the salary model must be good.

The reason money motivates me in sales is because the commission part of the salary is so much bigger than the base salary.

Majority of the interviewees mentioned money as one of the main reasons they originally applied for their current sales jobs. When asked about the main factors that attracted the interviewees to begin their career in sales, nearly every interviewee brought up money and the earning potential sales job provides them with.

I chose my current employer because I had heard that sales in there is fun and if you are good at it, you can earn really well.

To be honest, what motivates me in my job is money. The economic benefit is so great.

Even though money is one important motivator for young salespeople representing Generation Y, it is not the only factor. Many of the interviewees were attracted to sales because if they succeed, they have the opportunity to earn well. However, succeeding in sales requires certain personality traits and the interviewees mentioned that they either naturally possess these characteristics or have a desire to develop themselves in these areas. Therefore, the nature of the job itself was seen as a key attractive factor and this is further explained in the following chapter

5.2.2 Characteristics of the job

As already mentioned in the literature review, even though salespeople are often motivated by money, it should not be assumed to be the only reason attracting them. People are often attracted to selling due to the unique characteristics of the role (Jobber & Lancster, 2006, p. 382). Millennials are often performance oriented (Szabo et al., 2016, p. 294). The performance orientation and the desire to work independently were also strongly present throughout the interviews with the sales talents. When asked what interests the interviewees in sales and what made them begin their professional career in selling, a large majority of the people mentioned the characteristics of the job. Sales jobs are seen as a great place for people to challenge and develop themselves. The job requires courage, result orientation and ambition and the interviewed people who pursue a career in sales are interested in developing themselves in these areas. Furthermore, several interviewees brought up the endless room for development a job in sales offers, or as one of the interviewees said, "you can never be done with learning when it comes to sales". Numerous interviewees mentioned goal orientation combined with a competitive mindset to be something that originally attracted them to sales and what keeps

them going. These people want to challenge and test themselves to see what they are capable of.

> *Challenge and the hunger for self-development initially attracted me to this job. You can never run out of challenges and it is a lifelong endeavor. I wanted to see if I am able to succeed in sales.*

> *You have to develop a certain kind of mindset for yourself in order to succeed. Ambition, goal-orientation and striving forward. You have to have those three to succeed.*

> *A role in sales combines the qualities that I want to develop in myself. Result-orientation and courage.*

Additionally, as mentioned in the literature review, independency is something that often attracts people to sales. (Jobber & Lancster, 2006, p. 382.) This is something that also rose in the interviews. Sales job is seen as an independent and unrestricted job where individuals can freely design and schedule their work. The sales talents value responsibility and freedom and want to feel motivated to do their work without having their manager's command.

> *I have the freedom to choose where and when I do my job. It is not only that I am allowed to work independently but that is expected from me. I like that.*

> *The internal ambition is what motivates me. I want to develop myself and do it for myself, not for my manager.*

Based on literature review, there are certain characteristics that are connected to skilled salespeople. The authentic need to make a sale is what connects skilled salespeople and it is said that people with this trait will be successful in selling anything. (Jobber & Lancster, 2006, p. 387.) Certain personality traits also arose in the interviews and some people were attracted to sales simply because it has always come naturally to them.

I have actually always been doing sales. It probably just is in my blood and selling has always been close to my heart. I have always liked it and have not even considered it further, that must be the main reason why I work in sales.

I have always known I want to work in sales. Probably since my parents are working within the field and I have always seen the job from up close. I am good at it and that is motivating.

The nature of the job attracts people who have recognized they have the characteristics of a good salesperson. However, there are also other qualities in the role that shape the attractiveness in the millennial sales talents' minds. Many of the interviewed talents are attracted to sales due to the social aspects of it. The next chapter will present the social nature of the job and how it has attracted the interviewed salespeople to the job.

5.2.3   Customer centric role and social networks

Even though selling has always come naturally to some of the interviewed talents, there were also interviewees who rather described themselves drifting towards the role. Some of the interviewees had not noticed the sales orientation and customer-centric mindset in themselves but as sociable and extroverted people, they naturally like to work with people.

I have never been good at sales, but I have always been good with people and skilled in problem-solving. I am more motivated in helping others. That is what has guided me towards sales and made me succeed.

Based on literature review, the ability to understand customers' needs is a characteristic connected to skilled salespeople. (Jobber & Lancster, 2006, p. 387.) The customer-centric mindset was noticeable also through the interviewees. Many of the sales talents mentioned customers as a key factor attracting them to sales. The sales talents genuinely feel motivated when they can help their counterparts at the client companies' end. Based on interviews, salespeople are motivated in problem solving and helping others.

The interviewed sales talents get the most satisfaction in their job when they are able to bring new perspectives to their customers and help them in their work.

> *In sales you can help resolving your clients' issues and help improving their current situation. I find it motivating to be able to improve the current situation of a client with my expertise.*

> *I genuinely enjoy the collaboration with clients and other stakeholders. I want to create 'win-win' situations where each counterpart benefits. I do not want to push material for people who would not benefit from it but rather I want to create value and help my clients succeed.*

> *Selling comes naturally to me. I do not just do it to make tons of money. It goes deeper than that. I want to help others. It is rewarding to help my customers succeed.*

Sales are seen as a great way to network with professionals from many different fields. Several of the interviewed sales talents mentioned networking with other business professionals as a motivating factor attracting them to sales. Especially in Business-to-Business sales, the clients are often business decision makers, and the interviewed young professionals want to get to know those people. Networking with businesspeople might benefit the young professionals at the beginning of their career in the future.

> *I have actually worked only in B2B sales. In business environment I get to collaborate with experienced professionals, and I think that type of networks will never hurt.*

As mentioned in the literature review, the millennial talents are performance-oriented (Szabo et al., 2016, p. 294; Rosethorn, 2009, p. 18). This ambitiousness was recognizable during the interviews and indicated by how the sales talents plan their career. A job in

sales is seen as a great launch for career and it was brought up as one of the key factors attracting the young professionals to sales. The following chapter will provide further explanation of how sales jobs can be viewed beneficial for the future career and how has this attracted the interviewed talents.

5.2.4   Future career possibilities

I think it is smart to launch you career in sales. From there you can go to which direction you want without specializing into anything particular.

As previously discussed in the literature review, young professionals who begin their career sales might not see their long-term career in the role. Especially recent university graduates often use it as a first step towards marketing or management positions. (Jobber & Lancster, 2006, pp. 386-388.) This was also brought up by several interviewees as many see it as a great job from where they can continue pursuing a career in other tasks. As previously mentioned, many apply for sales as it is seen as a great place for challenges and self-development. These challenges and the experience acquired through them are seen as a way to prepare for the future career in other roles as well. Sales jobs might attract people because it is seen a great starting point to a career, but the interviews proved also that even though it is the initial reason to apply for some, they might start seeing their long-term career in it as well.

What originally attracted me to sales, is the fact that it is a great so-called entry-level job, from where it is easy to continue elsewhere. However, I have enjoyed the job so much that I have no interest in seeking for other jobs.

Some of the interviewees also described themselves to drift into sales as it is a required first step towards their end goals. Sales roles were described to be a way to get inside an organization or a field and then, once inside, it is easier to advance to other positions. For example, one interviewee explained that they had a specific employer in mind and that company was in start-up phase meaning that everyone's job included more or less sales. Despite the role, the employer was seen so attractive that the person was ready

to begin in sales in order to get into the organization. Another interviewee described how they had had a desire to work in the field of technology without an education from the field, and in this case as well, a start in sales was an efficient way to get into the field. Future career opportunities were a strong motivating factor for many of the interviewees.

Altogether, the findings of the study indicate a strong impact of employer branding on young sales professionals' willingness to apply. Moreover, there are several factors attracting these millennial talents to sales. The next chapter will provide conclusions to this research.

6   Conclusions

The aim of this thesis was to increase the understanding of employer brand's impact on the career decisions of young sales professionals. Furthermore, the objective was to identify the key factors that attract these sales professionals. This final chapter of this thesis summarizes the key findings of the research, presents the theoretical implications and managerial contributions. Lastly, the limitations of the research are considered and suggestions for future research are given.

6.1   Key findings

The findings of the study indicated that sales talents recognized the impact of a potential employer's brand on their eagerness to apply. The findings bring up different ways the employer brand affects the young sales talent's perception of the employer and why the brand has such a strong correlation with how motivated they are to apply. The study also identifies several different factors that have attracted these young professionals to begin their professional career in sales. The key findings provide answers to the research questions of this study.

The answers to the first sub question "*How does the employer brand of a company impact on salespeople's willingness to apply?*" introduces to the impact of employer branding in the context of young sales professionals. The interviewed young sales professionals recognized the influence of an employer's brand in their willingness to apply and the perceived impact is rather strong. Majority of the interviewees mentioned their employer's brand as one of the most important reasons they had chosen their current jobs. Based on the findings of this research, a positive employer brand is crucial in arousing the initial interest in a company but also in making the candidates apply. A positive and well-known employer brand not only catches the potential candidate's interest, but it also lowers the threshold for them to apply. (Gultekin, 2011; Knox & Freeman, 2006.) Based on the findings of interviews, employer brand's impact to the candidate's

willingness to apply can be both positive and negative. Young sales talents had also decided not to apply for an otherwise suitable job due to their negative employer brand image. The findings indicate that sales talents are more likely to apply to a well-known company with a positive employer brand.

The perceived employer brand, from the perspective of a millennial talent, is strongly influenced by the organizational culture of the employer (Espinoza & Ukleja, 2015). Based on the findings from the interviews, the young sales talents find out what kind of an organizational culture the company has and how their values are reflected in their everyday life. Millennial talents want to work in an environment where they fit in and with people they enjoy working with. The organizational culture of a company has a strong impact on an employer's brand and therefore on the young sales talents' willingness to apply. The findings from the interviews also show that a company culture can be an expelling factor if the candidate does not feel aligned with the values of a potential employer. Another way an employer's brand strongly affects salespeople's willingness to apply is employee word of mouth. The comments of the current employees were named as one of the most influential issues the interviewees evaluate in potential employers before applying. The comments of the current employees can have both a positive and a negative impact on their willingness to apply. The existing literature also recognizes employee word of mouth as an influential factor in shaping employer brand. (Mosley, 2014; Knox & Freeman, 2006.) The way a millennial sales talent perceives a potential employer is also highly influenced by media. The findings of this research show that young professionals are used to using technology and constantly evaluate potential employers in different medias. Companies can attract talent by reaching them through a media channel they already spend time in. Additionally, the candidates' use various channels to create an all-round understanding of a company, have nearly unlimited access to information and look for honest reviews. (Delgado, 2019; Espinoza & Ukleja, 2015; Mosley, 2014.)

The fact that the targeted talent of this research is young sales professionals at the beginning of their career creates a unique point of view to the research results as well. These talents are still starting their career and therefore they think about what their career development looks like from the outside. Young professionals look for good references for their future career. (Mosley, 2014, p. 90.) The interview findings also indicate that employers are viewed as status symbols and that the young professionals expect to benefit their future career by working for a well-known company. Well-known brands are believed to look good in the resume and improve the candidates' market value in the future. For this reason as well, the employer's brand has a direct impact on young sales professional's willingness to apply.

Additionally, as the targeted talent is from the sales field in specific, the company's brand is of even higher importance. The connection between customer brand and employer brand was also recognized in the literature and the integrated brand model by Mosley (2007, p. 130) well demonstrates it. However, interviews with the targeted talent provided insight into this specifically from sales perspective. The interviewed sales talents evaluate the brand also from the customer perspective. A well-known brand is easier to sell, and therefore sales in an organization with a strong and positive brand image is seen more appealing than sales in a less known company. Moreover, the interviewed salespeople evaluate how successful the business of the company is in their own segment, and how likely it is to make a sale.

The second sub question further investigates how to attract the young sales talents by answering the question *"What are the key factors attracting salespeople in the beginning of their professional career?".* The findings show that people are drawn to sales by various reasons and to be able to attract them through employer branding, it is crucial to understand what these reasons are. Based on findings, one important motivator for people in sales is money. The young sales professionals highly value money and the earning opportunities of the job make sales jobs appealing for them. Compensation is one of the key factors in attracting young professionals to sales (Jobber & Lancster 2006, p. 382). The findings of the interviews indicate that the salary model of a sales

organization is already evaluated before deciding whether to apply or not. Especially the salespeople who were highly driven by financial incentives look for a motivating commission model where the possibility to impact on one's own salary is high. The salary model in sales is perceived motivating if partly or completely based on commission.

Even though earning opportunities are an important factor in sales talent attraction, they are not the only factor. For companies to attract salespeople, they need to understand the unique characteristics of salespeople in more detail. A large majority of the interviewed people mentioned, as a key attracting factor, the sales job role itself. People are often attracted to sales because it is seen as an independent role (Jobber & Lancster, 2006, p. 386). Young sales talents wanted to work in sales because it is a job where people can freely design and schedule their work. Moreover, based on interviews, the job is seen as a great place for people to challenge and develop themselves. Based on the perceptions of the interviewed salespeople, the job requires courage and ambition, and these people either believe these to be some of their personal strengths or personality traits they want to actively work on in themselves. Furthermore, many of the interviewed talents wanted to work in sales because it is seen as a great job for social people and they want to work with different kind of customers. Many of the interviewees mentioned that they have a genuine interest in helping others and they enjoy meeting new people. Salespeople enjoy working with their customers and get satisfaction in their job when they are able to help them. Based on literature, the ability to understand customers is connected to skilled salespeople (Jobber & Lancster 2006, p. 387). Customer-centric role attracts young professionals to sales. Additionally, cooperation with customers and other stakeholders enables networking with business professionals, and this is valued by the young sales talents.

Based on findings, many young professionals are attracted to sales as they see it as a great way to launch their career. However, people who begin their career in sales for this reason, might not see their long-term career in the role. (Jobber & Lancster 2006, p. 388.) A part of the interviewees described sales as a way to get inside an organization or a field and then, once inside, it is easier to pursue a career in other tasks. If companies

want to attract young sales talents even only for a short period of time, highlighting the future career the role potentially enables, can be useful. Based on findings, the retention rate might be lower in these cases. The interviews did however show examples where the young professionals were originally attracted to sales because it was seen as a great first step, but they ended up enjoying the job so much they decided to continue for longer.

6.2   Theoretical contributions

The main contribution of this study is the increased understanding of talent attraction from the millennial's perspective in the field of sales. As mentioned in the theory, the topic of employer branding has been getting the attention of both the fields of marketing and HR. Additionally, the topic has been researched widely as its own entity. However, many of the recent studies on the topic are often published by consulting agencies that can have a commercial interest in mind. Additionally, employer branding in the sales talent market context is not as extensively researched and insights from the field are valuable. By interviewing young sales professionals in the beginning of their career, this research managed to build a thorough understanding of the current state of employer attractiveness in the minds of the targeted talent. The results demonstrated what kind of experiences and expectations the young sales professionals have for employer branding and how it impacts on their willingness to apply. Moreover, the actual factors attracting these talents to sales were described. Based on the findings, this thesis gives practical suggestions on how to attract young sales professionals.

Based on literature and the findings of previous researches, there is a strong connection between employer brand and the candidate's willingness to apply. Companies should aim at branding themselves as an employer that appeals to their targeted talent. Furthermore, employer brand is not only a result of the marketing communications and the comments of the current employees have a great impact on employer attractiveness. In line with the earlier findings (Knox & Freeman, 2006; Mosley, 2014), employee word of

mouth was found to be of high importance when the young sales professionals evaluate potential employers. However, unlike previous studies (Knox & Freeman, 2006; Mosley,2014; Rosethorn, 2009), the findings of this thesis also highlight the importance of an employer's brand from a sales candidate's perspective. Young sales professionals want to work for a company with a strong and positive brand due to the increased selling potential it is expected to enable. Also, since the targeted talents are at the beginning of their career, the brand of an employer is seen as a reference for future. For this reason as well, the interviewed talents are attracted to companies with a strong employer brand. Furthermore, the existing literature describes that people are attracted to sales mainly due to the independent nature of the job and the earning opportunities the role is expected to offer (Jobber & Lancster 2006). The findings of this research provided further evidence that these are some of the key attracting factors, however, additional aspects arose during interviews. Young sales professionals are attracted to sales because they are social, ambitious and enjoy challenges – they want to work in sales to challenge themselves and network with others. Additionally, these young sales professionals see sales job as a great launch for future career.

This research brings new insights to the talent attraction of young sales professionals and further emphasizes the importance of employer branding. The following subchapter will present the managerial implications of the findings of this research.

6.3   Managerial implications

The findings of this research suggest that companies should systematically build their employer brand to attract talent. The importance of a strong employer brand is especially important in the field of a young sales professional since they want to work for companies that are also positively viewed from the customer perspective as this is expected to increase the possibility to succeed in sales in that organization. Moreover, young professionals are looking for references for their future career and for this reason as well, building a strong employer brand in beneficial.

This research indicates that employer brand in the minds of young sales professionals is built on various channels. Media and the marketing communications of a company have an important role in building an employer brand but what is being said about a company is described to be even more powerful. Young sales professionals evaluate potential employers in different medias and look for employee referrals. These talents are interested in the comments of the current employees and the insights the candidate gets from them can have a significant impact on their willingness to apply. The findings suggest different ways for companies to attract young sales professionals through employer branding. The utilization of employee referrals could be one effective way and ensuring a positive employee experience can be expected to create a positive word of mouth, which in turn is likely to build a positive employer brand. Additionally, different media channels and social media can be efficient. Young professionals spend a lot of time on different social media channels and by being visible in the channels this targeted talent already spends time in is an efficient way to build brand awareness.

Furthermore, the findings of this research show that young sales professionals are mainly attracted to sales due to the independent and challenging nature of the job, the social aspects of the role and the earning opportunities. The targeted talent also appreciates the perception that sales is seen as a great launch for their future career. Companies should first ensure that they are able to meet these demands, and then, efficiently communicate it to their targeted talent through employer branding. Also, as the young sales professionals are sensitive to organizational cultures and want to work for an employer who shares their values, companies should invest in building an appealing organizational culture. Based on findings, the young sales professionals value flexibility and freedom and it is suggested that, in order to attract these talents through employer branding, companies should make sure that these wishes are implemented and then communicate them openly.

6.4   Limitations of the research

Like all studies, this research had its limitations as well. First limitation is related to the scope of this research from the theoretical framework perspective. This research focuses on the external employer brand from the candidate's perspective and therefore, the internal employer brand is not investigated. Another important limitation of this research is the methodological choices. As the objective of this research is to create a comprehensive understanding of employer branding in the context of young sales professional attraction, a qualitative research approach is followed. This thus limits the generalization of findings. Additional limitation to this study is in the selection of the interviewees. There were altogether eight interviewees from five different organizations, and they were all Finnish so it can be argued that the target group was relatively homogenous. The next subchapter will, also based on these limitations, give suggestions for future research.

6.5   Suggestions for future research

As employer branding in the context of sales talent attraction has gained limited attention among HR and marketing researchers, there are multiple possibilities for future research. This research examines employer branding from the perspective of young sales professionals in the beginning of their career and it would be interesting to, as a future study, investigate the topic from the perspective of salespeople with more work experience. Furthermore, it would be insightful to make comparison between these different talent groups to better understand how to attract sales talents altogether. Also, it would be interesting to conduct a similar kind of research than this but from the company perspective; how do companies attract young sales professionals through employer branding? Do they acknowledge the same characteristics that makes an appealing employer and the same factors that attract young sales professionals? Additionally, as the interviewed talents were all employed at the time of the interviews, it would be valuable to repeat this research with young sales professionals looking for jobs. All of the interviewees of this research were Finnish and one suggestion for future research is also to

conduct a similar research in an international context. Finally, as the target audience of this research was strictly limited to millennials at the beginning of their career, it would be useful to repeat a similar kind of research in five or ten years when the next generation has entered the labor market.

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Appendix. Interview guide

Appendix 1. Guiding questions for the interviews

Category	Question
Interviewee information	• Could you present yourself and what is your role in the organization?
Background information	• What factors originally attracted you to your current job? • What interests you in sales?

Employer brand	• When applying for sales jobs, what do you evaluate in a potential employer?
	• What makes an employer seem appealing?
	• Have you
	   a) Applied for a job solely because of an employer's brand?
	   b) Decided not to apply because of an employer's brand?
	• In which ways do you believe that what you see about companies in media affects your willingness to apply?
	• Could you imagine applying to a company you are not familiar with beforehand?
	   a) If yes, why?
	   b) If not, why not?
	• In which ways do you believe that the brand awareness of a company impacts on your willingness to apply?
	• Do you believe that the comments of current employees affect your perception of an employer?
	   a) If yes, in which ways?
	   b) If not, why?

Background information	• As a millennial, how do you believe that the generation you represent effects on what you appreciate in an employer?
Sales job attraction	• What originally attracted you in sales? • Why did you choose sales at your current employer?

Employer brand	• What kind of an employer brand does your current employer have in your view?
	   a) What factors do you believe to affect your view on it?
	• Do you believe that the employer brand of your current employer impacted on your willingness to apply?
	   a) If yes, how?
	   b) If not, why?

Sales job attraction	• What were the key factors that attracted you to begin your professional career in sales?
General information	• Do you have anything else in mind that you would like to add regarding this topic?