LOOK WHO'S CO-CREATING: WEB 2.0 TECHNOLOGIES EFFECTS ON EMPLOYER BRANDING

Complete Research

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Abstract

Web2.0 changes the way information, services and products are created. Companies engage with consumers in a process of co-creation to invent, shape and generate added value. This trend has been labelled Enterprise 2.0. This interdisciplinary study joins the fields of Information Systems, Marketing and Human Resource Management and provides an insight into how the models of value-, product- and service co-creation can be applied to the domain of employer branding. Based on the DART-model of value co-creation a qualitative multi-case study investigates how social media usage contributes to co-creation of employer brand. The study reveals unexpected trends, paradoxes and potential conflicts, and provides suggestions for further research. The paper highlights the lack of Dialogue between employer and employee; new ways of Accessing information by employees outside the control of the employer; the uncertainty of benefits and Risks of employee involvement in brand creation; and increased Transparency through inclusion of new participants in the employer brand creation process: alumni and customers. The study identifies an emergent shift of power to control and create information from the organization towards employees and consumers and links this power shift to social media use by organisations and their employees.

Keywords: Employer Branding, Co-Creation, Social Media, Qualitative Research, Case Study.

1 Introduction

Social Networking Sites (SNS) are web-based applications built upon the technological foundation of Web2.0; many of them allow users to not only generate content, but also to explicitly express their identity and their relationships with each other (Boyd and Ellison, 2008). Social media is a user generated information system which integrates SNS, Web2.0 and other technologies and provides unique value to the user (for example GPS on the mobile phone is used to check-in on foursquare and Facebook to receive reviews of places nearby). Despite a lack of a common definition of a social media application, most of the definitions share some core properties and can be distilled down to *an interactive web application that supports the creation of user-generated content and multiple ways of communicating between (loosely) interconnected personas* (Boyd and Ellison, 2008, DesAutels, 2011, Kietzmann et al., 2011, Hauptmann and Steger, 2013).

The ability to interact and participate in the generation of content facilitates the emergence of a new ideology of open access and collaboration (DesAutels, 2011). The content which was traditionally cre-

ated and controlled by corporate content providers (e.g. product information, encyclopaedia, phone register) is now being co-created by the consumers (DesAutels, 2011, Kietzmann et al., 2011). The metamorphose of (content) producer and (content) consumer creates a new role: a "prosumer" – a term widely used in literature to describe consumers who participate in value-generating co-creation process (Izvercianu et al., 2014, Gebauer et al., 2010).

The active involvement of stakeholders in the value creation process has enjoyed the attention of a growing number of scholars since 2003 (Durugbo and Pawar, 2014). Value co-creation is a process in which value created by the supplier (producer) and value created by the customer (consumer) are combined to generate *added value* for all participating parties (Andreu et al., 2010). In the literature the terms "supplier" and "producer" are often used interchangeably as are the terms "consumer" or "customer". This paper follows suit and uses the terms as synonyms, especially when referring to other sources the original expressions will be used.

Definition of "employee" and "organisation" requires some clarification. In the context of this paper an "employee" is understood as anyone who is employed by an organisation but does not act in official capacity in the name of or on behalf of the organisation. The "organisation", "the firm", the "employer" are abstract constructs, however, in the context of this paper anyone who officially, with management's consent represents the "legal entity" (a commercial enterprise registered as such) is referred to as "the organisation". For example an employment contact is drafted by an HR employee, or an employee can post on Twitter (a micro-blogging site) using official firm account: in the context of this paper both these examples would be considered as actions of "the organisation".

Some of the references in this paper are chosen primarily for their novelty and contemporary relevance, rather than reputation of the publication. Due to the emergent and developing nature of the social media phenomenon, many findings have not made it into the renowned journals so that conference proceedings provide invaluable access to most cutting-edge research.

Enterprise 1.0: Passive Consumer

Durugbo and Pawar (2014) described the role of the consumer in the "traditional" relationship as that of a "validator" – goods or services were invented, designed and created by the *active* supplier, a *passive* customer would receive the goods and validate their fitness. Goods and services were created *for* the customer and, following the 4Ps model, the products were priced, placed and promoted on the market (Vargo and Lusch, 2004). Similar to the "validator"-view of production described by Durugbo and Pawar (2014), the content and brand creation is traditionally dominated by unidirectional broadcast of information from the brand owner to its target audience (Nandan, 2005, Fieseler et al., 2010).

Enterprise 2.0: Active Consumer

Web 2.0 encourages and supports participative involvement in the creation of products and services (Izvercianu and Alina Seran, 2013, Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). The Co-creation process relies on the open and transparent access to information supported by Web2.0; Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004b) use the dimensions of the DART-framework (Figure 1): *Dialogic* communication, *Access* to information, *Risk-benefits* balance, and *Transparency* of information to explain value co-creation.
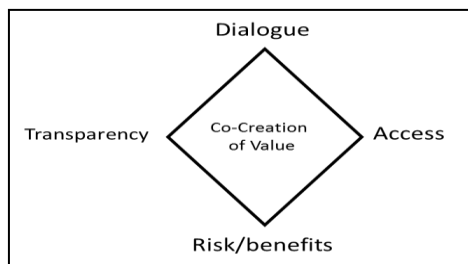

Figure 1 - DART-Model from Prahalad and Ramswamy's (2004)

Recent studies highlight the increasingly *active* role of consumers (but equally other stakeholders) as participants in the (co-)creation of value, content, services, and products (Andreu et al., 2010, Jussila et al., 2011, Laroche et al., 2012). Many of these models attribute the dominant role in the co-creation process to the producer, and assume that the producer is managing, encouraging and driving the co-creation through strategic, active, and supportive involvement of consumers in co-creation (Andreu et al., 2010, Durugbo and Pawar, 2014, Gebauer et al., 2010, Jussila et al., 2011).

Enterprise 2.1: Dominant Consumer

An even greater importance is attributed to the role of consumer by Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004a) who recognise that "companies can no longer act autonomously, designing products, developing production processes, crafting marketing messages, and controlling sales channels with little or no interference from consumers" . Applying Prahalad and Ramswamy's (2004b) DART-Model, the equality of access and the transparency of information will contribute to dialogue (Kent and Taylor, 1998) and re-balance the power-relationship between consumer and supplier, so that the dominant and dictating role of the supplier can be challenged. Grönroos (2008) takes a step further and shifts the locus of creative force from producer to consumer. Grönroos' framework assumes that, by combining products and services, it is the consumer who actually generates value at the point of consumption, and that the producer is the co-creator acting as a "facilitator" who provides access to goods and services. This view attributes the leading role to the consumer and agrees with Kaplan and Haenlein's (2010) observation with regards to corporate image creation that "firms have been increasingly relegated to the sidelines as mere observers, having neither the knowledge nor the chance – or, sometimes, even the right – to alter publicly posted comments provided by their customers" .

Employer Branding 2.0: Active Employee

Employer Branding is the application of marketing principles to Human Resource Management (HR or HRM) activities (Edwards, 2010). The employer brand is built around the *brand proposition* aimed at defining a coherent set of economic and psychological benefits offered in exchange for fulfilment of employee's obligations towards the employer (Mosley, 2007, Edwards, 2010) and around the *communication process* that negotiates the proposition and aims at establishing consensus. In the context of the communication process, brand *identity* is what the sender tries to communicate, and brand *image* is what the receiver perceives (Nandan, 2005). The impact of social media and Web2.0 has already been a subject of interest in the HR literature with selection and assessment activities, and collaboration being the prominent areas of academic interest (Brown and Vaughn, 2011, Roth et al., 2013). The employer branding activity has not yet enjoyed the limelight of HR research. Transfer of findings from the marketing literature to the domain of HR, specifically the creation of Employer Brand Identity is a first step towards closing this gap. Further, the need to develop multiple stakeholder approaches to brands and brand co-creation, emphasised by Gyrd-Jones and Kornum (2013), supports the idea of interdisciplinary research in this area. Employees are recognized as key stakeholders (Harris & De Chernatony, 2001 in Gyrd-Jones & Kornum, 2013) who have multiple roles – consumers of corporate brand identity: many of the branding activities are directed at employees; co-creators: actively shaping the organisation's identity; and carriers of the employer brand: representing the organisation to consumers, partners, recruits, families etc. The lack of current empirical research into HR activities with regards to utilisation of Web2.0 for employer branding, as well as the need to broaden existing knowledge from marketing literature and apply it to a larger group of stakeholders, calls for an in-depth investigation of the impact of Web2.0 and social media on employer branding. Are employees mere passive consumers of the employer brand? Are they actively co-creating, or are they dominating the creation of the employer brand? This research investigates how employer brand is (co-) created on social media and who are the actors in this process.

2 Method

This section introduces the framework, case selection methods, and the research lens applied to data gathering and analysis. The study presented here is a qualitative multiple case study conducted in January-November 2014.

2.1 Research framework

Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004a) explain co-creation as consisting of four building blocks – Dialogue, Access to information, Risk-benefit balance, and Transparency (DART). To establish dialogue, the power balance between all participating parties needs to be maintained (Kent and Taylor, 1998). The idea of the balance of power goes back to Habermas' ideal speech situation which requires all parties to be true to themselves, have the same opportunity to participate and equal power to influence others, and also allows every statement to be questioned and debated (Leeper, 1996). The power itself has three faces, according to Lukes (1974): the power to speak, the power to define what can be said and the power to prevent others from speaking. Linking these power attributes back to DART (Figure 2) – *dialogue* requires an equilibrium of powers and contributes to it; equality of *access* contributes to distribution of power and is influenced by power shifts at the same time; *risk-benefits* balance influences participants' decision to speak or not to speak, and to challenge and debate decisions; *transparent* information contributes to power distribution and informs the participants' contribution.
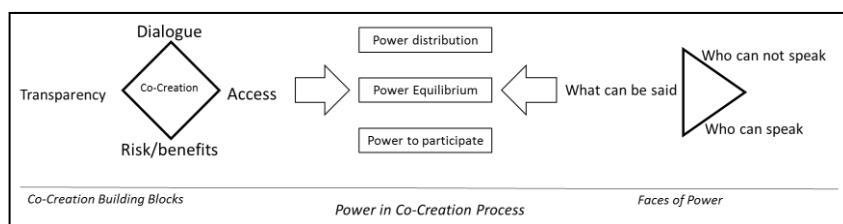

Figure 2 - Linking DART framework to Power

The research data is assessed with regards to the three faces of power:

- o who are the participants in the discourse on social media,
- o who are the non-participants unable to access the conversation, and
- o what is being discussed: what are the context and content of conversation.

2.2 Research lens

Information Systems is an interdisciplinary research discipline (Füller et al., 2009) and is in this instance placed into the domain of Human Resource Management. The focus is on understanding how Web2.0, specifically social media platforms, change the power structures in the employer branding process. Heidegger (1993) states that it is the way in which technology is used which defines how technology shapes us (Hatch, 2012), the research therefore adopts the practice lens (Barley, 1986, Orlikowski, 2000, Leonardi and Barley, 2010) and focuses on the actual practices and practical use of social media in organisations in relation to the creation of brand identity. In this study the mingle of technology, practices, and praxis is the subject of investigation and is tackled from three sides: on one side the study looks at what technology platforms and features are available; on the other side what organisational practices, rules and regulations governing the use of these technologies are in place; on the third side what the daily praxis is, how these technologies are used, and how the practices and the rules are implemented. Through two in-depth case studies involving interviews and analysis of websites and SNS activity this research attempts to establish an understanding of how social media use influences employer branding activities.

The selection of cases follows theoretical sampling with organisations likely to provide insights being the subject of the investigation (Rouse and Daellenbach, 1999, Eisenhardt, 1989). The firms were selected because of their apparent similarities in size, global operations to the overlapping set of countries, focus on private consumers, high public interest to their activities, their workforce composition, and headquarters in London – thus cultural, societal and legal environment being the same. The differences in observations are due to firm internal factors rather than environmental differences.

2.3   Case organisations

The case studies were conducted in two large international UK-based companies from different industry sectors and with different approaches to employee engagement, management style and levels of social media use. Both studies revealed that social media applications are being used for information sharing, collection and conversations among candidates, employees and alumni, with and without organisational support and, in some cases, despite explicit lack of support.

The first organisation is a UK based financial institution (UK Bank) with over 100,000 employees worldwide and operations in over 50 countries. Like other financial services firms, it is a strongly regulated, rigid organisation with tall static hierarchy structures ranging from associates, vice presidents, to presidents, directors and a number of high-ranking executive officers. At the time of the study the organisation was one of many financial institutions undergoing a global restructuring process. This involved re-invention of the global brand and personnel changes at the same time. Many recruitment and branding activities were actively held back due to the lack of a (new common) brand and in fear of potential redundancies.

The other organisation (Consumer Goods) is a Fast Moving Consumer Goods enterprise with over 100,000 employees worldwide and operations in over 70 countries. Consumer Goods considers its employees as customers and values their engagement with the brand. Being very much marketing driven, many activities in HR are coordinated with public relations, marketing and communication teams. Relatively flat hierarchies and employee-focused benefits such as flexible working hours contribute to the employer brand identity of a "family company".

2.4   Case study data gathering and analysis methods

In each organisation one in-depth open ended interview with an HR-technology middle manager has been conducted; public facing social media activities (YouTube channels, Facebook and LinkedIn pages) and other web sources such as the corporate homepage and careers page were analysed in January 2014, reviewed in May 2014 and then again in November 2014. Twitter channels for both organisations were evaluated during the November 2014 review, to provide an additional data source and enrich the previous data set. The findings were grouped and categorized along two dimensions – one dimension are the elements of DART framework, the second dimension, labelled "communication pattern", is based on the power-framework: who speaks and who decides what is being said.

The initial selection of websites analysed was driven by two approaches: (1) searches for "*Company name* jobs" and "… careers" on Google and following any links from the corporate career site, and (2) any SNS mentioned during the interviews. Information from the websites evaluated along two dimensions: first, *accessible* features were recorded (allowed comments, free to join groups, allow wall postings); then the actually *used* features were considered, i.e. did the users utilize any of the available features and how?

Interviews were conducted with HR employees who had an understanding of what the corporate message is in regards to the employer brand; Both interviewees are responsible for evaluating, selecting and implementing HR technologies (e.g. HRM software, applicant tracking systems, social media platforms); Both interviewees have a high exposure to attraction and selection activities of the organisation; Being in middle management, the interviewees are still close enough to the "shop floor level" to

know what actual practices exist, simultaneously having an understanding and knowledge of policies and strategies. The interviews were transcribed and quotes from the transcripts were used to identify rhetors and audiences, and their perceptions of DART attributes.

The quotes provided here for the discussion are verbatim with minor grammatical corrections and insignificant filler words (e.g. "hmm") removed. Where meaningful, pauses in statements are indicated. The interviewer is coded as "Iv", the respondents are coded as "UKB1" for UK Bank first interviewee, and "CG1" for Consumer Goods first interviewee. Due to the pressure for brevity, only selected evidence is presented in Tables 1 and 2 to support the analysis and discussion.

3   Results and Discussion

Fieseler et al. (2010) argue that on social media everyone can say (almost) anything. This claim has been confirmed to some extent in the interviews and observations. Both case studies revealed that organisations and employees face similar issues with regards to *dialogue, access, risk-benefit,* and *transparency* despite very different approaches to social media use by each organisation.

3.1   "UK Bank" findings

The company attempts to use social media to broadcast their employer brand identity, they are present on popular SNS including LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. In the interview, the organisation was described as being in the "infancy" of social media use. The search on Google for "UK Bank jobs" returns the corporate careers site as a first link. At the bottom of the page there are links to Twitter, YouTube and LinkedIn. Internally the bank uses a communication tool called "b-chat", which the interviewee described as "nothing but a messenger tool" (UKB1). Four different brand identity communication patterns within UK Bank emerge during the study: (1) *Internal Communications (Management – Employees), (2) Direct Hire Candidates (HR on behalf of UK Bank – graduates, trainees and support roles candidates), (3) Experienced Candidates (external recruiters contracted by UK Bank – experienced candidates), (4) External Communications (employees – alumni – candidates).* These patterns all differ in their DART-features.

Internal Communications

There appears to be little engagement between the organisation and its employees. Employee opinion is consulted during annual surveys, without any attempt to create a *dialogue*. Ongoing engagement with employees is consciously limited, internal communications seen as broadcasts which are "by their nature to inform people" (UKB1) and not to engage. This limits employees' *access* to the feedback channels and information. Providing *transparent* information is not intended: e.g. during the implementation of structural changes the organisation considered it impractical to engage with the entire workforce to discuss and develop these changes. Overall the employees and the organisation appear to see few *benefits* in utilisation of social media to engage directly with each other.

Direct Hire Candidates

The organisation seeks to promote itself to external audiences to attract future employees, however this is aimed primarily at graduate, trainee and support jobs. A careers channel on YouTube and a Twitter feed are featured prominently on the careers page, and there is a "UK Bank graduates" page on Facebook. It is uncertain whether *dialogue* is sought from either side: neither Twitter, nor YouTube, nor Facebook channels show any level of conversation at all. YouTube comments are disabled, as is posting to the graduate page on Facebook. User's *access* to content creation features is limited to tweets and Facebook comments on existing content created exclusively by the firm. Some form of exchange takes place when employees or candidates derive *benefits* from asking questions about recruitment process or events offered by the firm's HR team. The organisation is very prominently in a "broadcast" mode, thus still controlling the information flow and limiting *transparency*. The Facebook

page was not linked to from either YouTube, Twitter or the Careers Page, inconsistent links on individual pages led to different information being "discovered" depending on the starting point.

Experienced Candidates

The organisation has no tradition of building a *dialogue* with the experienced candidates. This is in some contrast to graduate and trainee recruitment which is traditionally kept in-house. The *access* for the members of the organisation (recruitment team) to the candidates and vice versa is limited and happens through a third party (recruitment agency), which was referred to as "our way to engage" (UKB1). The organisation considers it a high *risk* and low return exercise to engage with candidates directly. As there is virtually no direct interaction between the organisation and candidates, the information released by either party is made even less *transparent* as it passes through recruitment agents.

External Communications

Employees, candidates and alumni engage in some *dialogue* on social media outside the organisation. The *access* to some of the alumni groups on LinkedIn is limited, but there is a number of open groups with varying levels of activity where candidates can gain access to current and former employees. Most *valuable* conversations happen around discussions of informative posts or in answering questions regarding work and job opportunities. It appears that potential employees *benefit* from these conversations more than current or former employees. The content is provided by the community members and, due to the nature of LinkedIn, the source of posts and comments is *transparent*. The fact that information about the firm is provided by alumni further adds authenticity.

Overall, UK Bank uses social media for broadcast, and less for engagement and dialogue. The organisation strives for control of the information and media and uses technology to limit employees' ability to create content, participate in discussion, and provide feedback. However dialogue happens on LinkedIn between alumni, employees and potential candidates. The organisation's dominance over the content is being challenged as candidates and employees speak directly with each other.

3.2   "Consumer Goods" findings

The organisation was introduced as "obviously … a marketing company, but we have different managing areas and departments" (CG1). Marketing appears to play a dominant role in the organisation's life and employees appear to be well aware of the brand. Social media is being used to engage with consumers, and equally with candidates, who are understood to be consumers at the same time. The careers page of Consumer Goods has links to a blog, Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube with a live Twitter feed prominently displayed. The organisation has a strong recruitment team and relies on direct recruitment for junior and senior roles. The alumni are treated as potential employees: "quite a lot of people boomerang back" (CG1), as well as customers: "… keep them engaged not just as alumni, but also as customers" (CG1). Employees further engage with candidates and former employees over Skype and DropBox: both technologies which are not supported by the organisation. Three distinct communication patterns are identified: *(1) Internal Communications (management – employees), (2) Candidate Communications (HR on behalf of the organisation – candidates),* and *(3) External Communications (employees – candidates – alumni).* Evident DART-features for each of these patterns are briefly described below from the evidence presented in Table 2.

Internal Communications

Internally a social networking application "Chatter" by Salesforce is used to encourage a *dialogue* between employees and management. Managers seek to provide employees with *transparent* information, inform them of organisational changes and use "Chatter" as means to providing *access* to information and feedback media. Senior managers encourage use of the platform and use it themselves to engage with employees. Employees perceive their participation in the decision making process as *beneficial*; however, a clearly expressed fear of *risk* due to uncertainty of what can and cannot be

shared over this internally controlled platform needs to be acknowledged. As with other internal systems, the organisation controls who can and cannot use these systems and what is being said, maintaining a position of power.

Candidate Communications

Engagement with external audiences happens over LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. In addition to engaging with external audiences through creating a *dialogue* based on post/comment activities, recruiters actively go out to LinkedIn to search for talent and create a *dialogue* on- and offline. Some of the content is created by employees on their own accord, which emphasises their *access* to creation tools: e.g. YouTube videos are created by and feature graduates, trainees and non-managerial staff and so contribute to a more *transparent* image of the employer. Careers page, YouTube, and Facebook pages are interlinked and allow consistent *transparent* access to all information independent of how the user navigates there. Interaction is actively sought between the organisation and external audiences and *access* to all posting-, commenting-, and engagement-features is enabled across all social media platforms. The organisation *values* dialogic communication on social media platforms: critical comments are present as well as praise.

External Communications

Conversations between employees and people outside of the organisation are encouraged, albeit not all platforms are endorsed or supported. Direct *dialogue* or exchange happens between employees and alumni, and between HR and candidates. Most prominently, private accounts on Dropbox (a file sharing application) and Skype (multi-way video conferencing and sharing application) are being used by employees to communicate internally, and externally with candidates and former employees. The firm does not support these platforms, but does still allow *access* to these tools. The ease of use and additional *value* from utilising these tools and platforms provide *benefits* to their users. Thanks to the one-to-one exchange and personal relationships between employees and external members, the information is *transparent* from the viewpoint of parties involved in the conversation, however it is *not transparent* from the viewpoint of the organisation which is being excluded from this exchange.

Despite obvious efforts to engage employees and potential employees in a conversation there appears to be limited dialogue on social media. Employees are being actively encouraged to use internal social media platforms, and some dialogic exchange e.g. between marketing and other employees, is apparent. Use of external platforms is not discouraged, however there is no consistent dialogue between the organisation and its current and future employees. Much of the information published appears to be broadcasts, rather than dialogue, as the risk-benefit balance for the employees is not obvious.

3.3 Discussion

How is employer brand (co-)created on social media and who are the creators? Are the trends which are being observed in product-design: consumers being empowered through co-creation on social media (Füller et al., 2009) also visible in employer brand co-creation? The discussion links power (who can speak, who is prevented from speaking, and what is being said) to the dimensions of the DART framework by analysing *how* social media is used by organisations and employees to create and consume the employer brand.

The Participants – Who speaks?

UK Bank appears to believe in their ability to maintain control of the voice – YouTube videos featuring managers and directors are professionally created, no employees, graduates or trainees are involved in shaping or delivering the message. The employees speak internally once per year by participating in an employee survey. The management decides what information is posted out, what questions are asked in the annual survey and how the responses are evaluated. In parallel, the traditional employer branding activities in relation to current and future employees (Edwards, 2010) are being

complemented by a new type of employer brand creation activity: former employees (alumni) are now using social media to engage in conversations with current and future employees.

Consumer Goods appears to empower its current and potential employees and to support voice. The interactions happening on public SNS allow candidates to engage in a conversation. Employees are also encouraged to share their version of the employer brand through e.g. creation of videos or direct engagement with the alumni. Consumer Goods' view of their alumni as potential candidates and current customers introduces yet another potential participant in the employer brand co-creation process: the consumer. The established link between positive product brand and employer attractiveness (Edwards, 2010) supports the idea of including customers in the employer brand creation process.

The Non-Participants – Who is excluded?

UK Bank tries to limit access to communication channels wherever it can. Posting and comment features are disabled on public social media where possible. Internal communication platforms are neither used by managers to reach out to employees, nor by employees to address managers. The employees are seen as "consumers" of information and are excluded from the creation process. On the other hand, the organisation itself is excluded from conversation in public LinkedIn groups set up by alumni. The employer brand in these LinkedIn groups is being co-created between current, former and potential employees, without managerial or strategic input or control. It is the employer who cannot speak here and the alumni and potential candidates set the conversation's agenda.

Consumer Goods leave all channels open on public social media to be as inclusive as possible. Through their self-understanding as a "marketing company", everyone is treated as being a customer in addition to any other relationship they may have with the firm. Considering the use of the internal tool for employee engagement, there appears to be a dis-balance of power. Despite (or maybe because of) the effort of senior management to encourage employee use of internal SNS, employees appear conscious of the restrictions on "what can be said". They are reluctant to participate because their statements might "come back and haunt" them. This lack of regulation and active top-down encouragement, paradoxically, co-exists with (self-) exclusion of employees from the dialogue.

The Content – what is being said, where and how?

In both organisation most of the content on public networks is created by the organisation. Employees and external groups have little input into the content of these communications, with a small exception of graduates and trainees in Consumer Goods creating videos about themselves (notably with the permission and guidance of the firm). Despite the fact that social media platforms allow creation of content (through posts, comments, likes, tweets and re-tweets, etc.) external actors and employees do not extensively use this opportunity to participate. A notable exception are comments on Consumer Goods' YouTube channel. On the other hand, in groups and on platforms not endorsed by the organisations a more active creation of content and conversation is happening.

Patterns of higher and lower engagement levels exist in both organisations. Internal, Direct Hire, and Experienced Candidates Communication patterns in UK Bank (UKB), as well as Internal and Candidate Communication patterns in Consumer Goods (CG) show little levels of engagement. All of these cases exhibit low levels of *dialogue*, limit *access* (e.g. internal tools by their nature exclude external participants), have *risks* associated with them (e.g. risk of using Chatter in CG), and display little *transparency* of the content (e.g. staged videos on UKB's channel). At the same time all of these cases are characterised by high levels of power dis-balance, and of organisation's control over the media (e.g. internal SNS, official corporate sites on Facebook where posting is disabled, staged videos and disabled comments on YouTube etc.). The organisation is the one *who* speaks; it decides *what* can be and is being said, and *who can not* speak and is excluded (e.g. external participants on Chatter in case of GC, everyone on Facebook and YouTube in case of UKB).

Higher levels of engagement on the other hand are observed in External Communication patterns in both organisations. *Dialogue* is visibly and reportedly happening between employees and alumni, and between candidates and alumni. *Access* to certain media such as Skype and LinkedIn groups lies outside organisation's control; the *risk/benefits* balance is greater: for example Skype is "easier" to use (CG1), and LinkedIn groups offer candidates benefits of getting information about new vacancies. The personal relationships that become articulated in public SNS add to *transparency*. These more active and engaged communication patterns happen where there is little or no official and openly endorsed organisational involvement (i.e. outside of the official and internal sites, groups, and channels). None of the participant groups has overwhelming control over the media (in contrast to the internal SNS). The *who* can speak is somewhat limited to e.g. "current and former employees" in some of the closed LinkedIn groups, but also very much unlimited and includes everyone who chooses to participate in other open groups. Those who *can not speak* are excluded by their own choice and not through exercise of power; finally, as can be observed in some of the alumni-groups, *what* can be said is decided by a variety of participants: candidates enquire about work climate, alumni look back at their experiences, and employees cultivate their connections.

The study observed the co-creation process of the employer brand without the involvement of the employer. There is an indication that UK Bank employees, candidates and alumni are being empowered and given a voice in groups on LinkedIn. Consumer Goods employees, conscious of management control over internal social media networks, also escape to alternative platforms such as Skype and DropBox to generate and share their own content. These separate processes could be compared with Andreu et al. (2010) model in which supplier and customer value creation processes happen in parallel and independent from each other and the co-creation happens during an "encounter". It is, however, not observable from the data how, when, and if such an encounter takes place in case of UK Bank's employer brand creation process.

In both organisations employees, potential employees, and alumni actively engage in brand co-creation. Following the Web2.0 naming convention, the picture presented here can be described in some instances as Employer Branding 2.0: co-operative and co-created experience. The power to create employer brand shift towards employees and consumers. If the trend is confirmed and continues, the role of the management in employer brand creation process will change significantly. Imitating Grönroos (2008), the findings raise the question "who creates the employer brand? And who co-creates?" There is a potential for the employees and the consumers to take on the role of the creator, with the organisation (management) becoming a "facilitator" rather than producer.

3.3.1 Limitations

The case studies were conducted as exploratory studies to allow first insights into the phenomenon of social media use for employer branding. The findings are very limited and represent just snapshots of reality. The juxtaposition of the two organisations is not unproblematic in itself insofar as the approach to recruitment, retention and alumni engagement are different in each organisation, as is the approach towards marketing and the in-house marketing expertise. The collaborative nature of one organisation whereby different departments are open to sharing information (such as finance function sharing their experience with IT function in regards to employee consultation prior to restructuring) might have influenced the level of adoption of social media tools in HR for employer branding. The size of the organisations might have contributed to the low level of social media adoption observed, further studies will assess social medial utilisation in smaller organisations, which might be more agile. UK Bank relies heavily on external recruitment agencies, however no investigation in the role of external recruitment agencies in the employer brand creation has been made. Finally, respondents were not presented with a list of possible applications and it is possible that some applications that are being used by these organisations were not mentioned. Further data collection, within other organisations and involving more respondents, will provide a fuller and more consistent picture.

3.3.2 Contribution

This study investigates how emergent Web 2.0 technologies affect the creation of the employer brand. The first contribution of this study is to establish a link between power and engagement. These findings indicate that engagement levels are higher in situations with more power-balance between employer and employee. Adopting the DART framework to explain the co-creation *value*, the study suggests that this value is greater when organisations surrender control over the media and engage in dialogue, rather than rely on broadcast to disseminate information. The next two contributions are related to identification of new (1) practices and (2) actors in the field of employer branding. This study contributes to theory on Web 2.0 use in organisations by describing practices associated with social media use. A link between the Web 2.0 functionalities and emergent practices is established, and the effect of open SNS on accessibility and transparency of the conversation is highlighted. The findings indicate that public social media are predominantly used by organisations as broadcast platforms, with little dialogue taking place, while at the same time employees use these media to engage in dialogue with each other and new external groups. The alumni and customers are two of these external groups now participating in the employer brand (co-)creation process.

The study unveiled new complexities in the employer branding process. The complexities arise through social media use by a greater number of participants, more transparent access to media and information, and thus a more distributed power to speak and define the content in the conversations about the employer brand. Further research in this direction with more data and in-depth understanding of how these technologies are being used and how these practices change the power distribution would benefit theories on the creation of employer brand. Linking the brand creation to culture and organisational learning would potentially uncover further complexity of co-creation processes within organisations. Practical implications of the findings include the identification of new employer brand creation practices, and new actors in the brand creation process. The findings direct the practitioners to those Web 2.0 platforms and groups where the engagement is happening and employer brand is being co-created outside of the organisation.

4 Conclusion

Co-creation is a developing phenomenon supported and triggered in parts by the emergence of Web2.0 and social media. This study provides an insight into how the models from marketing literature with the focus on value-, product- and service co-creation can be applied to the domain of employer branding as a sub-domain of Human Resource Management. The empirical findings link the DART-model of value co-creation (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004b) to power and suggest that co-creation value is higher in settings with more balance of power. The findings further indicate a shift in power distribution between employer and employees and acquisition of voice by employees with regards to creation of employer brand, and thus suggest that brand co-creation value increases with power devolution to new players in the co-creation process: the alumnus and the consumer. The *dialogue* between the organisation (the traditional brand creator) and the employees (the potential co-creator) has not yet materialised. While one of the organisations studied tries to *limit access* and the other *supports access* to content-creation and communication channels on social media, neither seems to be able to demonstrate *benefits* for the employees in engaging in the brand creation process. Employees appear to associate some *risks* with openly engaging on platforms which are controlled by the organisation. The *dialogue* is happening on platforms and in groups outside the organisations' control and, in addition to the traditional participants (potential and current employees), the alumni and customers now too get involved in these conversations. These new participants can contribute to *transparency* of information and play a role in employer brand creation, limiting organisation's influence. The paper contributes to the existing body of knowledge by introducing technology focus into the theory of employer branding, establishing a link between co-creation and power, and by suggesting directions for further research.

	Internal Communications	Direct Hire Candidates	Experienced Candidates	External Communications
Dialogue	"How we tend to communicate [...] we have employee opinion surveys [...] they happen once a year…"	Facebook: One comment in group between 10/11/13 and 12/11/14. UK Bank did not respond to that comment. Twitter: 13 "conversations" – consisting of one reply from 01/10/-12/11/14; all recruitment queries replied to with "call our helpline on 0845…" LinkedIn: Page established in December 2013. No conversations at all. No replies to comments.	"Traditionally we are not really good at engaging people through social media or any direct sources"	LinkedIn: open discussions of potential jobs happen in open groups.
Access	"…if there is a mechanism whereby something is communicated and you expect feedback?…I don't think this is the intention, because these comms, by their nature, are to inform people…"	YouTube: comments on videos disabled. Facebook: posting to Grad page disabled.	"…I mean it's more of a 'we publish and then we receive' rather than 'we source'…"	"It's only recently that we have created our own page or group as you wish, prior to that you could probably find tens and tens of different groups created by other alumni and different people"
Risk/Benefits	"…social media is really a tool that connects people, and question is how much quality is there?"	LinkedIn: comments on post where interview/job advise given. Twitter: tweets @UKBankJobs with recruitment queries only Facebook: single comment in last year was a complaint about service.	"…what organisations [like us] struggle with: how to get to the right people?"	"I would call maintain [a relationship with former employees], I am part of the group, …I think there are way too many groups"
			"…I think it [social media usage] is almost now going to regression…"	LinkedIn: open groups discussing upcoming opportunities
Transparency	Iv: "How would that feedback be sought during implementation or due diligence process?"	YouTube: Total of 24 edited videos. 21 from Senior Managers created in 2012; three from HR Director and senior leaders created in 2013.	"…there are specialised agencies out that that act on our behalf …that's almost the equivalent of social media"	"…[information is provided by] people they are not UK Bank,…I know they are alumni because they are no longer here"
	UKB1: "Well, I mean, it's addressing stakeholders, you don't really go and engage the whole population, you have select groups of people of parts of	LinkedIn: promotion of recruitment events, some interview/CV advice. Twitter: Job Postings only. Fully organisation controlled		

Table 1 – UK Bank Findings

	Internal Communications	Candidate Communications	External Communications
Dialogue	"it is a relationship based company" "an online jam on chatter … to get employee input" "they [marketing department] can just post it [new marketing initiatives] on the website [Chatter] and then from comments ideas spring off"	"… the idea of our Facebook page is all about interaction…" "… recruiters would call them up and have a conversation…" Youtube comments: "Be careful… they are not loyal to employees" "One of the best corporate channels…"	"there are many of us that keep in contact with those who have left the organisation"
Access	"… it [Chatter] allows people to create groups…" "… I know they [graduates] setup a group to connect graduates… Which wasn't something I did as HR … they did it on their own initiative"	FaceBook: posting and comments enabled YouTube: comments enabled "…do we keep them [alumni] involved with everything that is going on in the company? To an extent…"	"… our IT department don't support technical problems with Skype, but we don't disallow it. And Actually everybody uses it"
Risk/Benefits	"… it is a very much ingrained tool now, all the seniors have it now…" "… when you are posting with friends, this comes a lot easier, cause you know what you are posting won't come back and haunt you"	"With Facebook, we know it's important: continuous interaction, dialogue" "[engaging alumni] as customers, I am sure these will be utilised: Facebook Groups, Salesforce…" "Where HR challenge has been is to get people with these [technical] skills"	"I have two Skype accounts – one business and one home and I regularly get friends added to my business account and vice versa. It's such an easy application […] in terms of it working technically, like not having any issues – it's awesome! […] My preference is Skype because it's easier."
Transparency	"the business leaders created a…framework… and went out … to get employee input….It was not an original idea – it came from the finance department who did it before." "it's all, obviously, in control of the company"	"…the videos are being uploaded [regularly], in fact there is one uploaded recently… it is not just videos on 'hey what is it like to join the graduate scheme' these are videos that show what our graduates are doing on a daily basis."	"[for DropBox, Skype, calendar] a lot of my team have their [personal] iPads"

Table 2 – Consumer Goods Findings

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