**MASTER THESIS**

# 'An Investigation of Engagement in the Context of Employer Branding and Social Media'

By

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# Abstract

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| **Title:** | An Investigation of Engagement in the Context of Employer Branding and Social Media |
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| **Keywords:** | Engagement, Employer Branding, Employer Brand, Social Media, Web 2.0, War for Talent |
| **Thesis Purpose:** | The purpose of this study is to examine how companies are applying employer branding in social media and how these activities affect potential employees' engagement. |
| **Methodology:** | Potential employees' and employers' engagement on social media has been analyzed according to the cognitive, emotional and behavioral dimensions using a mixed method content analysis. Employer brand activities on social media were investigated quantitatively and potential employees' engagement was predominately analyzed qualitatively. |
| **Theoretical Perspective:** | Employer Branding Theories, Customer-Brand Engagement Theory, Social Media and Web 2.0 Theories |
| **Empirical Data:** | Empirical data consisted of 741 samples of employer brand activities on social media during one month and potential employees' responses. |
| **Conclusion:** | The research narrowed down the gap in the literature regarding the research areas of employer branding, engagement and social media. It furthers suggests that social media is an effective channel to use for employer branding. A model for the purpose of combining the mentioned research areas and analyzing |

engagement according to the three dimensions was established and has been enriched by the findings. For the measurement of engagement, an engagement index was created and applied. The results have shown that engagement exists on all the three examined dimensions: the cognitive, behavioral and emotional dimension. However, a varying dominance of those dimensions was identified on both the employers' and the potential employees' sides. Here, the cognitive dimension was strongest on the employers' side and the emotional dimension was the strongest on the potential employees' side. Also, several new themes could be identified and added to the potential employees' emotional and behavioral dimensions to those already known from previous research. Among the new themes, nostalgia was found to have an especially strong influence on potential employees' engagement on the emotional dimension. Also, it was identified that different content led to different engagement responses on the three dimensions. Moreover, a habitus was observed as potential employees' responses were influencing each other which led to similar responses. Additionally a fourth dimension could be identified, a new functional dimension, in the context of social media, as different social media platforms enable different functionalities and have a different kind of impact on engagement. Finally, the research contributed by using a mixed method content analysis as this approach has not been used extensively in prior research methodology.

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# 1. Introduction

Employer branding has experienced significant developments in the past years and is defined according to Ambler and Barrow as *"the package of functional, economic and psychological benefits provided by employment and identified with the employing company"* (1996, p.187). Human resource and corporate management increasingly recognize employer branding as a high premium tool for recruiting key players and achieving sustainable competitive advantages in the so-called *war for talent* (Mandhanya & Shah, 2010). The rising attention for employer branding is confirmed in a recent global survey by Deloitte LLP in 2010 where results showed that more than seven in ten (72%) companies will increase their focus on their employer branding strategies (Botha, Bussin & Swardt, 2011). Also, according to research by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development approximately 75% of companies that use employer branding as a tool for recruitment find it effective (Arachchige & Robertson, 2011). Further, the demand for talented, value-adding and special-skilled employees is presumed to increase intensely in the short to medium run which is due to the rapid growth of certain industry sectors (bio-, nanotechnology) as well as the growth of emerging countries and economies such as China and India (Moroko & Uncles, 2008). Other motivation for stronger employer branding in the *war for talent* are stable immigration levels paired with an overall ageing population leading to a smaller group of working age people (Arachige & Robertson, 2011). Therefore, creating an employer image that functions as a working relationship between a company and its potential employees is introduced in an increasing number of companies and their recruiting processes (Mandhanya & Shah, 2010). This is as the company is portrayed as the brand in employer branding. The culture of the organization plays a major role and is subsequently influenced by current employees' attitudes and engagement intensity towards the company. Therefore values, messages and behaviors have to be consistent with the brand image in all facets of an organization's communication (Thorne, 2007). As a consequence the communication of the organization's culture towards potential employees is crucial for the success of employer branding as potential employees go and search for the information they need. In order to win in the *war for talent* what is being communicated has to be appealing in a way that differentiates the company as a superior working environment from other companies (Tüzüner & Yüksel, 2009) and it has to be communicated where potential employees seek information.

Many companies are now shifting their budgets and efforts to social media platforms (Hanna, Rohm & Crittenden, 2011). Due to Web 2.0, the Internet has evolved from an information

source to a platform for participation (Harrison & Barthel, 2009). As a consequence, branding in the online environment has approached the next level and marketers are regarding social media platforms as crucial tools in branding and marketing efforts. Therefore brand strategies have been undergoing a significant transformation as individuals adopt active roles and marketers struggle to cease control (Christodoulides, 2011; Deighton & Kornfeld, 2009; Hanna et al., 2011). For companies, social media is seen as an ideal platform to listen to individuals' desires, opinions and recommendations (Barwise & Meehan, 2010). Even though some companies' employer brands have joined the development and use social media to enhance their employer brand, they do not fully exploit the potential of Web 2.0 and social media (Berthon, Ewing & Hah, 2005). For example, in 2007, poll results of nearly 700 HR decision-makers in the United States showed that 23% of them did not understand Web 2.0 sites or have never heard of them and consequently only 34% actively used Web 2.0 technologies (Miller, 2008). A global survey conducted by Employer Brand International (2011) also shows only a relatively small increase of social media use in companies' employer branding efforts to 44% of the 1700 companies surveyed. However, social media platforms are where people communicate today and more people join the development everyday as rising user numbers prove. Therefore, as companies are pressured to be present where the best talent is, social media platforms as tool for a company's employer branding strategy have also become much more important (Russell, 2009; Laick & Dean, 2011; McLeod & Waldman, 2011; Petry, 2011; Brecht, Koroleva & Guenther, 2011).

There is strong evidence that in employer branding on social media, engagement is seen as a means towards a meaningful relationship between employer and potential employees in order to reach a sustainable competitive advantage in the long run (Hollebeek, 2011a; Hanna et al., 2011; Sashi, 2012). The definition pertaining to customer brand engagement is most suitable in this research as potential employees can be seen as an employer brand's customers. Therefore, brand engagement in the context of employer branding is defined as *"the level of an individual customer's motivational, brand-related and context dependent state of mind characterized by specific levels of cognitive, emotional and behavioral activity in direct brand interactions* (Hollebeek, 2011a, p. 790). In the context of employer branding, these direct brand interactions happen between an engagement object (employer brand) and an engagement subject (potential employees). Also, brand engagement as defined beforehand, is considered to be important due to its predictive power to loyalty outcomes as well as (e)-word-of-mouth (Hollebeek, 2011a; Hanna et al., 2011). The engagement phenomenon has been studied across various other disciplines such as sociology, psychology, political science,

and organizational behavior, but has only recently started to gain interest in marketing literature (Brodie, Hollebeek, Juric & Ilic, 2011). Here, the phenomenon has been studied typically as customer engagement with particular objects, such as brands, products or organizations (Tripathi, 2009; Bowden, 2009; Sashi, 2012; Hollebeek, 2011a; Hollebeek, 2011b). However, no study has investigated engagement form an external perspective between potential employees and employer brands before. Comparable studies include employee-engagement studies, taking an internal perspective, or student-engagement studies, limiting the pool of individuals that can be investigated to students (Hollebeek, 2011a). Also, all engagement studies performed in a social media context are also related to customer engagement (Sashi, 2012; Hermes, 2010; Briggs, 2010). No study was found relating towards engagement in the context of employer branding and social media.

Although the phenomena of employer branding, engagement and social media have been studied independently, they have not been examined by academics in one model leading to gaps in current literature which leads to the problem formulation at hand.

## 1.1. Problem Formulation

As mentioned before, an increasing number of companies recognize employer branding as a useful tool for recruiting key players and desirable candidates (Moroko & Uncles, 2008). There is an agreement about the fact that employer branding is a process which requires a company to first define a clear employer value proposition (EVP) which gives insights about a company's management and culture, and second to apply internal and external marketing techniques in order to promote these EVPs to potential employees (Sullivan, 2004). Researchers also agree that the organizational and corporate identities have to be clearly defined and aligned in order to apply employer branding successfully as it is essential to present a coherent image of the company to potential employees (Barrow & Mosley, 2005; Fraser, 2009; Minchington, 2010). However there is only limited research about how to apply employer branding successfully in social media and especially what role the engagement phenomenon plays in social media activities and its impact on the success of employer brands. Although many employer brands have started using social media platforms for employer branding purposes, it seems that instead of using the advantages of a two-way communication tool, most employer brands still use mass media techniques ignoring the reciprocity in social media (Berthon, Ewing & Hah, 2005). However, best practice companies such as Google, Proctor & Gamble, HP and The Adidas Group etc., listed on the official best-practice

employer branding list Universum Global, have successfully taken advantage of the tools that can be used in employer branding today (Universumglobal, 2012).

The research needs to go one step further and claim that it is not only crucial to show strong online presence in order to be regarded as a successful employer brand, but that it is also essential to engage potential employees in social media activities. The main thought behind this issue is that engagement in social media leads to loyalty and increased attractiveness for the employer brand. Therefore, the thesis aims to provide a framework for analyzing how companies engage potential employees using social media in their employer branding. This will be done by means of a content analysis.

### 1.2. Research Question

In order to apply the right focus to the research, appropriate research questions need to be formulated which will guide the literature review as well as the empirical investigation. Therefore, the main research question guiding the thesis is the following:

**How do companies engage potential employees on their social media platforms in order to create an attractive employer brand?**

The research also poses certain *limitations*. First, the research is focused on the external perspective of employer branding in order to ensure depth and quality as employer branding can also be internally focused. The exact difference between both perspectives will be discussed in the next chapter. Also, the research is solely focused on social media activities, not taking into account other platforms used by the investigated employer brands. The research aims to *contribute* by merging the different research areas of employer branding, social media and engagement and by providing insights regarding how these research areas relate to each other on a theoretical level. These theoretical contributions are aimed to translate into managerial implications with suggestions on how companies can engage more effectively on social media.

The following parts of the thesis will provide the reader with a theoretical background where all essential definitions and models of employer branding, Web 2.0, social media and engagement are explained in more detail. The literature review will be followed by a methodology chapter explaining the research approach to answering the research question. The chapter will further introduce the best practice companies to be studied and the choice of social media platforms and tools to be investigated. The platforms used will then be analyzed with a special focus on engagement resulting in a presentation of findings and discussion in

order to establish a framework that provides the management of the companies with insights on how to engage potential employees using social media platforms in their employer branding.

## 2. Literature Review

The following chapter critically reviews the most up-to-date literature in order to establish a theoretical framework around the main concepts: employer branding, Web 2.0, social media and engagement. It will shed light on what has been discovered in each particular field and the relationships amongst them. Also, models will be highlighted that are of particular importance to the research as they will be used later on.

The literature concerning employer branding and its definition, foundation and process will be reviewed first, establishing its theoretical foundation. Finally, the employer branding concept will be discussed in the light of to the engagement phenomenon. The review then turns its view towards Web 2.0 and social media's theoretical constructs. Furthermore, social media will also be discussed in relation to the engagement phenomenon in order to generate a complete picture of the issue. In a final chapter the two streams will be combined and engagement criteria will be established for the purpose of the empirical part of the research. Also, a model will be established serving as the theoretical foundation for the analysis.

### 2.1. Employer Branding
#### 2.1.1. Defining the Term

Employer branding plays an essential role in attracting potential employees and retaining key performers who match with the brand's philosophy. Thus, employer branding supports the recruitment of those who reveal a favorable profile for the company (Vaijayanthi, Roy, Shreenivasan & Srivathsan 2011). A significant number of companies decided on increasing attention towards employer branding and 75 % of the companies already applying employer branding for its recruitment purposes, find it effective (Botha, Bussin & Swardt, 2011; Arachchige & Robertson, 2011). An ageing population, growing emerging countries and certain industry sectors are just some reasons why employer branding is increasingly important as stated in the introduction of the thesis (Arachige & Robertson, 2011; Moroko & Uncles, 2008). By all means, human resources and corporate management have acknowledged employer branding to be a premium tool for recruiting key players and for achieving a sustainable competitive advantage in the so-called *war for talent* (Mandhanya & Shah, 2010). The following paragraph explains the term employer branding in detail while further paragraphs will then explore the concept from different angles.

The American Marketing Association (1960) defined a brand as "a name, term, sign, symbol, or design, or combination of them which is intended to identify the goods and services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competitors". According to

this definition the brand creation and the branding process contain to set a name, logo, symbol design and attributes for a certain product which helps to identify and distinguish it from others (Keller, 1998). Branding efforts usually include developing the product and corporate brand; however branding can also be applied in the domain of human resource management which is then called *employer branding* (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004).

Employer branding is according to Ambler and Barrow "the package of functional, economic and psychological benefits provided by employment and identified with the employing company" (Ambler & Barrow, 1996, p. 187). The term can further be seen as a whole process which is "the sum of a company's efforts to communicate to the existing and prospective staff that it is a desirable place to work" (Lloyd, 2002, p. 65). Sullivan (2004) additionally complements the definition of employer branding as a targeted, long term strategy to manage the awareness and perceptions of potential employees, and related stakeholders with regards to a particular firm. Employer branding is also regarded as a framework for management which simplifies and emphasizes priorities, increases productivity and influences positively the recruitment process (Argyris & Schön, 1978). The main goal of employer branding is to create an image which leads to the desire to work for the company (Argyris, 1993). In this research, the term employer branding will be used as a complementary mix of Ambler and Barrow's and Lloyd's definition.

Employer branding is therefore

> the package of functional, economic and psychological benefits provided by employment and identified with the employing company" (Ambler & Barrow, 1996, p. 187) and is "the sum of a company's efforts to communicate to the existing and prospective staff that it is a desirable place to work (Lloyd, 2002, p. 65).

As established, employer branding is comparable with concepts of the marketing world as companies are using branding strategies in order to focus and find their identity in the market and create the image they want to give to potential employees as an employer (Welsing, 2003). While some elements of employer branding are adapted from the marketing academics, others find their origins in human resources. A successful employer branding strategy helps to develop characteristics which support a company to differentiate itself from other companies as a superior employer. A brand that is able to point out positive aspects of

the company's working environment is consequently supporting the human resources department in its recruitment process (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004).

### 2.1.2. Identities of the Employer Brand

It is said that employer branding combines not only marketing and human resource strategies, but that it also originates from different identities. The two main identities which have to be clearly defined in order to establish a successful employer branding strategy are the corporate and organizational identity of the company. These two identities are regarded as key ingredients for successful employer branding (Robertson & Khatiki, 2012). The company's total range of brands needs to be aligned with the organizational strategy and has to represent a coherent relationship between the employer brand, the corporate brand and the organizational brand in order to establish a clear strategic positioning. The employer brand has therefore the task to reflect externally and internally the core of the corporate brand together with a consistent image of the brand promise and values (Barrow & Mosley, 2005; Fraser, 2009; Minchington, 2010). The following paragraph will define the terms corporate and organizational identity and explain their relation to employer branding as well as their function in supporting engagement externally. As stated in the introduction, the customer-brand perspective of the engagement phenomenon is most applicable in the employer branding context which is furthermore defined as "the level of an individual customer's motivational, brand –related and context dependent state of mind characterized by specific levels of cognitive, emotional and behavioral activity in direct brand interactions" (Hollebeek, 2011a, p. 790). As stated as well, potential employees can be seen as the customers of a company's employer brand. Engagement and its theoretical constructs will later be defined more specifically.

*Corporate identity* is the planned and operational, internal and external self-presentation of a company that is based on a commonly agreed company philosophy (Van, 1995). A corporate brand gives a specific brand promise to its stakeholders; keeping this brand promise is crucial for establishing a successful corporate identity (Balmer, 1998). Attributes such as behavior, communication and symbolism complete the term corporate brand and lead to positive reputation (Einwiller & Will, 2002). Symbols play an important role when representing a company. A symbol serves primarily the company by distinguishing it from other companies especially when similar working benefits are offered in the same domain (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). A symbol can further evoke certain feelings and meanings in current and potential employees which make them more loyal to the organization (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004).

Therefore, when it comes to employer branding, companies have to be aware of the influence a symbol might have on its employees or potential employees and should choose them carefully (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). The attribute behavior represents specifically the current employees' behaviors which are best practiced when the brand promise is entirely understood internally. Therefore, an alignment between a company's vision and current employees' values supports a consistent external brand image (Berry, 1995, 2000; Bitner, 1992).

Corporate and employer branding have many characteristics in common, such as that the brand has to be relevant and noticeable as well as unique and resonant to shareholders (Moroko & Uncles, 2008). Further, corporate and employer branding share the idea of the brand promise made usually between an organization and its shareholders. In the employer branding case the promise can be regarded as the psychological contract between a company and its current and potential employees (Moroko & Uncles, 2008). The psychological contract is a contract which "encompasses the actions employees believe are expected of them and what response they expect in return from the employer" (Rousseau & Greller 1994, p. 385-401). More specifically, both the potential employee and the organization have certain expectations which should be met when it comes to company practices in order to create satisfaction and to remain a strong employer brand (Mosley, 2007). The need for bringing in line corporate branding with employer branding is pointed out even more when considering the rising multifaceted identities of stakeholders who are strongly influencing the corporate brand management. Therefore potential employees can be considered as a firm's customers who can be regarded as an external key audience (Knox & Freeman, 2006). Furthermore an employer brand image that is created by current employees earns much more credibility than *controlled* employer promotions (Rynes, Bretz & Gerhart, 1991). In sum, the integration between corporate branding and employer branding leads to consistency in the public mind which positively influences the perception of the employer brand and contributes to a competitive advantage (Moroko & Uncles, 2008; Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). Communicating a clear and consistent employer brand by aligning it with the corporate identity and keeping the brand promise can have further a positive influence on engagement as it creates trust, commitment, satisfaction and ultimately loyalty amongst potential employees. Well-defined corporate values and an external image that result in well-understood practices of the company provide potential employees with the possibility to decide whether they are interested in the company and see personal relevance in order to connect or not. Naturally, the better a potential employee can identify himself with the company he might want to work for, the higher his engagement will be. In sum, the better the values of the company and the

corporate identity are communicated, the easier potential employees are able to find characteristics in common and the easier it is for the company to engage and keep the psychological contract by meeting potential employee's expectations.

*Organizational identity* is also regarded as a part of employer branding and has a similar influence on the engagement process as has corporate identity. It is an organization's central, durable and explicit character which is especially relevant for employer branding (Albert & Whetten, 1985). This is due to the fact that usually a strong brand identity leads to an increased level of employee satisfaction and performance which at the same time reduces employee turnover (Miles & Mangold, 2004; Riketta, 2005). Organizational identity can be distinguished from corporate identity as the latter is rather an expression of a management's main idea of an organization provided to an external audience, while organizational identity is rather describing a collective's common understanding of an organizations' functional benefits including distinctive values and characteristics (Stuart, 2002). The strength of the organizational identity is generally used as an explanation why current employees engage in cooperative behaviors on a regular basis and others do not. The presentation of an organization's identity in employer branding is therefore regarded as an explanation of certain behaviors of current employees and is a representation of an organization's expectations of potential employees' behavior (Robertson & Khatibi, 2012). According to Edwards (2010), there is a strong connection between an organization's identity and an employee's or potential employee's commitment and performance. Commitment at the same time goes often hand in hand with the potential employees' trust and satisfaction level towards the chosen company, two attributes of a good relationship quality between employer and potential employee. In other words and as mentioned before, the stronger the organizational identity is, the stronger the emotional bond between the company and a potential employee can be, which then serves as an important factor for engagement and loyalty as it facilitates identification with an employer.

### 2.1.3. The Employer Branding Process

The former section explained and discussed the identities of an employer brand which are in direct relation to the employer branding process illustrated in Figure 1 below (adapted from Arachchige & Robertson, 2011). As pictured, clearly defined *corporate and organizational identities* result in a clear so-called *employer value proposition (EVP)* whose development is an essential part in the employer branding process. The EVP can be best described as an exact picture of what a company stands for including expectations of and offerings towards future

employees (Robertson & Khatibi, 2012). It further gives an insight about the company's culture and management, the employee's abilities, as well as the company's image (Sullivan, 2004). The EVP therefore helps to define a concrete offer to current and potential employees by keeping its value proposition in line with the corporate and organizational identities (Eisenberg, Kilduff, Burleigh & Wilson, 2001). After defining the EVP successfully, *external marketing* of the employer brand can be applied in order to promote the company's values and to appeal to a desirable pool of potential employees (Tüzüner & Yüksel, 2009). By doing so, engagement can be increased as potential employees can more easily identify themselves with the company. Similarly, *internal marketing* of the employer brand is also applied by promoting the brand promise and values within the company in order to maintain the psychological contract (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Lievens, 2007).
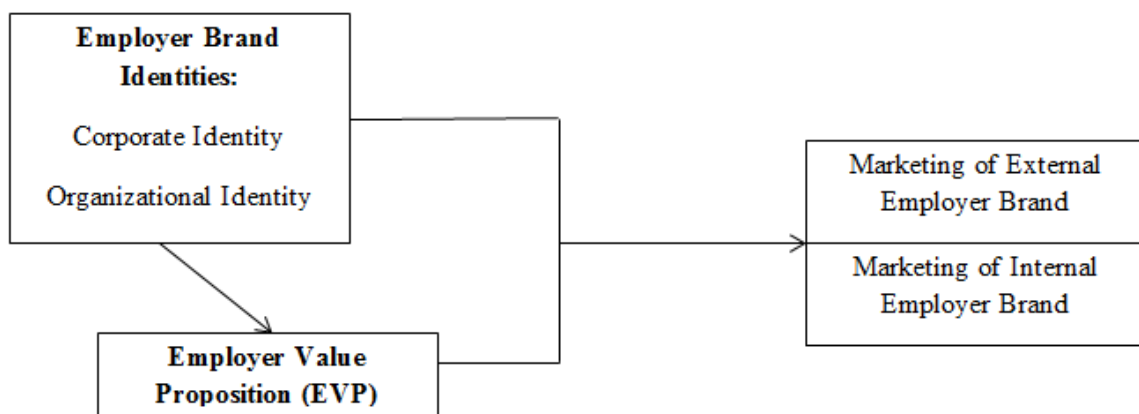


Figure 1: Components of the Employer Branding Process (Adapted from Robertson & Khatibi, 2012)

All in all, during the whole employer branding process, companies have to be aware of the fact that internal as well as external marketing of the desired employer brand image and benefits are required which are based on well-defined corporate and organizational identities as well as a well-defined EVP (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Lievens, 2007).

### 2.1.4. Elements of Successful Employer Branding

Based on previous research in the area of employer branding and its success factors, several different elements have been identified. In this section only success factors which are relevant for the research of this thesis are presented.

One essential element is the focus on a company's authenticity. Authenticity is defined as the expression of self-identity, established by people who are able to speak the truth about

themselves, when they argue, fight, speak up for their own views and opinions in their unique way (Martin, Gollan & Grigg, 2011). Authenticity is regarded as crucial when companies are aiming to create sustainable employer branding (Graeme et al., 2011). By being authentic a company establishes credible communication of values and images and further establishes a sustainable and successful employer brand (Graeme et al., 2011).

Moroko and Uncles (2008) further consider differentiation a key element of success. This means that a company needs to differentiate itself from competitors by being known for best practices in the field of employer branding. Well-branded companies which are known for their best practices are also called benchmark companies as other companies are eager to learn from their strategies. To be considered as a benchmark company, the participation in major benchmarking (ranking) studies is crucial as well as having good contact to those who mention the company as a best-practice company (Sullivan, 2004).

According to Sullivan (2004) a successful employer brand has to be known for great internal management skills. The goal is to make potential employees apply because of appealing management practices which can best be achieved through establishing a well-structured and informative employer's website. A website that communicates a stable picture of the company and its business practices, and provides potential employees with enough information about their future working environment is considered to be crucial for employer branding (Sullivan, 2004). It has to be noted at this point that researchers are clear about the fact that companies should be present online and that it is even expected from them (Sullivan, 2004; Hanna et al., 2011; Laick & Dean, 2011). However a website is solely regarded as a source of information where potential employees can seek facts about the company, but it does not invite potential employees to participate like social media does. Although the importance of social media for employer branding has been established in this study, there is still only limited research about the applicability of social media in employer branding. This is why research only mentions that an employer website is crucial, but it does not extend to social media.

Proactive storytelling is another attribute of successful employer branding. The main idea behind storytelling is that current employees spread the story about the company's management, business practices and the influence it has on their lives (Nillsson & Nordgren, 2012). Only employees of well-branded companies voluntarily speak positively inside and outside about their working place. They tell positive stories to families, friends and even strangers and thereby create viral marketing (Sullivan, 2004). Current employees can therefore be used to attract potential employees by sharing their experiences about their

company and its organizational culture (Nillsson & Nordgren, 2012). Another advantage for a company is that stories spread by employees gain much more credibility than stories told by a company itself. No outside consultancy can achieve the same impact of designation on potential employees than the current employees themselves. At the same time proactive storytelling creates pride and increases holding rates within the company (Sullivan, 2004).

In sum, by following all mentioned elements of successful external employer branding, such as being authentic, being known for best practices, establishing informative websites and most importantly creating positive and proactive storytelling and word of mouth will lead to successful employer branding (Sullivan, 2004; Nillson & Nordgren, 2012; Moroko & Uncles, 2008; Martin, Gollan & Grigg, 2011). However, as employer branding is mainly used to attract the most sought-after potential employees, it is crucial for employer brands to capture the attention of high potentials, engage them and eventually convert them from being only interested into true applicants. Therefore, employer branding is used to help potential employees see personal relevance, get involved with the employer brand and ultimately identify with the brand in order to apply for a position. So, companies use employer branding to form an ongoing relationship and conversation with potential employees in order to convince them to work for them over others. Therefore, engagement becomes crucial as only engagement can truly convert and change people's opinions, create trust, commitment, satisfaction and ultimately loyalty (Hollebeek, 2011a). For these reasons, the engagement phenomenon within the wider employer branding context will be discussed in the following section.

### 2.1.5. The Engagement Phenomenon in Employer Branding

As stated in the introduction, the engagement phenomenon has been studied across various other disciplines such as sociology, psychology, political science, and organizational behavior, but has only recently started to gain interest in marketing literature (Brodie, Hollebeek, Juric & Ilic, 2011).. Here, the phenomenon has been studied typically as *customer engagement* with particular objects, such as brands, products or organizations (Tripathi, 2009; Bowden, 2009; Sashi, 2012; Hollebeek, 2011a; Hollebeek, 2011b). Also as stated in the introduction, no study has investigated engagement form an external perspective between potential employees and companies' employer brands before. Comparable studies include employee-engagement studies, taking an internal perspective or student-engagement studies (as students may also be potential employees), limiting the pool of individuals that can be investigated to students (Hollebeek, 2011a). The heightened level of interest by academics

and practitioners in the engagement phenomenon is due to its potentially predictive power to loyalty outcomes as well as (e-) word-of-mouth (Hollebeek, 2011a; Hanna, Rohm & Crittenden, 2011; Brodie et al, 2011; Javornik & Mandelli, 2012). Loyalty is here defined as" repeated purchases (behavioral loyalty) prompted by a strong internal disposition (attitudinal loyalty) over a period of time" (Hollebeek, 2011a, p. 794). E-Word-of-mouth (eWOM) is furthermore defined as "any positive or negative statement made by potential, actual, or former customers about a product or company, which is made available to a multitude of people and institutions (via the Internet)" (Chu & Kim, 2011, p.48).

As the engagement phenomenon is relatively new, a firm definition does not exist, yet. However, Hollebeek (2011a) discusses the different definitions generated from other disciplines. In social psychology, social engagement is defined as a "sense of initiative, involvement and adequate response to social stimuli, participating in social activities and interacting with others" (p.786). Student engagement in educational psychology is defined as "students' academic investment, motivation and commitment to their institution, their perceived psychological connection, comfort and sense of belonging towards their institution" (p.786). Employee engagement in organizational behavior is defined as "the amount of cognitive, emotional and physical resources an individual is prepared to devote in the performance of one's work roles" (p.786). All these definitions may stem from different disciplines, but have many aspects in common resulting in a general definition of the engagement phenomenon as "an individual-specific, motivational, context-dependent variable resulting from two-way interactions between relevant engagement subject(s) and object(s)" (Hollebeek, 2011a, p. 787). However, this definition is too general and a more specific one needs to be used when investigating engagement in the context of employer branding.

However, certain statements can already be made from this general definition of engagement. For example, it can be derived that engagement is not stable, but that specific engagement levels or engagement intensities exist under particular contextual conditions making it an ongoing process (Sashi, 2012; Hollebeek, 2011a; Brodie et al, 2011). Although, there has not been an agreement regarding dimensionality in the engagement phenomenon, most authors agree that it is multidimensional with a cognitive, emotional and behavioral dimension (Hollebeek, 2011a; Brodie et al, 2011). However, the expression of these dimensions may vary across contexts meaning that they may not all be observable all the time (Hollebeek, 2011b). The definition also implies that engagement happens between two parties, the engagement object and the engagement subject. Engagement subjects in current literature are

represented as students, employees and nation states and engagement objects include schools, other individuals or more intangible objects including individuals engaged with their profession or brands. Hollebeek (2011a) also suggests that engagement with a brand can be addressed from an employee perspective as employees are viewed as customers of an employer brand. Therefore, potential employees can also be seen as customers of an employer brand. From this perspective, engagement in employer branding can be viewed from the sub-discipline *customer-brand engagement* and therefore, the engagement subject in this study will be considered potential employees and the engagement object will be the companies' employer brands.

For that reason, theories about *customer brand engagement* have been chosen as they are closest to the particular engagement phenomenon to be studied in the context of employer branding; potential employees can be seen as customers of an employer brand. As Hollebeek (2011b), Javornik and Mandelli (2012) argue, customer brand engagement, as sub-discipline of customer engagement and engagement in general, is advocated particularly from relationship marketing and service-dominant logic perspectives. This is because these logics are centered on the importance of enduring, co-creative interactions and relationships amongst value-generating stakeholders (Vargo & Lusch, 2004; Fournier, 1998). Customer brand engagement is however distinctive from other concepts such as involvement and participation as it "encompasses a proactive, interactive customer relationship with a specific engagement object" (Brodie et al, 2011, p.257; Bowden, 2009).

Therefore, customer- brand engagement is defined as

> the level of an individual customer's motivational, brand-related and context dependent state of mind characterized by specific levels of cognitive, emotional and behavioral activity in direct brand interactions (Hollebeek, 2011a, p. 790).

These direct brand interactions furthermore happen between an engagement subject (potential employees) and engagement object (employer brand). In the sub-discipline of customer-brand engagement, Hollebeek (2011b) identifies specific themes relating to truly engaged customers and the different dimensions of their engagement. The *cognitive dimension* is part of the immersion theme including an individual's level of concentration and /or engrossment in the brand. Brodie et al (2011) has termed this theme absorption which is identical with Hollebeek's (2011b) definition of the theme. However, it can also be seen as an employer

brand's level of concentration and/or engrossment in the potential employee. The *emotional dimension*, part of the passion theme, is the level of brand-related inspiration and/or pride; which can be expressed by the company towards the potential employee and vice versa. Brodie et al (2011) terms this theme dedication and describes it more as an individual's sense of belonging which is close to Hollebeek's (2011b) definition. The *behavioral dimension*, part of the activation theme, is expressed through an individual's level of energy spent in interacting with a focal brand (Hollebeek, 2011a; Hollebeek, 2011b) or consequently a brand's level of energy spent with a potential employee. Brodie et al (2011) terms this behavioral theme vigor which is also identical in its definition. However, Brodie et al (2011) splits this theme introducing a separate fourth theme in the behavioral dimension, called interaction. This is to show how critical two-way interactions between a focal engagement subject and object are. Tripathi (2009) argues furthermore that a truly engaging brand must be trustworthy which it becomes by delivering the promises it makes. A feeling of authenticity and relevance is critical as well (Briggs, 2010). Therefore, brands must be able to tell resonant stories as customers more likely relate and feel engaged (Briggs, 2010; Robertson, 2013; Ivey, 2013). This indicates many parallels between successful employer branding and successfully engaging individuals further indicating engagement to be a critical aspect of employer branding.

Customer brand engagement has furthermore been described as a *process* as can be seen in the following model *brand engagement model* by Hollebeek (2011a) adapted for our purposes (see Figure 2). An antecedent to engagement is involvement, meaning that an individual needs to be interested in the object and see personal relevance in order to connect and engage (Hollebeek, 2011a; Hanna et al, 2011; Briggs, 2010; Robertson, 2013; Ivey, 2013). This is also supported in Sashi's (2012) customer engagement cycle model as a connection with emotional bonds is a prerequisite to engagement. Therefore, involvement facilitates engagement via two-way interaction which incorporates cognitive, emotional and behavioral aspects as discussed earlier. This leads to a certain level of relationship quality (engagement intensity) combining the concepts of trust, commitment and customer satisfaction. Furthermore, this relationship is said to contribute positively to loyalty which is why, as stated before, engagement is considered so important. However, for the purposes and focus of this study, factors relating to the relationship quality (trust, commitment and satisfaction) will not be further examined as they are outside the scope of the research question. Therefore, the relationship between these factors and its result, loyalty, is also not empirically examined. However, it is also evident that although both models by Hollebeek (2001a) and Sashi

(20120) have similarities, there is one big difference: whether or not loyalty precedes or follows engagement as Hollebeek (2011a) sees engagement as an antecedent to loyalty but Sashi (2012) sees it as a consequence of loyalty. For this study, it is assumed that engagement is an antecedent to loyalty (Hollebeek, 2011a; Hanna et al., 2011).
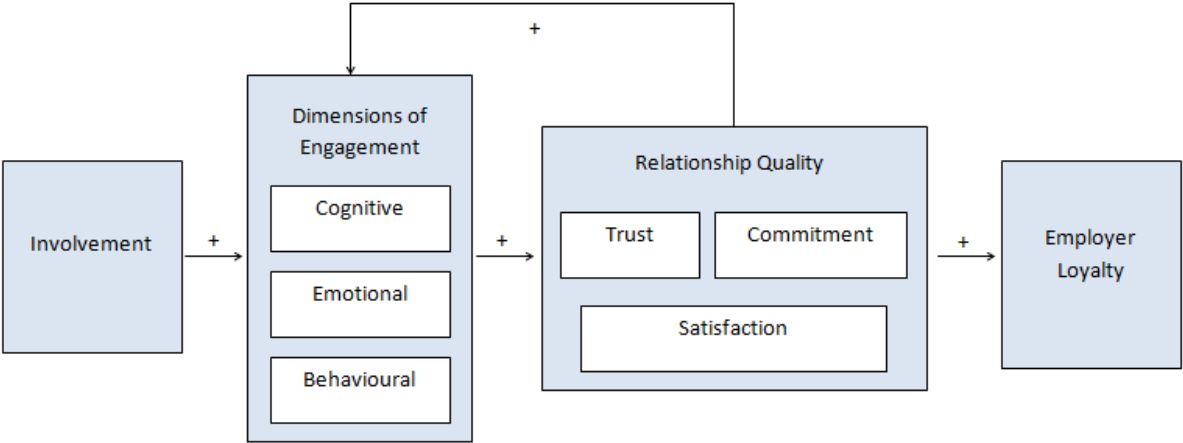


Figure 2: Brand Engagement Model (adapted from Hollebeek, 2011a)

In summary, the brand engagement model (Figure 2) depicting the engagement process has been deemed to be extremely relevant to our study. As the study focuses on engagement, the engagement dimensions and preceding involvement will be used and applied in a model which will be part of the theoretical foundation for the analysis. The adapted model can be found in the last chapter of this literature review (see 2.4.). Furthermore, the themes and factors discussed regarding engaged individuals as well as what brands need to do in order to be engaging represent appropriate theory that can be transformed into criteria for the empirical part of the study. They will be used as indicators to see whether or not individuals are truly engaged and how employer brands are fostering this engagement to a high intensity.

## 2.2. A New Era of Web 2.0

In recent years, technology and specifically communicative technologies have developed enormously. Around 2004, the concept of Web 2.0 started to replace the then known Web 1.0 concept of the 1990s (Harrison & Barthel, 2009; Song, 2010). The era of Web 1.0 has been characterized as static and lifeless as the Internet served solely as "repository of information and static content" or "isolated information silos" (Song, 2010, p.251). In contrast, Web 2.0 is characterized as dynamic and inviting people to participate. The Internet evolved from a one-way communication tool to an all-way communication tool capable of harnessing collective intelligence. It is a space in which people can talk back and express their opinions and brands can send out many personalized messages as opposed to one message fits all (Christodoulides, 2009; Fournier & Avery, 2011). It is said to be a useful tool to transmit the authenticity people seek (Laick & Dean, 2011).

Web 2.0 is furthermore defined as the

> architecture of *participation* created by web enterprises whose applications invite, facilitate, encourage or make it possible for users to interact, share knowledge and information with each other and construct content (Harrison & Barthel, 2009, p. 159).

It is "transforming the computer into a revolutionary new medium for interpersonal, group and mass communication and introducing users to a dazzling array of new communicative capabilities" (Harrison & Barthel, 2009, p.156). All in all, Web 2.0 has changed the way we communicate as the services and applications within the Web 2.0 environment make interactions between people and servers more dynamic, websites and applications more engaging and user-to-user interactions more direct, interactive and participative (Harrison & Barthel, 2009; Christodoulides, 2009). Now, people can even without the technical knowledge, construct and share media and information. They build and maintain social networks, tag, rank information and become deeply involved. Now more than ever, individuals play an active role in generating content; they are regarded as co-developers. Therefore, Web 2.0 is inherently social and it is only natural that social media is intertwined within the concept of Web 2.0 (Harrison & Barthel, 2009; Hanna et al., 2011; Chu & Kim, 2011).

## 2.3. An Introduction to Social Media

Social media is characterized as is Web 2.0 by connectivity and interactivity in which content is key to deliver experiences to individuals (Hanna et al., 2011). Even though, there is no accepted standard definition of social media, we use Kietzmann's et al (2011) definition for the purposes here.

More specifically social media

> employ mobile and web-based technologies of Web 2.0 to create highly interactive platforms via which individuals and communities share, create, discuss, and modify user-generated content (Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy & Silvestre, 2011, p.241).

Generally Web 2.0 and social media have become an essential part of any branding activity due to the fact that more and more people can be reached through this medium as the growing numbers show. For example, Facebook has more than one billion users and is ranked the number one social networking site worldwide. Also, Twitter has more than half a billion users ranked number two worldwide and LinkedIn reached 187 million members ending up in third place in worldwide rankings (Fiegerman, 2012; Discovery News, 2012) and the numbers are climbing daily.

Therefore, companies have recognized that a presence in social media can strengthen a brand as it allows more costumers to identify with the brand and get involved on another level (Yan, 2011). This is also evidenced by increases in companies' social media budgets (Hanna et al., 2011). Although, social media has been recognized for its advantages, it also poses a risk as information, criticism and parody can spread extremely fast through social media (Fournier & Avery, 2011). The branding activity cannot be completely controlled solely by the brand manager any longer (Christodoulides, 2009) as individuals take on an active role as co-developers or co-creators of content and meaning supplied by brands (Harrison & Barthel, 2009; Hanna et al., 2011; Kietzmann et al., 2011; Vargo & Lusch, 2004; Fournier & Avery, 2011; Deighton & Kornfeld, 2009). The loss of control is enhanced even more by a growing desire for transparency (Yan, 2011; Fournier & Avery, 2011).  Therefore, social media will "empower the prepared firm and destroy those that fail to adjust" (Harrison & Barthel, 2009, p.162). This concludes that companies need to take into account many factors when using social media as well as acknowledge individuals' needs due to their important role within social media.

### 2.3.1. Engagement in Social Media

One very important aspect of why social media specifically is so interesting and important to companies is the possibility to engage individuals (Evans & McKee, 2010; Hollebeek, 2011a; Hermes, 2010; Sashi, 2012; Tripathi, 2009). In order to be and remain successful in the long-run, it has been recognized that it is necessary for brands to build a connection with individuals and to foster a sense of belonging by being engaging (Yan, 2011). Marketers cannot capture attention via reach alone anymore, but must focus on both capturing and continuing attention via engagement (Hanna et al., 2011). As mentioned before, the heightened level of interest in the engagement phenomenon is also due to its predictive power to loyalty outcomes as well as (e)-word-of-mouth (Hollebeek, 2011a; Hanna et al, 2011; Brodie et al, 2011; Javornik & Mandelli, 2012).

In social media specifically, there are a lot of different individuals and groups of individuals as the growing numbers displayed earlier indicate. The literature suggests that in a social perspective different types of groups can possess different modes of engagement. A particular mode of engagement is acquired through lasting exposure to particular social conditions and conditionings within a social media platform which eventually allows people to cultivate a particular habitus, a way of thinking that makes sense of the particular field. These modes of engagement or habitus will then guide individuals in how they ought to manage their identity, how intimate their interactions ought to become, and how opinions ought to be expressed and handled (Song, 2010). For this reason, it is important to know which social media platforms have which dominant functionalities as these functionalities will have implications for the conditioning of individuals towards a certain mode of engagement or habitus. Therefore, choosing a certain platform leads towards varying engagement intensity levels (Hollebeek, 2011a; Sashi, 2012). Yet another implication is that individuals, who actively choose certain social media platforms, subconsciously do so because of their specific engagement needs (Song, 2010; Kietzmann et al., 2011).

Therefore, it is important to examine social media platforms according to their functionalities while having in mind what specific engagement goals have been set. It also confirms, as explained in the concept of customer brand engagement, that engagement is highly context dependent and must therefore be examined within a specific context. This notion seems to be even stronger in a social media environment. Furthermore, the social perspective also implies a multi-dimensional concept, specifically cognitive, emotional and behavioral dimensions as concluded earlier. However, looking at engagement from a social media perspective, it raises

the definition of customer brand engagement which is used here to another level, because it acknowledges engagement at an individual level as does the definition, but it also includes a group level that has not been examined in customer brand engagement. It is important to acknowledge this point, but as there is not enough strong evidence for it in literature, specifically customer brand engagement literature, it will not be explored further. Another conclusion is naturally that, in order to reach high levels of engagement, the two-way interaction needs to be present, relevant and meaningful (Hollebeek, 2011a; Hermes, 2010). This is because the social media environment is inherently social, meaning that it is characterized by connectivity and interactivity making communication a major facet of this specific environment. This notion also fits very well into the definition of customer brand engagement. Overall, it suggests that social media is an appropriate place to implement employer branding strategies when the goal is to engage individuals. The next step is to examine social media platforms more closely.

### 2.3.2. Social Media Platforms

In social media, content comes in many forms or platforms driven by social connections and user participation. All the different platforms together form its own ecology (Song, 2010; Hanna et al., 2011). Today, there are hundreds of such social media platforms (blogs, micro blogs, social networking sites, podcasts, wikis, media sharing sites, social news and bookmarking sites and much more). These platforms can be for the masses or are more focused for specific groups and needs. A lot of literature has already concerned itself with success factors in branding through social media as well as general do's and don'ts which will be discussed hereafter. One of the most important factors is to investigate which social media platforms are suitable and why they are appropriate for a company's purposes, especially in relation to engagement.

McKee (2010) proposed the "Social Trinity Model" (p. 183) to categorize social media platforms regarding their purposes (see Figure 3, p.30). The model proposes three categories: networking, conversation and community to which the most popular platforms up-to-date can be matched; Facebook (number one) serves the purpose of community, Twitter (number two) conversation and LinkedIn (number three) facilitates networking.
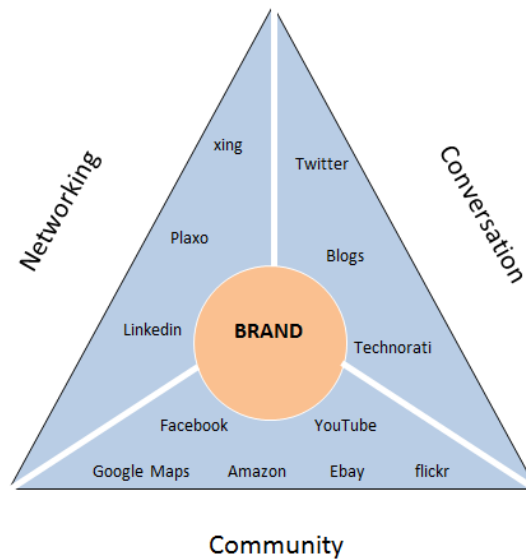
Figure 3: The Social Trinity Model (McKee, 2010)

Kietzmann et al (2011) however go into much more detail and suggest looking at every platform separately as there are slight differences in functionalities. He suggests a categorization according to seven functional blocks, the "honeycomb of social media" (p.243) which examines facets or blocks of social media user experience and its implications for companies.
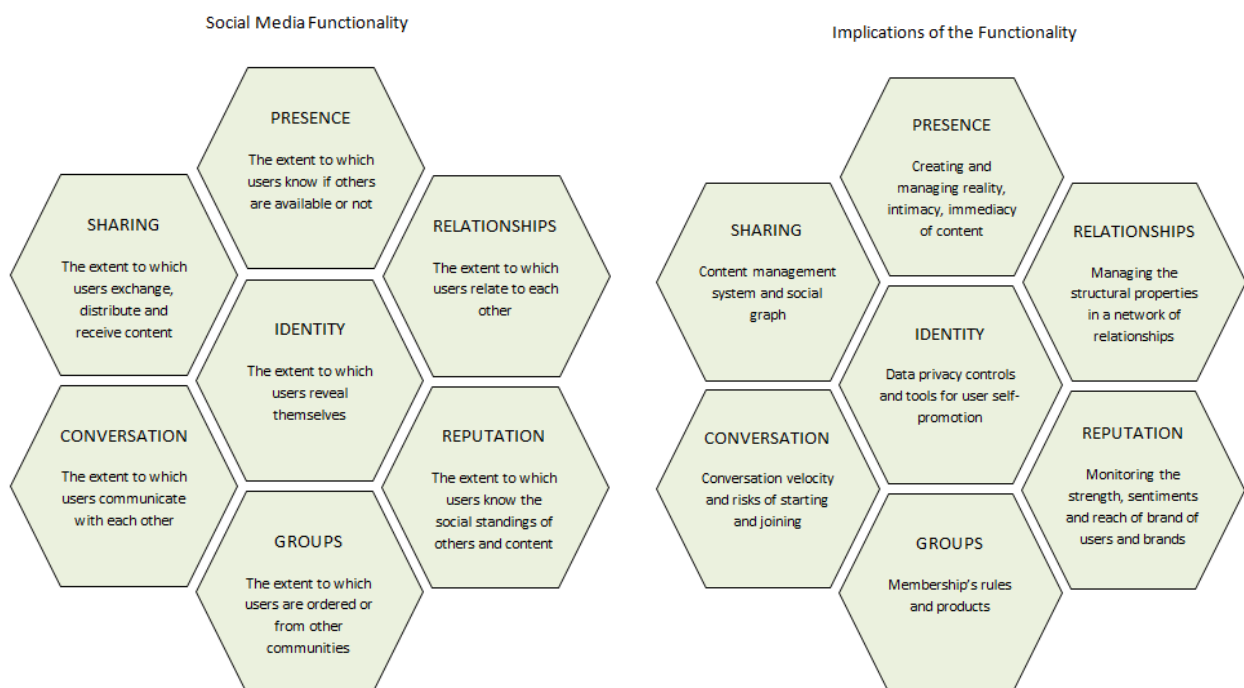


Figure 4: The Honeycomb of Social Media (Kietzmann et al., 2011)

Therefore, every social media platform has different dominant facets or blocks which companies need to be aware of if they want to participate in social media platforms. Also, if a

company's goal is to engage individuals, knowing about the different blocks may facilitate engagement and helps make better choices in order to reach that goal.

The identity block shows to what extent users reveal their own identity and personal information. This can happen consciously or unconsciously, but it is a fact that some social media platforms require elaborate profiles whereas others do not. The general implications for this block are correlated with privacy issues. Knowing individuals' identities also helps companies to determine which demographic they are engaging the most in order to generate appropriate strategies online. The conversation block represents to which extent users communicate with others. As companies are advised to use social media as a learning tool, it is essential to set up tracking systems to track certain conversations (rate and direction of change) and to decide whether or not companies are allowed to join a conversation. For engagement, a social platform with this functionality needs to be chosen as direct brand interactions are a crucial element of engagement as discussed earlier. Also, by tracking the different conversations, companies can more easily analyze individuals' engagement and how well the different dimensions (emotional, cognitive and behavioral) are displayed in these interactions. The sharing block shows the extent to which users exchange, distribute, and receive content; implying that companies will need to find out what objects are being shared in order to map users and determine legal issues in terms of copyright laws. By having this functionality, it allows individuals to engage in a different form than conversation and companies are able to add another dimension to analyzing individuals' engagement intensity. The presence block indicates the extent to which users can know if other users are available or not. This would allow companies to interact and engage in real-time; possibly engaging with individuals over a longer period of time as individuals receive answers immediately. The relationships block indicates the extent to which users can be related to others. As relations may be diverse, companies need to understand these types of relationships: the structural property as to how many connections users have and their positions in the network as well as the flow property as to the strength of the relationship and its multiplexity (connected by more than one type of relationship). The implication regarding engagement may be that companies will be able to detect the driving individuals on their websites and be able to target them better in order to maximize possible eWOM. The reputation block represents the extent to which users can identify the standing of others and themselves. Companies need to know if users value this in order to trust information provided. If so, companies need to track their own reputation. In terms of engagement, it again helps to identify key individuals who are driving engagement and eWOM by turning individuals with a good reputation into brand advocates.

The final groups block shows the extent to which users can form communities and sub-communities. Companies need to know what kinds of groups exist in order to learn more about the users as well as what drives engagement on a group level.

As mentioned before, Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn are the most popular social networking sites today and as will be later explained in the methodology, are also the social media platforms chosen for the purpose of this study. Therefore, the honeycomb model by Kietzmann et al (2011) has been applied to all three platforms to showcase the different functionalities (see Figures 5, 6, and 7, p.33). Facebook is mainly concerned with building connections or relationships amongst its members with a secondary focus on presence, reputation, conversations and identity. Therefore companies will be able to detect key individuals in order to maximize engagement, loyalty and eWOM. Secondly, companies may engage in real-time, detect specific engagement dimensions in interactions and forge a strategy that appeals to that specific demographic already engaging on that platform or a desired demographic. LinkedIn on the other hand is mainly concerned with establishing elaborate profiles or identities of their members with a secondary focus on relationships and reputation. Here, companies can find out almost anything about the individuals they wish to engage as users have elaborate profiles. Secondly, they can detect key individuals or thought leaders. Last, Twitter is mainly concerned with conversations and secondary focuses on identity, reputation and sharing. Here, companies' focus should be on detecting the different dimensions and what it tells them about the individuals' engagement intensity. Secondly, it allows for establishing a tailored strategy according to demographic and for targeting key individuals.
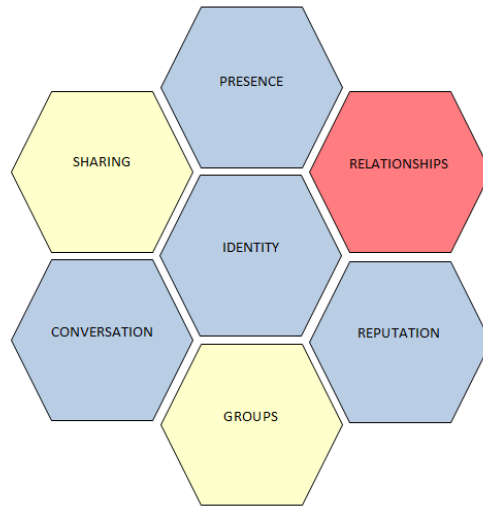
Figure 5: Facebook Applied Honeycomb Model (Kietzmann et al, 2011)
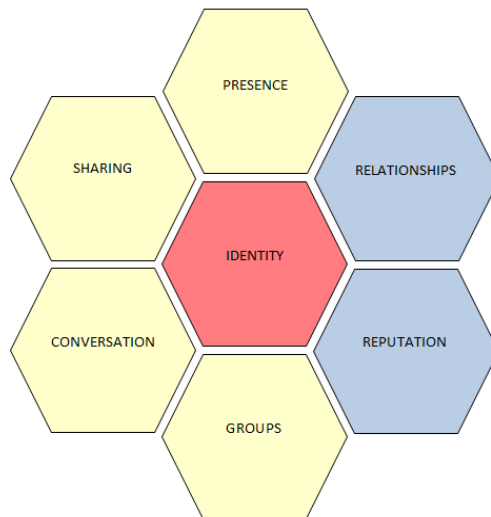


Figure 6: LinkedIn Applied Honeycomb Model (Kietzmann et al, 2011)
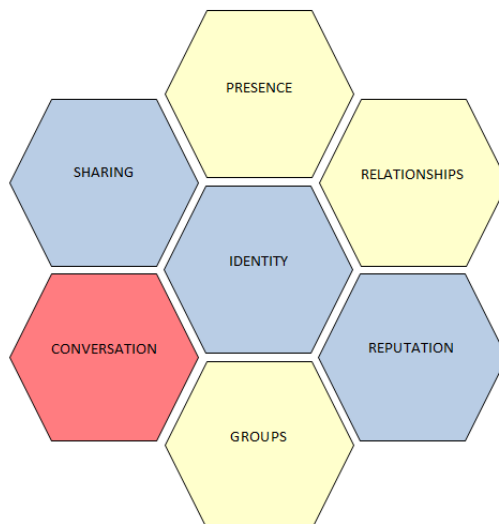


Figure 7: Twitter Applied Honeycomb Model (Kietzmann et al, 2011)

This model is useful to understand what the dominant functionalities of certain social media platforms are, their implications and how to strategize in order to reach desired goals (Kietzmann et al., 2011). Also, it gives an indication of how the different functionalities may impede or facilitate engagement. Depending on companies' specific engagement goals, companies will have to choose wisely which social media platform needs to be chosen as a popular platform may or may not be ideal for engaging individuals. This suggests that social media platforms' functionalities are important factors in engaging individuals.

### 2.3.3. Theories of Social Media Branding

As mentioned before, many academics have contributed to the literature about what to do and what not to do regarding branding in social media. These points will be furthermore evaluated in the light of engagement and employer branding theory in order to detect parallels or wide discrepancies.

According to Yan (2011), specific goals need to be set when branding in social media. First, companies need to build a sense of membership or emotional bond with the organization amongst individuals on social platforms which is also the point in employer branding and engagement. Second, individuals need to be encouraged towards the acceptance and communication of brand values. Companies also need to encourage individuals to engage in dialogue and promotion of the brand. Dialogue according to Yan (2011) is a key aspect here as it numerous advantages: it can help an organization find and maintain a competitive edge, inform the vision behind the brand, build differentiation, and act as a control on whether the brand is properly communicated. Moreover, as discussed before, dialogue or interaction is also a crucial aspect of engagement as without it, engagement would not be possible. Barwise and Meehan (2010) agree in essence that a clear and relevant promise needs to be communicated, delivered, improved and innovated basically allowing for a continuous cycle of improvement which is in agreement with employer branding theories. It also concludes that the goal set can never be met nor exceeded, but need to be reinforced continuously as companies need to continue listening (Yan, 2011).

Several authors emphasize the fact that social media fosters a sense of community and this collective intelligence can be tapped into for free information to create a better experience for users and for innovation (Fournier & Avery, 2011; Yan, 2011; Barwise & Meehan, 2010; Evans & McKee, 2010).

Barwise and Meehan (2010) also warn that brands need to always follow the social rules, even in an online environment. This emphasizes that companies cannot do simply what they want in social media (Fournier & Avery, 2011). According to several authors, brands presented in the social media environment must be genuine and authentic which is supported by the literature of elements of successful employer branding. Moreover, they also should have a personality. This is supported within the engagement theory as individuals need to interact with relevant engagement objects which may be facilitated by infusing an employer brand with a personality (Yan, 2011). This may also add to the brand's authenticity.

Therefore, companies must consider a lot of aspects and plan well in order to implement a strategy that will positively affect their employer brand and engagement.

## 2.4. Summary and Theoretical Framework

As companies are pressured to be present where the best talent is, social media platforms as tool for a company's employer branding have also become much more important (Russell, 2009; Laick & Dean, 2011; McLeod & Waldman, 2011; Petry, 2011; Brecht, Koroleva & Guenther, 2011). A simple career website may not be sufficient anymore as companies have to go where potential employees are in the *war for talent*. As shown, being recognized as a top employer brand has become of the utmost importance in present economic times. Now, social media platforms are used by individuals to find information on employers and as a way to get to know the corporate culture behind the employer brand. Social media platforms make this challenge of transmitting an employer brand and its corporate culture much easier for companies as these platforms offer transparency and authenticity which is why companies are starting to use social media as a tool in their employer branding strategies.

Therefore, it has become a primary focus to engage with targeted audiences to ensure that the employer brand is highly valued and the corporate culture and values are rightfully transmitted as it has been shown that potential employees demand this kind of information. Social media platforms are seen as tools to facilitate this process. Therefore, "the truly great employers will have nothing to hide and capitalizing on Web 2.0 they will further strengthen their sustainable competitive advantage in the *war for talent*" (Laick & Dean, 2011, p.300). For example, Marriott Hotel as part of an ongoing employer brand initiative to engage its target audience is experimenting with a culinary social media game which achieved astonishing numbers and positive coverage in media (Freer, 2012).

From the literature review on customer brand engagement, engagement criteria can also be established in the context of employer branding. They serve as basis for the engagement phenomenon. First, involvement meaning personal interest and relevance is a prerequisite for an individual to be engaged. Second, engagement is displayed via two-way relevant and meaningful interactions indicating some sort of an ongoing relationship. Third, the interactions must happen between relevant engagement objects (employer brand) and subjects (potential employees). Finally, at least one of the three dimensions (cognitive, emotional, or behavioral) needs to be displayed in the interactions depending on the context.

The elements discussed have been applied in the *adapted model employer brand engagement Web 2.0* below (see Figure 8) to illustrate how engagement plays a role in employer branding within the context of social media. Here, engagement and the criteria relating to the phenomenon are at the heart of the model which parallels to the study as the engagement phenomenon is at the heart of the research as well. Moreover, this part is adapted from an earlier model (Figure 2, p.25) depicting the process of brand engagement in 2.1.5. More specifically it describes the engagement object (employer) as the sender of content for the engagement subject (potential employee) as the receiver to engage with. The potential employee's engagement is preconditioned by whether or not involvement can be reached; in other words whether or not potential employees see personal relevance in the content sent. If the answer is positive (indicated by a positive sign), then potential employees will be engaged on one or all three dimensions (cognitive, emotional and behavioral). This phenomenon is set in the wider context of social media and Web 2.0.
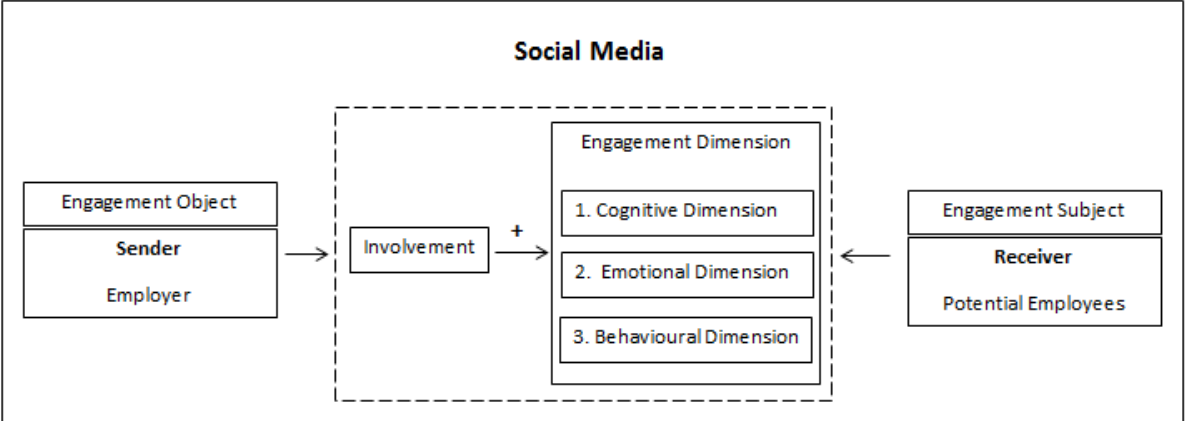


Figure 8: Adapted Model Employer Brand Engagement Web 2.0

# 3. Methodology

The following chapter introduces the methodological approach in order to appropriately answer the research question *how do companies engage potential employees on their social media platforms in order to create an attractive employer brand?*

The research question is based on the assumptions that companies use employer branding strategies on social media platforms and secondly, that engagement is an important factor in having a successful employer branding strategy and attracting the potential employees online. The aim of answering the research question will be to understand and explain how companies' employer branding engages potential employees on social media platforms.

The chapter will furthermore go into detail regarding the philosophical standpoint taken by the researchers, the qualitative/quantitative choices made and how theory contributes to the research design. Then, a thorough description of the research design and the approach to analyzing the empirical material will be given. Additionally, the issue of reliability and validity will be discussed as well as the research's limitations and ethical considerations.

## 3.1. Philosophical Discussion

The researchers' epistemological position, the philosophical study of the nature of knowledge, is mainly inspired by interpretivism where it is believed that reality is socially constructed (Fisher, 2010; Bryman & Bell, 2011). This means that people in societies and groups form reality from their interpretation of reality influenced by their values and their way of seeing the world as well as other peoples' interpretations and the compromises and agreements that arise out of the negotiations between the first two (Fisher, 2010). The particularities of every situation are taken into consideration; therefore emphasizing plurality, relativism and complexity. This holds true as the context of the research, social media platforms, has been determined as important. Also, Web 2.0 and consequently social media have been proven as being inherently social in 2.2. As has been mentioned in the literature review in 2.3.2, all social media platforms have different functionalities and therefore offer different particular contexts for people to engage in. The engagement phenomenon in itself described in 2.1.5 and 2.3.1 has shown that it is individual-specific as well as highly context-dependent as well. Therefore, the researchers try to map the range of companies' activities and the complexity of views and positions that potential employees take in interactions/ engagements on social media platforms with employer brands. From an ontological position, the philosophical study of the nature of reality (Fisher, 2010), the research is then naturally inspired by ideas of

constructionism. This implies that social phenomena and categories are not only produced through social interaction, but that they are in a constant state of revision (Bryman & Bell, 2011; Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2008). This also means that the researchers will present a specific version of social reality when analyzing interactions on social media platforms. Also, the particular interest of the research is the interactions between individuals which are observable on the specific social media platforms as they are a major aspect of the engagement phenomenon. From the philosophical standpoints, it has been shown that a research method needs to be chosen which is in line with the philosophical standpoint taken in this research.

## 3.2. Qualitative/Quantitative Choices

In order to answer the research question, a mixed methods approach will be used combining qualitative and quantitative elements in a content analysis performed on social media platforms (here seen as virtual documents) used by best-practice employer brands. A qualitative content analysis is defined as an approach "to documents that emphasizes the role of the investigator in the construction of the meaning of and in texts" (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p.291) whereas the more traditional quantitative content analysis is defined as "an approach that seeks to quantify content in terms of predetermined categories and in a systematic and replicable manner" (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p.289). A mixed approach has been chosen based on criteria established from the literature review (presented in Figure 8, p.36). As determined in Figure 8 (p.36), the engagement phenomenon depends on both, an employer side as well as a potential employee side. The employer, the so-called engagement object or sender, provides content on social media platforms with the goal to engage potential employees, the so-called engagement subject or receiver on a cognitive, emotional and behavioral dimension. These three dimensions represent the meeting point of employer and potential employee. Data represented on the employer side in terms of content is rather formal and is better suited for a quantitative analysis as it is easier to count for example the amount of followers, the amount of posts etc. However, data provided on the potential employee's side is mostly more informal as it consists of the comments displayed by individuals and is best analyzed qualitatively. For that reason, qualitative and quantitative approaches had to be combined in order to accommodate the research as both sides are of high importance. Therefore, the part of the research question investigating the content or activities contributed on social media by companies' employer branding is addressed quantitatively. The response, the expressions of

engagement of potential employees on the three dimensions, is mostly investigated qualitatively.

Concluding, a mixed methods content analysis has been chosen in order to understand and explain *manifest content*, "the elements that are physically present and countable" (Neuendorf, 2002, p.23) expressed by the employer side such as the amount of posts contributed. On the other hand, a mixed methods content analysis also expresses *latent content*, "the unobserved concept(s) that cannot be measured directly but can be represented by one or more indicators" (Neuendorf, 2002, p.23), expressed by the potential employees' side such as the deeper meaning of comments made by them. The latent content will further result in themes and patterns of engagement that mirror these deeper meanings. Therefore, themes are "threads of an underlying meaning through, condensed meaning units, codes or categories, on an interpretative level" and answer the question *How?* (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004, p.107). A mixed methods content analysis has also been deemed superior to the alternative, a netnography which "investigates computer-mediated communication in connection with market-related topics" (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p.654). This is because a netnography would ignore quantitative data, which has been shown to be relevant as a netnography would not analyze the data accurately produced by the employer, the so-called engagement object. Also, it is believed that a netnography would not be an appropriate research method in regards to the theory generated during the literature review.

### 3.3. The Role of Theory

It is important to discuss how specifically the role of theory influences the research design. The deductive approach normally deduces a hypothesis or assumption generated through theory that must then be subjected to empirical scrutiny (Bryman & Bell, 2011; Fisher, 2010). As mentioned, the researchers have established assumptions, but it is not their aim to empirically test them as they have already been confirmed in prior research (see literature review). The research is now being taken a step further by observing and understanding what is actually happening in relation to engagement in employer branding on social media. Induction is a creative approach in which a researcher infers the implications of his or her findings and feeds them back into the theory (Bryman & Bell, 2011). However, the approach chosen here is a mix of the deductive and inductive approaches as there are pre-coded categories prior to data collection derived from theory, but there is also an emphasis on allowing categories to emerge out of newly gathered data as referred to as open coding process (Bryman & Bell, 2011; Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009; Boyatzis, 1998). Therefore, this

research method uses an *abductive* approach entailing elements of deduction and induction. Abduction, as induction, has its starting point in empirical data, but it does not reject theoretical preconceptions that have been established from existing theoretical concepts which can serve as sources of inspiration (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009). Also, abduction is related to the epistemological direction of interpretivism which fits within the philosophical framework as well (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). The theoretical concepts used as basis for the research design of the analysis are discussed in the final chapter of the literature review (2.4.) and illustrated in the *adapted model employer brand engagement Web 2.0* (Figure 8, p.36) with its engagement dimensions (cognitive, emotional and behavioral) at its core. The model and specifically the dimensions (where employer and potential employee meet) serve as basis from which categories were pre-coded (Tables 3 and 4, pp.44/45). This is in order to collect data systematically and to structure the analysis in relation to the different dimensions as this is where all elements meet. Most categories have been created in a strictly deductive manner except for data associated with the categories Pa through Pf in Table 3 (*coding manual platform*, p.44), consisting of general observations which were made during data collection; and the categories USa through USk in Table 4 (*coding manual content*, p.45) were established inductively as it was deemed important to analyze in more detail who these individuals engaging with employer brands are. This is possible as individuals on social media share personal information about them by establishing profiles. The categories are discussed in more detail in 3.4 (Research design) explaining what category is aimed at analyzing what specific element from the theory. Most importantly, the results of the analysis and discussion are fed back into the *adapted model employer brand engagement 2.0* (Figure 8, p.36) in order to arrive at a more precise and complete model.

### 3.4. Research Design

The *scope of the analysis* will be five employer brands considered as best-practice examples as listed on the Global Top 50 Business list from 2012 by Universum (2012). The list provided by Universum was chosen as it is the only global index of employer attractiveness focusing on companies that excel in both talent attraction and retention. Unlike many other lists basing numbers on current employees' opinions, this ranking adopts an external view basing it on Students' employer preferences. The scope of the research is limited due to the qualitative nature of the research design as it is preferred to investigate a smaller sample. This is also done in order to maintain focus. Furthermore, companies have been chosen who all use social media platforms for the employer branding purposes, more specifically the most

popular platforms worldwide (as proven in 2.3 An Introduction to Social Media): Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter. As these companies have multiple Facebook and Twitter sites, only the global ones have been chosen for consistency reasons. As mentioned in 2.3.2 (Social Media Platforms), different platforms have different functionalities. The three platforms have therefore been not only chosen because of their worldwide popularity, but because of their distinguishing functionalities as illustrated in 2.3.2 (Social Media Platforms).

A list of the companies to be investigated (see Table 1) and following a short description about them can be found. The full list with the specific website addresses can be found in appendix 1 (Table 2, p.94).

| Ranking on Universum | Company |
|---|---|
| 1. | Google Inc. |
| 3. | The Procter & Gamble Company |
| 12. | L'Oreal Group |
| 18. | The Adidas Group |
| 41. | HP (Hewlett-Packard Company) |

Table 1: List of Companies to be investigated

Google Inc. is an U.S.-American multinational corporation and one of the biggest specialists for internet-related services and products. It provides a whole range of search-, cloud computing-, software- and online advertising technologies and generates most of its profits from AdWords (Google, 2013). Procter and Gamble (P&G) is an American multinational consumer goods company headquartering in Ohio, USA. Its product offer ranges from body care-, cleaning-, pet food products as well as food and beverages (P & G, 2013). The L'Oreal Group is the largest cosmetics and beauty group in the world. With a headquarter in Paris it offers a wide range of skin care-, hair care-, sun protection and make-up products as well as perfumes. It further has strong participation in dermatological, tissue engineering and pharmaceutical areas and is a pioneer in nanotechnology (L'Oreal, 2013). The Adidas Group is a German multinational corporation that is producing and designing sports clothes and shoes. With its headquarters in Germany, it is managing brands such as the Reebok Sportswear Company, Taylor Made-Adidas Golf Company and Rockport. The Adidas Group is Europe's biggest and the world's second largest sportswear manufacturer (Adidas, 2013). HP or Hewlett-Packard Company is an American multinational information technology corporation based in California, USA. The product range offers technologies, software

solutions and services to consumers as well as small- and medium-sized companies and large organizations, often originating from government, health and education segments (HP, 2013).

As can be seen, a specific industry has not been chosen; neither the top five of the list. Rather, it was made sure that several industries are represented and also companies from both spectrums of the list in order to ensure diversity. Also, the specific *units of analysis*, defined as" a great variety of objects of study" (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004, p.106) are all the online conversations (viewed as texts) between potential employees (receivers/engagement subjects) and the chosen employer brands (engagement objects/ senders) on Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter. Here, only relevant interactions are chosen. They have to be specifically in response to employers' content. Although *likes and shares* are counted as a form of engagement, the main focus is the actual textual comments made by potential employees as they represent the highest level of commitment. It is assumed that leaving a comment requires more effort than clicking a button in order to share or like something. A second unit of analysis is the layout of the different platforms itself and how they have been used by the employer brands under investigation. Not all data presented on the various social media platforms can be examined as it is not the intention to perform a longitudinal study. Therefore, it was decided to use the most up-to-date data starting from the 1st of April till the 30th of April 2013 (one month) in order to present a snapshot of activities. Furthermore, although global websites have been chosen, not all data is in English. Therefore, due to limited language capacities all languages not pertaining to English, German, Dutch, Spanish or French will be excluded from the data set.

*Data collection and analysis* in this content analysis happen more or less simultaneously. In terms of data collection, all data analyzed will be collected and inventoried in documents in order to freeze all information at the specific point in time of investigation. This is to ensure that the researchers do not get confused by changing data sets as data on social media platforms may change instantly as anyone who is a member may change, add or delete data that he or she submitted. The researchers' role in the data collection, analysis and interpretation of the findings will be invisible as the researchers will not participate in the interactions, but merely *observe*. However, the interpretation of the text resulting in patterns and themes will be somewhat subjective due to the philosophical standpoint of the researchers which has been made explicit.

Once the data has been inventoried, it may be submitted to categories and codes may be applied. Categories, are "groups of content that shares a commonality", are mutually

exclusive and consist of a number of data (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004, p.107). They answer the 'What?' question. Sub-categories in relation to main categories have been developed as well. The data that has been associated with a category and sub-category has always been coded as codes give a label to data or meaning units; they function as heuristic devices. The specific categories have been all indicated in the coding manuals for both units of analysis. For the coding manuals, the structure suggested by Boyatzis (1998, p.31) has been used. Every category, if not self-explanatory, will have a label (name), a definition of the text's theme, a description of how to know when the theme occurs, a description of any qualifications or exclusions to the identification, positive and negative examples to avoid confusion, as well as the codes that correspond with each category. Therefore, the coding manuals illustrating the categories developed for this purpose and its codes are shown here (Table 3 and 4, pp.44/45). Whenever a number is encased by brackets, it indicates the application of a code, ex: (1), meaning that it displays numerical data. Whenever the word *count* is used as instruction, it also displays numerical or quantitative data. Qualitative data applies to whenever the word *description* or *statements* is used as instruction and  textual data or quotes are required. Furthermore, the two coding manuals will be explained; what the developed categories analyze in regards to engagement and the research question.

| P. | **MAIN Category: (P) Platform- Cognitive Employer** |
|---|---|
| Pa. | Amount of Tabs: Count Amount of Tabs<br>*Tabs are considered sub-pages of the main website which are optional to the company.* |
| Pb. | Company Name is Integrated in some way: Yes (1), No (2) |
| Pc. | Header/Background Image (if available): include a discription of the image in terms of situation displayed, colors used, atmosphere in the text column.<br>*Some companies include an image on top of their website in order to customize it.*<br>***Example description:*** *The image displays a woker of x company in a suit with an orange background.* |
| Pd. | Colors Used Mainly on Platform (more than one code my apply): Blue (1), Red (2), Black (3), Yellow (4), Green (5), White (6), Mixed (7)<br>*The use of colors may tell something about the company's character.* |
| Pe. | More Specific Company Information Offerd in some form: Yes (1), No (2) |
| Pf. | Links to other Social Media Available: Yes (1), No (2) |
| Pg. | Number of Followers or Fans (of the Company on the Platform as displayed on top of the page): Count Amount |
| Ph. | Average Posts per Day: Count all the Posts during the time period and divide by 30 (April has 30 days); Include total amount of Posts in the Text column next to the count column. |
| PT. | **SUB: (T) Type of Content Used- Cognitive Employer** |
| PTa. | Amount of Infographics posted: Count Amount |
| PTb. | Amount of Articles (other) posted (these articles refer to anything other than employee stories): Count Amount |
| PTc. | Amount of Videos posted (any other video that does not realte to Employee Stories) : Count Amount |
| PTd. | Amount of Images posted: Count Amount |
| PTe | Amount of Employee Stories posted (must be original and fromat is not considered here): Count Amount |
| PTf. | Amount of Job Postings posted: Count Amount |
| PTg. | Amount of Competitons posted: Count Amount |

Table 3: Coding Manual Platform

The *coding manual platform* (see Table 3) for the chosen platform captures general data on the platforms in order to address layout questions (categories Pa through Pf). It also has been established to facilitate quantification as it displays total amounts of followers, total/average amount of posts and types of content used (categories Pg through Ph and PTa through PTg). The same points are associated with answering questions regarding the employer's cognitive dimension. Here, all data is numerical (amounts and codes) except for category Pc which is textual as it is a description. The data is mostly numerical as it addresses the employer's side which data has been declared as most easily represented by quantitative data.

| U. | MAIN Category: (U) Unit of Analysis: Interactions |
|---|---|
| **UF.** | **SUB: (F) Format- Presentation of Content- Cognitive Employer** |
| UFa. | The Content fits the following format (more than one code my apply): Infographic (1), Article other (2), Video (3), Image (4), Employee Story (5), Job Posting (6), Competition (7) |
| UFb. | A direct clickable Link is presented to the content: Yes (1), No (2) |
| UFc. | Original Content: Yes (1), No (2); if no then the content is curated |
| UFd. | Description: Include a description regarding what the content is focused on, the subject in the text column. *Example: The article talks about a new product launch.* |
| **UI.** | **SUB: (I) Interactions Registered per Content Type- Cognitive Potential Employee** |
| UIa. | Number of Comments linked to the posted content: Count Amount of Comments |
| UIb. | Number of Shares linked to the posted content: Count Amount of Shares |
| UIc. | Number of Likes linked to the posted Content: Count Amount of Likes |
| **UO.** | **SUB: (O) Object language used in posts- Emotional/Behavioral Employer** |
| UOa. | Emotional Employer: Disposition of the Engagement Object/Language used in the Content: Positive- cheery, enthusiastic, funny tone (1), Negative- sad, upset tone (2), Neutral- infromative tone (3) *Example (Positive): Hey guys, check out this great product!* *Example (Negative): Unfortunetly we have bad news as...* *Example (Neutral): Just want to let you know about...* |
| UOb. | Behavioral Employer: Does the company respond in general to questions posed by commentators?: Yes (1), No (2) |
| **US.** | **SUB: (S) Subject: Who is engaging actively/ commenting? (Potential Employee)** |
| USa. | Number of Male Engagement Subjects: Count Amount of Males |
| USb. | Number of Female Engagement Subjects: Count Amount of Females |
| USc. | Number of Unknown Subjects (not male or female): Count Amount |
| USd. | Number of Europeans: Count Amount |
| USe. | Number of North Americans: Count Amount |
| USf. | Number of South Americans: Count Amount |
| USg. | Number of Africans: Count Amount |
| USh. | Number of Asians: Count Amount |
| USi. | Number of Australians: Count Amount |
| USj. | Number of Antarcticans: Count Amount |
| USk. | Number from Unknown Origin: Count Amount |
| **UD.** | **SUB: (D) Dimensions Subject: Behavioral/Cognitive/Emotional Potential Employee** |
| UDa. | Behavioural Dimension- How much energy is spent on the brand?: All types of statements that indicate that the individual is planning to or not planning (boycott) to take some sort of physical action in the future as a reaction towards the content. *Example: Tomorrow I am going to send this article to my friend. She could really use it. OR I will never go to x company ever again!* |
| UDb. | Cognitive Dimension- How engrossed are subjects in the brand?: Count how many poeple commented more than once |
| UDc. | Emotional Dimension- How much pride, passion and brand-related inspiration is displayed?: All types of statements that indicate a certain kind of attitude towards the brand or content (positive, negative and neutral). *Example (Positive): Awesome! I love x company.* *Example (Negative): I do not agree with the actions x company is taking...* *Example (Neutral): This seems interesting.* |

Table 4: Coding Manual Content

Table 4 (p.45), *coding manual content*, is used to analyze specific data found on separate interactions. It furthermore analyzes the data in regards to the employers' and potential employees' cognitive, emotional and behavioral dimensions as part of the engagement phenomenon. The categories UFa through UFd also address the content contributed by the employer on a more specific level, therefore analyzing the employer's cognitive dimension and adding to data collected in table 3. Category UOa analyzes the tone, employers use in presenting content; therefore analyzing its emotional dimension. Category UOb analyzes the employers' responsiveness level; analyzing its behavioral dimension. On the potential employee's side, categories UIa through UIc analyze how many and what types of engagement have been registered (comments, shares, likes); analyzing the potential employee's responses on a cognitive dimension. Category UDb further examines the potential employees' responses on a cognitive dimension by including how many of the commentators registered, interact more than once; looking at prolonged engagement. Category UDa analyzes the potential employee's responses on a behavioral dimension whereas category UDc analyzes the potential employee's responses on an emotional dimension. The categories USa through USk have been established to create a profile of the potential employee as an individual in terms of gender and nationality as interesting results were assumed to be produced. However, these results cannot be attributed to a specific dimension. Here, most data is numerical as well (amounts and codes) except for categories UFd, UDa and UDc, UFd are textual as they require a description and UDa and UDc consist of a collection of quotes that fit within the category. The numerical data addresses the employer's side which data has been declared as formal and most easily represented by quantitative data; however it also expresses the potential employee's responses on a cognitive dimension as this was most easily analyzed quantitatively. The potential employees' responses on an emotional and behavioral dimension are represented qualitatively as the data presented is more informal (comments). A small exception in category UFd on the employers' cognitive side is presented qualitatively; however this specific element is rather used for identification purposes and not in the analysis as such. The data which is collected with the help of the categories within the two coding manuals answers the research question as it shows what content/activities are contributed by employers for the potential employees to engage with. It also shows how engagement is expressed by both the employers and the potential employees on the three engagement dimensions (cognitive, emotional and behavioral).

Due to the amount of data, it was decided to establish two coding manuals as the *coding manual platform* (Table 3, p.44) and corresponding coding schedules act as a summary or

grouping of the coding schedules associated to the *coding manual content* (Table 4, p.45) in order to facilitate quantification of results. Coding schedules help to code data sets more easily and in a consistent manner. The data will be entered into coding schedules for each unit of analysis and as described in the coding manuals which can be a simple code, a counted number or a textual element as explained before. The blank coding schedules can be found in the appendices 2 and 4 (pp. 95 and 97); the completed ones are kept in storage due to the large amount of schedules (in total 741 coding schedules have been filled in). However, two completed examples of the schedules can also be found in the appendices 3 and 5 (pp. 96 and 98). The qualitative or textual results will be illustrated via quotations whereas quantitative data will be illustrated using graphs or tables in Microsoft Excel. In this case Excel has been chosen above SPSS as it is not the researchers' intention to test hypotheses. Therefore, no tests for statistical significance are necessary which means that Excel will suffice. Moreover, it has been decided that all quantitative data can be expressed using Excel and that this program offers overall more flexibility in data presentation.

### 3.5. Assessing the Quality of the Research

In research, usually the terms validity (internal and external), reliability (internal and external), and objectivity are used as criteria to assess the quality of research (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009). However, due to the researchers' philosophical standpoint and due to employing a mixed methods approach, conventional criteria are somewhat unsuitable for judging the research results as they presuppose that a single absolute account of social reality is feasible. For that reason, Guba and Lincoln (in Bryman & Bell, 2011) established alternative criteria that address a research's overall trustworthiness: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability which will be applied in this case in combination with validity, reliability and objectivity.

Credibility refers to the "adequate representation of the constructions of the social world under study" (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009, p. 6). It also parallels the traditional criteria of internal validity: whether or not there is a good match between observations and the theoretical ideas developed. In order to ensure as much credibility as possible throughout the research, precise coding definitions and coding procedures have been employed in a coding manual. Also, coding consistency will be checked throughout the research. Transferability applies to the extent to which the researchers' hypothesis can be applied to other contexts (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009) and parallels with external validity. In order to ensure transferability, rich descriptions have been given so that other researchers can make

appropriate judgments themselves. Dependability refers to "the coherence of the internal process and the way the researcher accounts for changing conditions in the phenomena" (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009, p. 6). This criterion parallels reliability, the degree to which the study can be replicated and whether or not there exists inter-observer consistency. Dependability is ensured as the research takes place in a 'public' virtual world until it ceases to exist or is alerted. However, all data is stored, so that it can be looked into by other researchers. Also, precise coding definitions, procedures and overall records guarantee inter-observer consistency, which is important as two researchers are involved. Confirmability refers to "the extent to which the characteristics of the data, as posited by the researcher, can be confirmed by others who read or review the research results" (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009, p. 6). It also parallels objectivity. Since absolute confirmability or objectivity does not exist, the researchers try to make assumptions as explicit as possible and also try to avoid personal values to interfere. Guba and Lincoln (in Bryman & Bell, 2011) add another criteria called authenticity; however since it is seen as rather controversial, it will not be applied in this case. Any political consideration will be discussed in the ethical discussion regarding this research, if applicable.

All in all, concerning this research, there may be issues with all criteria being met. Credibility may be impaired as there are time constraints that limit the time it is possible to recheck coding manuals. Also, there are only two researchers who are able to recheck the coding manual which may create some sort of tunnel vision missing obvious errors. Transferability may be weak as well since the research is performed on different social media platforms which have all their unique functionalities; therefore it may be problematic to apply the research across social media platforms. Dependability will be ensured as all data will be kept in storage making it accessible at any time. Furthermore, rich descriptions will be available for others to make appropriate judgments. Last, confirmability is an issue in any qualitative research as 100% objectivity never exists.

### 3.6. Ethical Issues

In this research, some ethical issues need to be discussed and made explicit. As the research takes place on social media platforms, the right to privacy may be an issue for the individuals and employer brands to be investigated. However, the researchers believe that although a registration is needed to access the platforms, everything that has been published on these sites has been determined public information. This is as members and employer brands can opt to hide comments, not share if they do not want to or simply use different names if

privacy was to be an issue. Inherently, if something is posted on a social networking site, it is public if everyone is able to see it. Therefore, all subjects included have given their consent that the text may be used for the research. However, anonymity is important to the researchers and no last names will be used. Another consideration is also that although the researchers may never be completely objective, they have to seek to be disinterested (Fisher, 2010). This means that personal views or opinions should not interfere with the research and the researchers must stay impartial to the data being studied. The researchers may have never participated in the interactions to be studied on those particular social networking sites. Also, all raw data must be stored so that it can be accessed by whoever needs to.

## 3.7. Limitations

Every research has certain limitations that need to be made explicit. Due to time constraints and the partly qualitative nature of the research method, the scope of the research had to be limited to a smaller number of employer brands and social media platforms which makes generalizing the results more difficult. Also, the data amount to be examined (one month's worth) on the various platforms had to be limited as it was decided to provide a snapshot of the situation instead of a longitudinal analysis. Although global platforms were chosen with English as main language, some other data had to be excluded (data that was not in the languages English, German, French, Dutch or Spanish were excluded). However, a longitudinal analysis may provide much more insight and should be considered in this context. Other data that was excluded were interactions that stem from individuals without any direct connection to the companies' content on their platforms as this is beyond the focus of the study. Another limitation includes the decision to look at employer branding from an external perspective, not including the internal/employee perspective which was deemed to be too complex. Originally, the research was also to be enhanced by conducting in-depth interviews with managers of the chosen employer brands to be investigated. However, as the researchers did not want to be dependent on the employer brands as scheduling interviews can take up a long time and might not happen at an appropriate stage during the research, this additional research method was rejected. Another limitation is that only two researchers are conducting the content analysis which entails that no audit of the coding categories and excessive crosschecking was possible. In general, errors in terms of coding cannot be completely excluded. As data will have to be interpreted, some degree of subjectivism cannot be excluded. All these limitations also impact the criteria which assess the overall quality of the research as stated above.

## 4. Presentation of Research Results

In the following chapter, the research results are presented. The data represent a snapshot of activities within a 30 day time period (the month of April 2013). As discussed in the methodology, it is the intention to understand what employers did on the different platforms in order to engage with potential employees and also how this engagement was expressed on the different dimensions (cognitive, emotional and behavioral) on the employers' and the potential employees' sides in order to answer the research question. Therefore, this chapter will present the results following the *adapted model Employer Brand Engagement Web 2.0* (Figure 8, p. 36) on which the methodology is also based on. This chapter presents the results according to the different dimensions on both the employers' and the potential employees' side and in correlation of the two per dimension. Furthermore, additional research results will be presented at the end of this chapter.

However, certain data that has been collected throughout the research was deemed not as useful and has not been further investigated. This includes the question whether or not a direct clickable link was present along with the content; no evidence has been found that it had a substantial effect on engagement as a link was mostly present. The amount of tabs also did not seem to have an effect on engagement as they only presented content that individuals were not able to interact with in form of comments, shares or likes; they mostly contained other information. As the company name was always integrated in all platforms, no effect on engagement was noted. The only possible effect might have been that the company name mirrored the companies' overall reputation that initially attracted potential employees to the website. However this has not been and cannot be measured. The same applies to whether or not company information was offered. Also, it has been deemed not further relevant for engagement purposes to investigate the issue of links to other social media as this depends on the platforms' design and was not always a choice companies could make. In terms of layout and color use, no conclusive observation was made as most platforms had a standard layout which put the issue outside the companies' control. Looking at background pictures or header images, it was observed that L'Oreal and Google used the same image across all platforms. Adidas also streamlined images; however there was no picture on LinkedIn. HP's images were more or less streamlined; no picture was found on Twitter. P&G did not streamline its images using different ones across platforms. However it is not clear how these observations related to engagement and were not further investigated.

## 4.1. The Cognitive Dimension

As defined in the literature review, the cognitive dimension is part of the immersion theme including a potential employees' level of concentration and /or engrossment in the employer brand or in the reversed case, an employer brand's level of concentration and/or engrossment in the potential employee. Here, the results regarding potential employees' cognitive dimension will be presented and then correlated with results regarding the employer brands' cognitive dimension in order to arrive at conclusions.

### 4.1.1. Potential Employees' Engagement Index

In order to calculate which platform or employer was overall most engaging and displays potential employees' cognitive dimension the most, the engagement index was established. The index is the total amount of registered interactions (comments, shares and likes) added up. The higher the number the stronger the engagement was assumed to be for the time period. Table 9 (p.52) illustrates the engagement indexes per platform and per employer. It shows that LinkedIn had comparably the highest engagement index (9960) during the investigated time period; then followed by Twitter (2072) and Facebook (1677). As the distance between LinkedIn and the other two platforms is great, there is even stronger evidence that LinkedIn was the most engaging platform regarding potential employees' cognitive dimension. It also shows that in terms of engagement type (comments, shares or likes); LinkedIn noted the most comments (698 comments) which are assumed by the researchers to be the strongest kind of engagement on a cognitive dimension within the social media environment. This is because it shows an individuals' highest level of commitment, meaning that an individual takes the time to make some form of statement which further suggests that LinkedIn is where potential employees wanted to engage with the employer. Here, LinkedIn was followed by Twitter (152 comments) and then Facebook (88 comments). The researchers consider shares to be the second strongest type of engagement on a cognitive dimension as an individual commits to placing content in his or her own personal social media space. In terms of shares generation, Twitter counted the most (1293) and Facebook was second with 164 shares; LinkedIn had to be excluded as the data is generally not obtainable making these overall results somewhat inconclusive. At last, likes are considered the weakest type of engagement on a cognitive dimension as it does not take much effort to push a button in order to engage. Here, LinkedIn generated the most likes (9262); Facebook was second (1425 likes) and Twitter last (627 likes) further solidifying LinkedIn's position. The highest amount of comments, likes and shares per employer within platforms are indicated with a

green color marking the amounts. The engagement indexes of the overall most engaging employer within platforms are marked red. The employer which was the most engaging across all platforms according to potential employees was HP, Google was second, P&G third, L'Oreal fourth and Adidas finished last. The corresponding table 10 showing the calculations can be found in appendix 6 (p.99). Interestingly, the ranking is almost identical to the sequence presented by the Universum Ranking in Table 1 (in 3. Methodology) except for HP who is ranked last in our sample by Universum, but ended up being the most engaging employer overall on a cognitive dimension during the investigated time period.

| Table 9: Most Engaging Platform (Ranking) | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Employer | Platform | Total Comments | Total Shares | Total Likes | Total Engagement Index |
| Adidas | LinkedIn | 14 | N/A | 182 | 196 |
| Google | LinkedIn | 161 | N/A | 2893 | 3054 |
| HP | LinkedIn | 407 | N/A | 4554 | 4961 |
| L'oreal | LinkedIn | 16 | N/A | 293 | 309 |
| P&G | LinkedIn | 100 | N/A | 1340 | 1440 |
| **TOTAL LINKEDIN (1)** | | **698** | **N/A** | **9262** | **9960** |
| Adidas | Twitter | 12 | 56 | 32 | 100 |
| Google | Twitter | 130 | 1044 | 537 | 1711 |
| HP | Twitter | 8 | 103 | 43 | 154 |
| L'oreal | Twitter | 2 | 37 | 9 | 48 |
| P&G | Twitter | 0 | 53 | 6 | 59 |
| **TOTAL TWITTER (2)** | | **152** | **1293** | **627** | **2072** |
| Adidas | Facebook | 33 | 8 | 205 | 246 |
| Google | Facebook | 20 | 77 | 254 | 351 |
| HP | Facebook | 11 | 20 | 295 | 326 |
| L'oreal | Facebook | 15 | 18 | 370 | 403 |
| P&G | Facebook | 9 | 41 | 301 | 351 |
| **TOTAL FACEBOOK (3)** | | **88** | **164** | **1425** | **1677** |
| * Red marked: Most engaging within Platforms | | | | | |
| * Green marked: Most engaging reg. Comment/Share/ Like sections within Platforms | | | | | |

The engagement index does not show if potential employees engaged more than once on a cognitive dimension within an interaction. As it is the goal to achieve prolonged engagement, it is necessary to investigate whether or not potential employees are engaging generally once or are displaying signs of ongoing engagement with the employer. Therefore, Table 11 (p.53) indicates how many potential employees commented more than once. It is expressed as percentage: the number of potential employees who interacted more than once was divided by the total amount of comments registered in that interaction. Although this might not be the most accurate way, it does show that a subject is willing to follow an interaction more than others who comment once and leave. Also, as mentioned the calculation is only regarding the prolonged engagement within single interactions and not across all interactions as it has been noted that some potential employees did respond to a multitude of posts within the same

platform. However this has not been measured and cannot be expressed in numbers. Table 11 below shows that a prolonged cognitive dimension was visible, although minimally. It also shows that on average prolonged engagement was most visible on Twitter (7,13%); second was Facebook (5,45%) and last was LinkedIn (2,16%). However, one must not forget that the more posts, the more opportunity there was to comment which might explain why on Twitter the visibility was the strongest as Twitter also registered the highest content output. Facebook was second in content output and LinkedIn close third which correlates to the proximity in percentages in prolonged cognitive visibility between the two platforms. This also means that prolonged cognitive engagement might have been somewhat affected by amount of content output. However, table 11 also shows that most individuals only commented once and did not engage beyond that (indicated by a 0,00%).

| Table 11: Visibility Prolonged Cognitive Dimension | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Overall % in Relation to Total Comments | | | | |
| | **Platform** | | | |
| **Employer** | LinkedIn | Twitter | Facebook | **AVERAGE** |
| Adidas | 0,00% | 8,33% | 0,00% | **2,78%** |
| L'oreal | 0,00% | 0,00% | 0,00% | **0,00%** |
| P&G | 5,00% | N/A | 0,00% | **2,50%** |
| Google | 1,86% | 7,69% | 0,00% | **3,18%** |
| HP | 3,93% | 12,50% | 27,27% | **14,57%** |
| **AVERAGE** | **2,16%** | **7,13%** | **5,45%** | |

*N/A: No comments were registered on P&G's Twitter platform

#### 4.1.2. Amount of Posts

Table 12 (p.54) relates the amount of posts (total per month and daily output) per employer per platform in relation to the platforms' and employers' engagement rankings as indicated by the engagement index. It shows that Twitter experienced the most content contribution (545 posts) compared to Facebook (94 posts) and LinkedIn (87 posts) suggesting that Twitter was the employers' main focus in order to engage potential employees, then Facebook and LinkedIn. However, the platform (LinkedIn) that received the lowest contribution of content, received the most engagement on the potential employees' cognitive dimension as indicated by the engagement index which suggests that employers may have concentrated on the wrong platform in order to engage potential employees. This is further supported as HP contributed the most content on LinkedIn (marked red) and was the most engaging on potential employees' cognitive dimension. Also, L'Oreal who contributed most on Facebook (marked red) was the most engaging on that particular platform as well. However this has not been true

for Twitter; the employer (Google) with the second least amount of output prevailed (marked red). This suggests that quantity is contributing positively to potential employees' cognitive dimension, but that quantity has to be seen relative to quality and type of content, and that it only contributes positively if it is directed to where potential employees expect to engage. This can be supported as Facebook received, just as LinkedIn, little content contribution and was the least engaging on potential employees' cognitive dimension, meaning that potential employees were not looking for engagement on that particular platform. Overall it suggests that employers may raise potential employees' cognitive dimension by contributing content where potential employees are most interested to engage on social media. The data suggest, therefore, that for the investigated time period, there was some disconnect between the employers' efforts and concentration of content contribution and the potential employees' expectations regarding where content should be available in order to engage.

In terms of posting frequency represented by the average daily output per employer, the standard deviation has been calculated in order to analyze how posting strategies varied across employers within platforms. The standard deviation is a calculation of variance and uses the same unit as the items under investigation. The further away the standard deviation is away from zero, the further away the frequencies are from the mean and therefore the greater the variances. This means that the posting frequencies across employers on Facebook (std. dev. 0,35) and LinkedIn (std. dev. 0,58) were similar, meaning that employers followed similar posting strategies which suggests a similar understanding of how to use these tools. This further highlights that employers' understanding of where to concentrate may have been disconnected to where potential employees wanted to engage. For Twitter, the variance was greater compared to the other two (std. dev. 2,7) suggesting that employers had overall different posting strategies on Twitter and no common understanding of how to use Twitter could be identified.

| Table 12: Correlation Content Output for April 2013 & Engagement Rankings (30 days) | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Platforms (Engagement Ranking Platforms) | | | | | | | | |
| | Twitter (2) | | Facebook (3) | | LinkedIn (1) | | | |
| Employer | Total Output per Employer | Average Daily Output per Employer | Total Output per Employer | Average Daily Output per Employer | Total Output per Employer | Average Daily Output per Employer | SUM TOTAL POSTS PER EMPLOYER (Accross Platforms) | Engagement Ranking Employers |
| Adidas | 237 | 7,9 | 21 | 0,7 | 24 | 0,8 | 282 | 5 |
| L'oreal | 15 | 0,5 | 32 | 1,07 | 4 | 0,13 | 51 | 4 |
| P&G | 89 | 2,97 | 11 | 0,37 | 6 | 0,2 | 106 | 3 |
| Google | 86 | 2,87 | 6 | 0,2 | 8 | 0,27 | 100 | 2 |
| HP | 118 | 3,93 | 24 | 0,80 | 45 | 1,5 | 187 | 1 |
| TOTAL OUTPUT (SUM) | 545 | | 94 | | 87 | | 726 | |
| Std. Deviation | | 2,70 | | 0,35 | | 0,58 | | |
| * Red marked: Most engaging within Platforms | | | | | | | | |

### 4.1.3. Amount of Followers

Table 13 below correlates the employers' overall engagement rankings with their overall amount of followers across platforms. The results suggest that the more followers an employer had, the higher the engagement on a potential employee's cognitive dimension. For example, Adidas had the least amount of followers overall (70.821) and ended up last in the engagement rankings. The sequence follows identically except for the first two where HP was ranked first on potential employees' engagement but had the second most followers. When looking at employer level, it also indicates that the amount of followers or fans had an effect on the engagement indexes; the more followers, the higher the engagement index. The amount of followers may help employers to decide which platform to focus their efforts on in order to reach potential employees on a cognitive dimension. However, there are some exceptions to this theory and it needs to be investigated further.

| Table 13: Correlation Followers & Engagement Index | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Engagement Ranking Employers** | | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | |
| | **Employers** | Adidas | L'oreal | P&G | Google | HP | |
| **Followers per Platform (Engagement Ranking Platforms)** | | | | | | | **TOTAL** |
| Twitter (2) | | 15.358 | 4.889 | 1.879 | 217.177 | 2.108 | 241.411 |
| Facebook (3) | | 6.120 | 37.799 | 22.604 | 46.829 | 26.015 | 139.367 |
| LinkedIn (1) | | 49.343 | 213.257 | 445.535 | 1.122.316 | 1.100.595 | 2.931.046 |
| **TOTAL FOLLOWERS** | | **70.821** | **255.945** | **470.018** | **1.386.322** | **1.128.718** | **3.311.824** |
| * Red marked: Most engaging within Platforms | | | | | | | |

### 4.1.4. Content and Engagement

The next step is to investigate what type of content or activity was concentrated on by employers. Table 14 showing the calculations regarding content per platform per employer can be found in appendix 7 (p.100). It is not presented here due to its size; however results can be expressed easily. It must be noted that the total sum of content presented in this table does not correspond a 100% with the total output of posts in general making it appear as if there are more posts than actually registered. This is as some posts consisted of a combination of content (example: an article together with an image would have registered two codes or content types). However it is not assumed that the table would present different results if combinations would be included. The research shows that on LinkedIn, the content types used by employers during the investigated period were mostly images followed by articles, job postings, videos, employee stories, infographics and competitions. On Twitter, the content types presented most to least were job postings, articles, images, employee stories, videos, infographics and competitions. On Facebook, the content presented most to least were images,

articles, employee stories/videos, job postings, infographics and competitions. In general, the most presented and concentrated on content by employers across platforms from most to least were job postings, images, articles, employee stories, videos, infographics and competitions.

Table 15 shows which content actually engaged potential employees on a cognitive dimension; the table can be found in appendix 8 (p.101). The results indicate that on LinkedIn images and articles worked best in terms of overall potential employee engagement (comments and likes). Least engaging were employee stories without visual aid, and competitions. As LinkedIn does not show how much has been shared, this was not observed. These results indicate that LinkedIn is an appropriate platform for combinations of textual and visual content. On Twitter, job postings (and articles) worked best in terms of overall potential employee engagement (comments, shares and likes). Least engaging on Twitter were articles combined with video, images and competitions. The results indicate that Twitter is an appropriate platform for mostly textual content. On Facebook, mostly images and somewhat less so articles were most supportive of potential employees' engagement; however the results show a very mixed picture as in terms of comments, shares and likes different results were achieved indicating that different content produced different types of engagement (comments, shares or likes) on Facebook. However, the overall results incline that Facebook is more appropriate for predominantly visual content. In general, the most engaging content on potential employees' cognitive dimension was also the content that was posted the most in general (see Table 14 in appendix 7, p.100) resulting in the inclination that for engagement, a strategy of quality content and an increased posting frequency (quantity) was favorable at the time, as was suggested before. It also indicates that employers understand in general what kind of content is expected by potential employees to engage with. This furthermore strengthens the theory that employers post the right content, but may have misdirected it to the wrong platforms.

It has also been recognized by employers that different content was appropriate for different platforms as the variances in form of a standard deviation calculation in Table 16 indicate (see appendix 9, p.102). The numbers vary from a standard deviation of zero to 122,55 indicating large variances/differences of content types across platforms per employer for the investigated time period.

### 4.1.5. Original Content vs. Curated Content

Not only is the content format and the content itself important to investigate, but also whether or not the content was produced by the employers themselves (original) or whether it was curated (produced by someone else, for example an agency). Figure 9 below shows that mostly original content had been produced (on average 90,39% vs. 9,69% curated). However, it also shows that the most engaging platform on potential employees' cognitive dimension, LinkedIn, did use more curated content (on average 20% vs. 80% rounded) than Twitter and Facebook equally (on average 5% vs. 95% rounded).
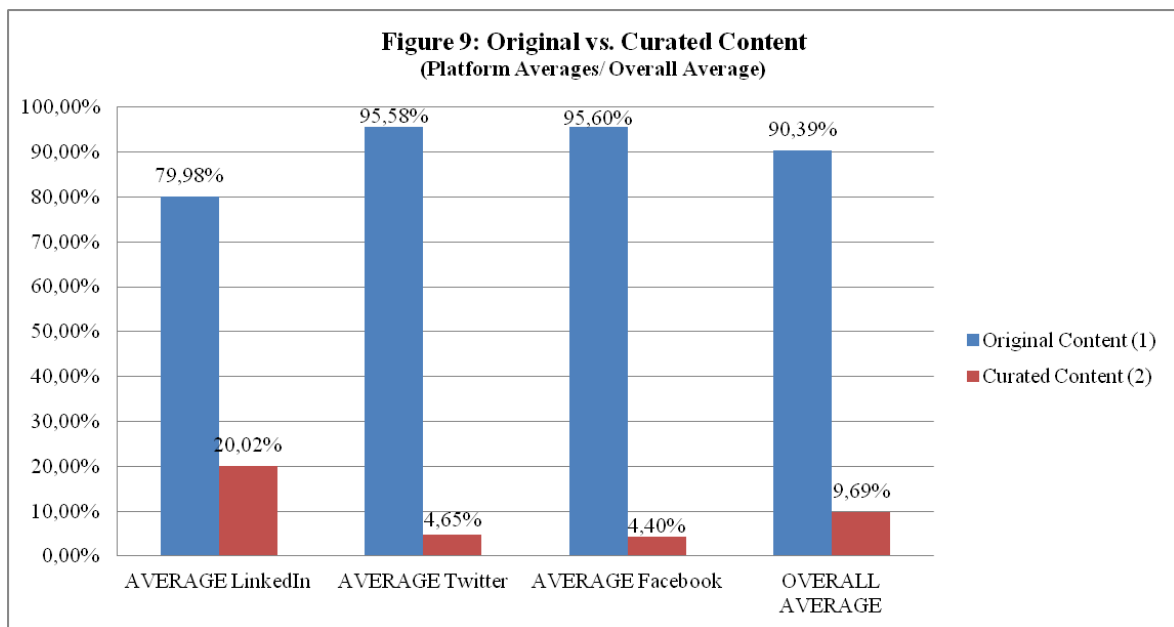


Looking specifically at the employers in Figure 10 (p.58), it can be noted that the two most engaging employers on potential employees' cognitive dimension, HP and Google, presented more curated content (appx. on average 20 % vs. 80 %) than the rest which indicates that curated content may be more engaging to potential employees. However, these are employers and not publishers; therefore some percentage of curated content was expected. Also, since employers were able to engage potential employees on a cognitive dimension, it suggests that original content also supports engagement in general. However, no definite conclusions can be made; although the small percentages still seem to be significant.

**Figure 10: Original vs. Curated Content 2**
(Employer Averages)
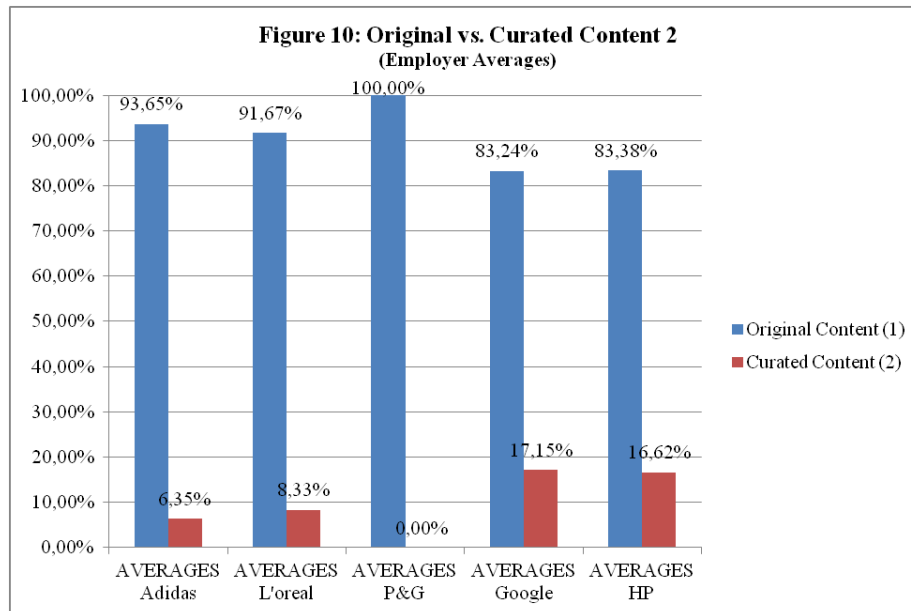
### 4.1.6. Potential Employees' Non-Engagement

It is also of importance to note that not all content was able to register engagement on potential employees' cognitive dimension. Table 17 below shows the amount and specific type of content without a response; meaning no comments, shares or likes could be registered. It shows that job postings was the type of content most potential employees did not respond to. It also shows that Twitter had the highest non-reaction percentage (49,54%) which is about half of the posts registered during the investigation. So, although job postings were the most engaging content type on Twitter according to potential employees' cognitive dimension, the risk of non-reaction is much higher than compared with the other platforms (LinkedIn's non-reaction percentage is 19,54% and Facebook's is 6,38%). However, in total 40,36% of all posts have not been reacted to in any kind of form which suggests that there is generally still much room for improvement for employers to engage on potential employees' cognitive dimension.

| Table 17: Amount/ Type of Content without Reponse | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| (no commnets, shares, or likes detected) | | | |
| **Content Type** | **Amount Facebook** | **Amount LinkedIn** | **Amount Twitter** | **Total** |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1- Infographic | 0 | 0 | 2 | **2** |
| 2- Article | 2 | 1 | 12 | **15** |
| 3- Video | 1 | 0 | 0 | **1** |
| 4- Image | 0 | 0 | 13 | **13** |
| 5- Employee Story | 0 | 0 | 3 | **3** |
| 6- Job Posting | 1 | 16 | 231 | **248** |
| 2,4- Article w/ Image | 1 | 0 | 0 | **1** |
| 5,4- Employee Story w/ Image | 0 | 0 | 9 | **9** |
| 7,4- Competition w/ Image | 1 | 0 | 0 | **1** |
| **TOTAL SUM** | **6** | **17** | **270** | **293** |
| **TOTAL AMOUNT OF POSTS** | **94** | **87** | **545** | **726** |
| **% OF POSTS NOT REACTED TO** | **6,38%** | **19,54%** | **49,54%** | **40,36%** |

### 4.2. The Emotional Dimension

The emotional dimension, part of the passion theme, is the level of brand-related inspiration and/or pride which can be expressed by the employer towards the potential employee or the potential employee towards the employer. The results of both sides will be presented and then correlated.

### 4.2.1. The Potential Employee's Emotional Dimension

The analysis of the data collection for this specific research has further strongly indicated that more than the themes indicated by the literature could be identified on the emotional dimension. The themes passion and dedication could be confirmed through the examination of the comments given by potential employees on the employer's social media platforms and further themes were identified. An overview of all themes identified, together with their description is displayed in Table 18 below.

| Table 18: Emotional Dimension | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Theme** | **Theme Title** | **Theme Description** |
| Theme 1 | Dedication and passion for the employer | All comments which have a positive character and express emotions that show excitement, enthusiasm and admiration towards the employer have been assigned to theme 1. |
| Theme 2 | Criticism / Skepticism | All comments which imply criticism towards the employer, show a general skepticism towards the content provided by the employer, or simply imply a negative attitude / tone have been assigned to Theme 2. |
| Theme 3 | Nostalgia / Retro | All statements which express nostalgic feelings and memories of old times have been assigned to Theme 3. |
| Theme 4 | Neutral | All general comments and questions with a neutral attitude have been assigned to Theme 4. |
| Theme 5 | Outliers | All comments which are not related to the content provided by the employer and are out of context have been assigned to Theme 5. |

As seen, five specific themes have been identified. The following section will therefore give a definition of each theme and support their existence with examples collected.

All comments which have a positive character and express emotions that show excitement, enthusiasm and admiration towards the company have been assigned to **Theme 1**, *dedication and passion for the employer*. This is a theme which is very strongly presented on the emotional dimension across all platforms. Theme 1 becomes especially relevant for answering the research question as it has been observed that the positive tone of comments and feeling of

closeness and respect towards the employer had the strongest influence on the engagement level on an emotional dimension. The observation was also made that content which generated one comment containing dedication and passion for the employer was often followed by similar comments of other potential employees. A variety of comments were observed: "Great career page" (Jerry), "Nice work" (Kaitlyn) to stronger expressions such as "Adidas is the best!" (Edesio), "Amazing facilities and great people" (Josh) and "Great example of engaging professional audience with humor and rich media. HP gets an A+ in content marketing." (Shadi).

A content type whose comments supported the presence of theme 1 the strongest on an emotional dimension and had a positive influence on the engagement level, were employee stories. For example, a post displaying an image with a link to the Adidas homepage showing the newest work of the digital team, the Adidas Neo Lookbook, generated comments such as: "Original!!! Adidas NEO lookbook, LOVE IT!!!" (Justin). By using capital letters and exclamation marks he emphasized his strong and positive emotions towards the employer. Another employee post in form of an image which described women who shape the future of sports and the introduction of one of the female senior managers, generated comments such as "Thanks for inspiring me" (Mihai). L'Oreal further achieved multiple comments with a video post about one of L'Oreal's employees speaking passionately about her job: "Love L'Oreal" (Sha) or "Passion & Instinct!!!" (Yoursa). An article about a Google Country Director in Sweden received comments like "Inspiring example of authentic leadership" (Vijay) or "Inspiring! As someone once said…find something you love doing and you will never work a day in your life" (Suzanne). Most employee stories seemed to evoke inspiring emotions in the potential employee, generally expressed with the word "inspiring".

Another content type that was well received and generated comments assigned to theme 1 was content displaying achievements and efforts made by the employer. A link posted to the so-called *Google Person Finder* established for the purpose of finding missing people during the Boston Bomb Attack in April 2013, Google generated the following comments: "This is the best of Google, the kind of persons behind the code, thank you" (Danilo) and "I Totally Respect Google for doing this. It's nice to know a company that can help" (John). P&G's achievement of zero manufacturing waste led to Maria commenting: "P&G Congratulations, YOU ARE THE BEST OF THE BEST!!!" using capital letters and exclamation marks for emphasis. An image illustrating young students donating their hair for charity generated

equally positive comments such as "Awesome" (Nelly), "Wow! Great gesture" (Jesse) or "Amazing" (Amrita).

All comments which imply criticism towards the employer, show a general skepticism towards the content provided by the employer, or simply imply a negative attitude / tone have been assigned to **Theme 2**, *criticism / skepticism*. This theme was present on a limited level. Establishing theme 2 has been considered as relevant for answering the research question as criticism or skepticism might influence someone's positive engagement level in a negative way. In order to distinguish between strong and weak criticism, two types have been established. Type 1 is considered to be criticism containing constructive suggestions or simply expressing opinions towards the employer but is not generally negative. An example was documented when two participants (Tomas and Jason) were criticizing the way of applying for a job and strongly suggested to develop an app which should make an application at Google easier. Jason was even commenting on this subject twice; Google however did not reply. Another post about being ranked number one among Fortune Global 200 companies based on the percentage of female board members provoked next to a lot of positive comments, also some criticism. Some of the readers were indignant by this post as in their opinion it rather pointed out the minority of women in leading positions working at P&G. A further comment which can be assigned to type 1 was made by Debashish: "I am a huge Google fan but extremely annoyed too because of the way Google is forcing its products n services on me and I am sure others too. For instance, Google+. (...)". Even though some comments contained criticism /skepticism it seemed, those comments rather supported the discussion flow and potential employees were even more motivated to share their opinions. Type 2 of the criticism and skepticism theme includes all comments which contain a clear negative attitude and antipathy against the employer. For example, Roger said on the Google platform: "You are the worse company in the world- you are cheating your customers out of millions I hope the law catches up with you" or Laust: "How come you treat people like trash and insulted as a liar (…)?". Both comments were documented separately and non-content-related. Also, no further negative comments were generated and neither were answers from the employer. A further comment assigned to theme 2 was received by Jyot: "Never purchase HP products because they are charging for nothing, I had never seen a worse company like HP". However he directly received an answer by another commentator, Deepak, who was speaking about his very positive experiences with HP products and that he was a loyal customer for years. This conversation shows that even a negative comment can generate

positive comments and can therefore augment the emotional dimension and level of engagement positively.

All statements which express nostalgic feelings and memories of old times have been assigned to **Theme 3**, *nostalgia / retro*. This is a theme which has been established solely on data collected from HP. It has been considered as a relevant theme, as posts assigned to it were able to generate a significant number of comments. For example, an article about an old HP wrist instrument, a product which was released in 1977 generated comments of excitement and pride: "WOW!! I remember those." (Steve), "I have one, in good working condition. A personal gift from Bill Hewlett, many years ago. I feel proud of having it"(Gonzalo) and "I am proud to have had one" (Al). Other potential employees opened up on a very personal level and talked about their childhoods, how they remembered receiving one of those wrist instruments from a parent. A further nostalgic post which generated similar reactions was the image/video of an old, retro calculator: "Still have mine! Love HP......." (Steve). Jefferson added "So Thank´s HP to developed it! It´s amazing". In some comments pride and commitment was reflected as well "Awesome. Had the privilege to be part of this iconic business" (Wing). To sum up it can be said, that all nostalgic/retro posts by HP have evoked positive memories and generated some honest, friendly and cheerful conversations. A strategy that was only found on the HP platform and one that seemed to be worth following when looking at the amount and quality of comments and the high level of engagement created on an emotional dimension.

All general comments and questions with a neutral attitude have been assigned to **Theme 4**, *neutral*. Even though neutral comments do not deliver strong influence on the engagement level, they are considered still to be relevant as any form of reply to the content provided by the employers can be regarded as a sign of engagement. Especially on Twitter, which contained mainly job offers, neutral comments were generated. A relatively high number of statements made were regarding questions or comments concerning the application process or other job offers. These comments were kept in a neutral tone, for example: "What about Russian?" (Assiya) which Google's responded to as "Yes, here's one: *Link*". When Ira asked "What is the split of English, French and German language in the office in Zurich?", Google answered: "IT's hard to say, but everyone in the office speaks English, and many Googlers there are bilingual." Therefore, there is some indication that answering questions or replying to comments facilitates the potential employee's engagement level on an emotional level.
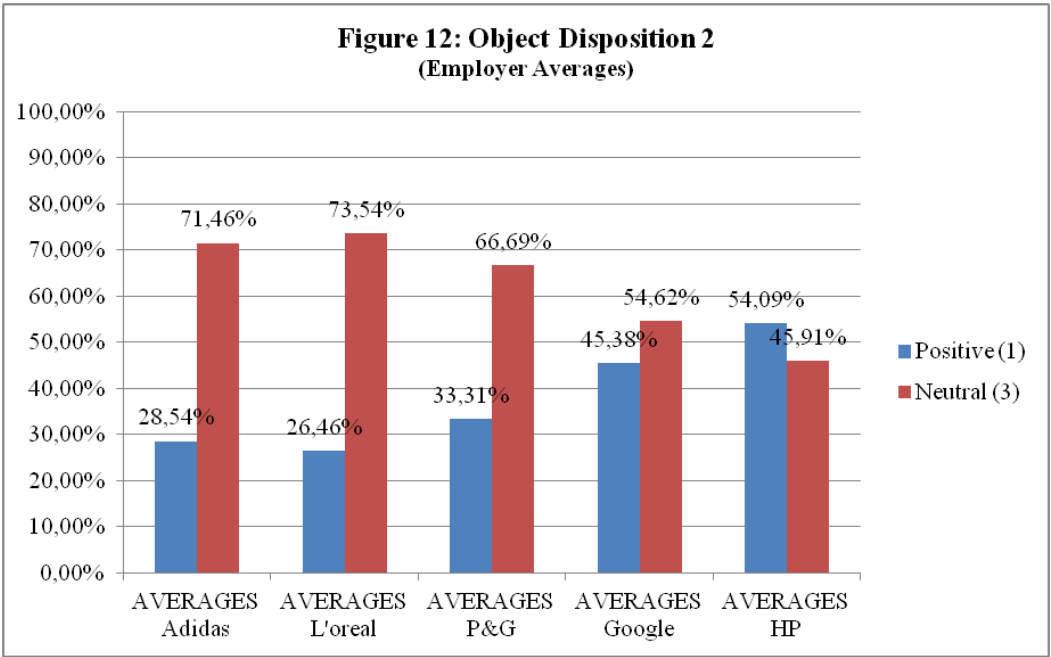
All comments which are not related to the content provided by the employer and are out of context have been assigned to **Theme 5**, *outliers*. This theme has been established and considered to be relevant as outliers might influence conversations and therefore the engagement level. A comment which is not related to the original post might disrupt or interrupt a conversation flow. For example, Ifran asked three times on Google's LinkedIn Platform for help regarding a personal technical problem with no relation to the original post and Alread asked for help reactivating his account. Even though both did not directly disrupt a conversation it might influence the viewer of the page in his attitude towards the employer as both never received a reply which might give impression the employer ignores people seeking for help.

All in all, the emotional dimension seems to be the most visible of all comments documented during the time frame of one month, more specifically theme 1. It has been furthermore observed that for specifically theme 1, certain content such as employee stories and companies' achievements contributed to higher engagement on an emotional dimension. This implies that potential employees' emotional dimension is affected by the employers' cognitive dimension. However, it also has to be noted that although the emotional dimension was visible on all platforms, it was not visible on P&G's Twitter platform as no comments were registered at all.

### 4.2.2. The Employer's Emotional Dimension

On the employers' side brand-related inspiration and/or pride has been investigated by looking more closely at the tone used in order to present content to potential employees. It has been analyzed whether content was presented in a positive (cheerful, happy), neutral/formal (emotionless, informative) or negative (sad, angry) tone. Figure 11 (p.64) shows that most employers chose to present their content in a neutral/formal tone (on average 62.44%) and none chose to present it in a negative way which is why negative is not represented in the figure or therefore on the employers' emotional dimension. On average only 37,56 % of content was presented in a positive tone which does show that an emotional dimension has been identified among employers. It also shows that when employers used positive language, they did so mostly on Facebook (second LinkedIn and third Twitter). However, the percentages do not indicate that a positive tone (or showing its emotional dimension) contributes positively to engagement as Facebook was deemed the least engaging and presented the strongest regarding employers' emotional dimension. However, Figure 12 (p.64) shows that there is some evidence on employer level that the more positive content was

presented by the employer, the higher the engagement. For example, HP was the most positive and also the most engaging. Interestingly, the list follows identically with positivity associated positively to engagement rankings except for the last two (Adidas and L'Oreal are reversed). However, results have also shown that Facebook was the least engaging platform leading towards a mixed result: there is no definite evidence that the way content was introduced by employers had a positive effect on engagement. Also, as the emotional dimension was identified as the strongest among all dimensions on the potential employees' side, it suggests in general that the presence of employers' emotional dimension does not influence the presence (or possibly strength) of potential employees' emotional dimension.

**Figure 11: Object Disposition**
(Platform Averages/ Overall Average)

LinkedIn: Positive(1) 34,44%, Neutral(3) 65,56%
Twitter: Positive(1) 24,76%, Neutral(3) 75,24%
Facebook: Positive(1) 53,47%, Neutral(3) 46,53%
Overall Average: Positive(1) 37,56%, Neutral(3) 62,44%

**Figure 12: Object Disposition 2**
(Employer Averages)

Adidas: Positive(1) 28,54%, Neutral(3) 71,46%
L'oreal: Positive(1) 26,46%, Neutral(3) 73,54%
P&G: Positive(1) 33,31%, Neutral(3) 66,69%
Google: Positive(1) 45,38%, Neutral(3) 54,62%
HP: Positive(1) 54,09%, Neutral(3) 45,91%

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## 4.3. The Behavioral Dimension

The behavioral dimension, part of the activation theme, is expressed through a potential employee's level of energy spent in interacting with a focal employer or an employer's level of energy spent in interacting with a potential employee. The results thereof will be presented and then correlated.

### 4.3.1. The Potential Employee's Behavioral Dimension

Also for the potential employees' behavioral dimension specific themes indicating certain behaviors could be identified and formulated based on comments made. Therefore, all themes describe a potential employee's intention to do something or to behave in a certain way which contributes to an increased level of engagement on the potential employee side. It is also important as it can transfer engagement outside social media extending beyond social media borders. The five themes which have been established on a behavioral dimension are summarized and described in Table 19 below.

| Table 19: Behavioural Dimension | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Theme** | **Theme Title** | **Theme Description** |
| Theme 1 | Excitement for the employer resulting in action | All comments which had a positive character and expressed any excitement towards the employer that resulted as a consequence in a certain behavior are assigned to Theme 1. |
| Theme 2 | Intention to work for the employer resulting in action | All statements that expressed a potential employees' wish or intention to work for the employer are assigned to Theme 2. |
| Theme 3 | Word of mouth (WOM) | All comments which implied that the potential employee will or has spread the word about the employer are assigned to Theme 3. |
| Theme 4 | Criticism / Skepticism and its behavioral consequences | All comments which implied criticism or skepticism towards the employer, or simply implied a negative attitude / tone and containing a hint that the potential employee has the intention to behave consequently in a certain way are assigned to Theme 4. |
| Theme 5 | The Past in the Present | All statements which describe a certain behavior in the past, a wish to change past behavior or the intention to do something in the future based on memories in the past are assigned to Theme 5. |

All themes presented contribute to the potential employees' engagement level on a behavioral dimension. In order to provide evidence for this assumption and the actual existence of the themes, the section below will illustrate a compilation of examples collected from all platforms and employers examined. It also has to be noted that no comments were registered

on P&G's Twitter platform during the time frame; leading to the absence of the behavioral dimension.

All comments which implied excitement for the employer and resulting action thereof are assigned to **Theme 1,** *excitement for the employer resulting in action*. This theme can be somewhat related to theme 1 on an emotional dimension, but specifically looks at the resulting behavior. The theme is reflected when Justin, for example, was writing to a promotion of the Adidas London Marathon: "HALL OF FAME sounds exciting ladies!!!!" He further described his intention to check out the marathon as a consequence. Sheena was so excited about L'Oreal's post showing images about the manufacturing of perfume bottles that she wished to see more insights about the production. Her request was answered, but denied due to trade secret issues. Especially HP's LinkedIn Platform was able to generate excitement and resulting actions on a behavioral dimension. Jason further showed his interest and appreciation towards HP by indicating with "can't wait to get one" that he will buy one of HP's newly launched products.

All statements that expressed a potential employee's wish or intention to work for the employer and resulting behavior are assigned to **Theme 2,** *intention to work for the employer resulting in action.* This theme is considered to have the greatest representation across the platforms on the behavioral dimension and is thus assumed to have the strongest influence on the behavioral and overall engagement level. This is further due to the assumption that potential employees who expressed their intention publicly to work for an employer signaled a certain conviction and affected other people. Justin, for example, commented on an employee story about how to build an IT career at Adidas: "Looking forward to work on my career path" and Samual wrote "I would love to work here", after watching a video about Google workplace culture and people. Paul more specifically wanted to apply for the Adidas Future Talents program and asked directly for an email address. Vijaya had an actual conversation with HP after expressing her determination to work for HP and said: "I want to continue my career in great HP!!". Mark asked on Google's LinkedIn platform: "Cool, need consultants @ NYC area?" (Mark) or Monika saying "I need a job, please contact (number)." These statements showed that individuals were very enthusiastic, interested and right away prepared to apply. Others simply stated that they have just applied for a job vacancy. People were also enthusiastic about asking for country specific information or summer internships. All in all, the employers were able to generate an atmosphere where potential employees liked to ask more questions regarding specific job positions, employee stories and other content

signaling that job postings were very engaging specifically on potential employees' behavioral dimension.

All comments which implied that the potential employee will or has spread the word about the employer are assigned to **Theme 3,** *word-of-mouth (WOM).* This theme has been regarded as important to establish on the behavioral dimension as it directly engages other potential employees. By tagging names into comments, re-tweeting news and information to other people or by simply sharing content provided by the employers, a direct involvement of others can be achieved which thus may raise the level of engagement. The intention to spread the word about the employer or its content outside of the actual platform was presented by comments such as "I have spread the word about this Link" (John for Google) or by Diogo on L'Oreal's platform who was specifically writing to a friend , tagging him and sharing the content with him. A further sign for word of mouth was also found when George commented: "Thanks for this very informative white paper. I will circulate it with your permission". He thus expressed his intention to share the content provided by HP with other potential employees. On Google's LinkedIn platform several job postings received enthusiastic comments by potential employees who recommended others for the job opening by including their names in the post. Numerous examples were further documented of re-tweets and name tagging.

All comments which implied criticism or skepticism towards the employer, or simply implied a negative attitude / tone and containing a hint that the potential employee has the intention to behave consequently in a certain way are assigned to **Theme 4,** *criticism / skepticism and its behavioral consequences.* Even though theme 4 was only documented minimally on a behavioral dimension, it has been considered as important as it can still have a certain influence on the overall engagement level. Further, the data collection is a snapshot of events during a time frame of one month which is why it cannot be generalized that there are never comments on a behavioral dimension which contained criticism or skepticism. Nevertheless one comment made by Jyoti, an unsatisfied customer of HP, can be presented who warned other people not to purchase HP products and indicated that he himself will boycott HP products in the future. However, this negative comment was not able to disrupt the conversation; nor did he receive an answer from HP.

All statements which describe a certain behavior in the past, a wish to change past behavior or the intention to do something in the future based on memories in the past are assigned to **Theme 5,** *the past in the present.* Similar to theme 3 (nostalgia / retro) on the emotional
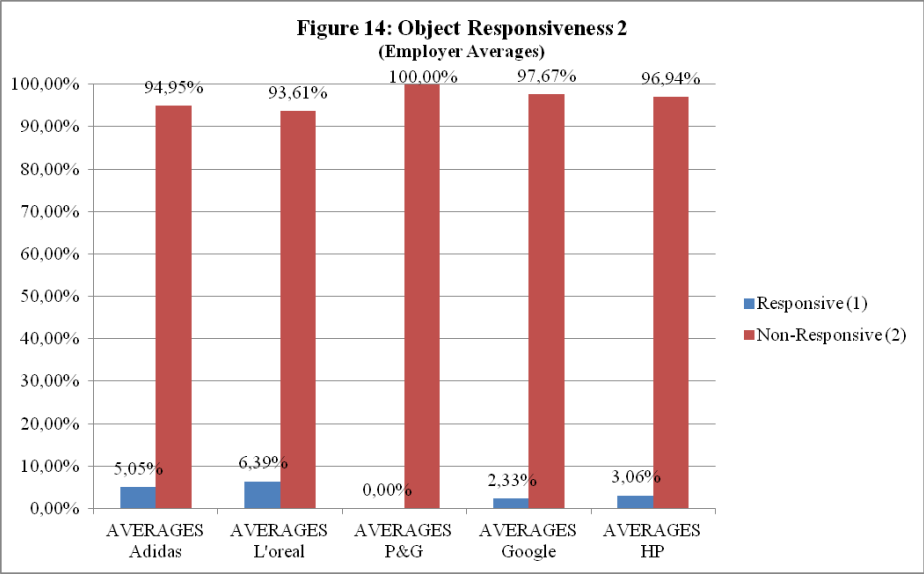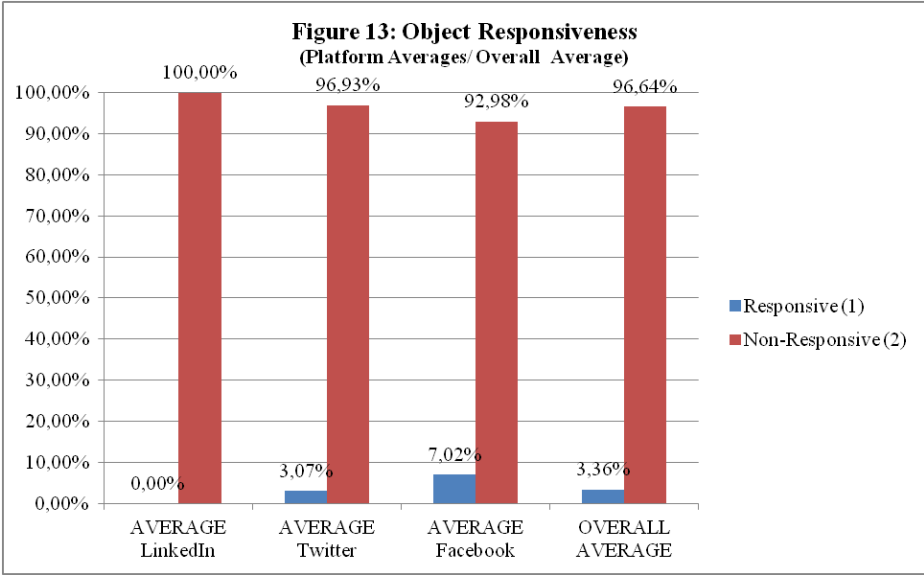
dimension, theme 5 has been established solely on the data retrieved from HP's platforms. But again, posts regarding theme 5 were with such strong influence on the behavioral dimension and thus on the engagement of potential employees, that it seemed necessary to dedicate a theme to it. For example, a post about a wrist instrument that reminded many potential employees of old times let them comment the following: "I wish I could have bought one back then...." (Bill) and Sammy "I wish to see one with my naked eyes" (Sammy) and "I want one!" (Marc). All potential employees expressed their admiration for that retro product and their wish to have bought one in the past, thus wishing to reverse past behavior, or to acquire one in the future. This is further evidenced as potential employees looked up current prices and shared them in the conversation. A post about a retro desktop computer also sparked a lot of memories and descriptions of past behavior, for example "I remember using that at an engineering office to run some calcs...." (Bill), "I used to fix these things! Wow..." (Francis), or "I used one of these when I first joined HP in 1976" (John). An article posted by HP reminded potential employees of old memories and they shared specific behaviors associated with the product, engaging others with their enthusiasm about the nostalgic posts.

All in all, the behavioral dimension is also strongly represented, more specifically theme 2. It has been furthermore observed that for specifically theme 2, certain content such as job postings contributed to higher engagement on a behavioral dimension. This implies that the potential employees' behavioral dimension is affected by the employer's cognitive dimension.

### 4.3.2. Employers' Behavioral Dimension

On the employers' side the behavioral dimension has been investigated by looking at employers' responsiveness level: if they tended to engage further with potential employees after the content has been posted, if questions were answered or if the content was generally supported further. Figure 13 (p.69) shows that employers on average did not responded or engaged past posting content (96,64%). However, if responding, employers on average responded most on Facebook (7,02%), second on Twitter (3,07 %) and least on LinkedIn (0%) which proves that the behavioral dimension exists on employer level, although minimally. This suggests, as Facebook was the least engaging platform, Twitter second and LinkedIn third that responsiveness was not necessarily positively related to engagement. This is also supported by Figure 14 (p.69) which shows that the least engaging employers, Adidas and L'Oreal, were in fact the most responsive (5,05% and 6,39% respectively). Although not indicated by statistics, most employers only responded or further engaged when asked a specific question by potential employees inclining that employers were mostly reactive

instead of proactive. As the behavioral dimension was identified as rather strong on the potential employees' side, it also suggests that employers' behavioral dimension does not influence the expression (or possibly strength) of potential employees' behavioral dimension or engagement.



Figure 13: Object Responsiveness (Platform Averages/Overall Average)



Figure 14: Object Responsiveness 2 (Employer Averages)
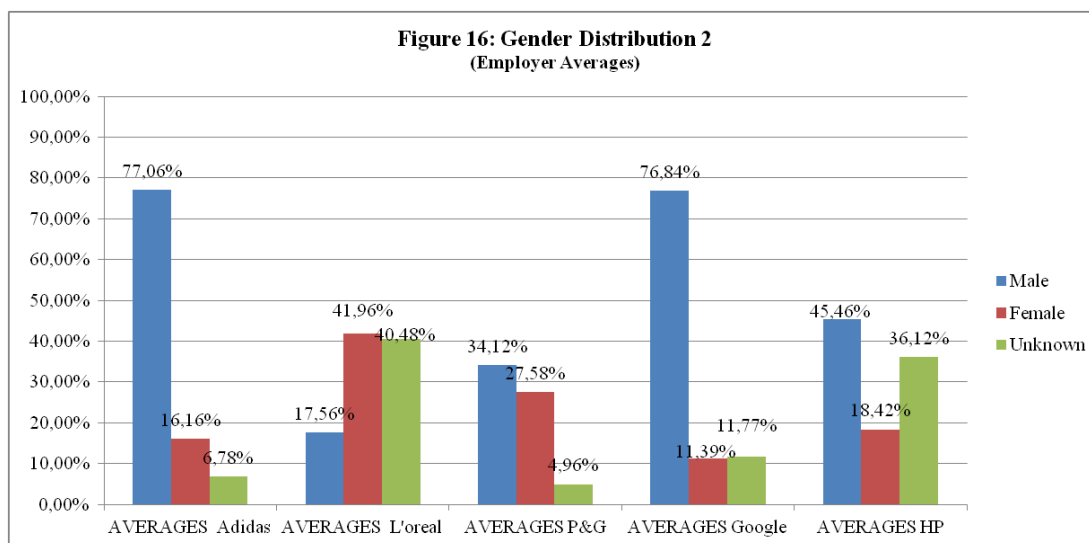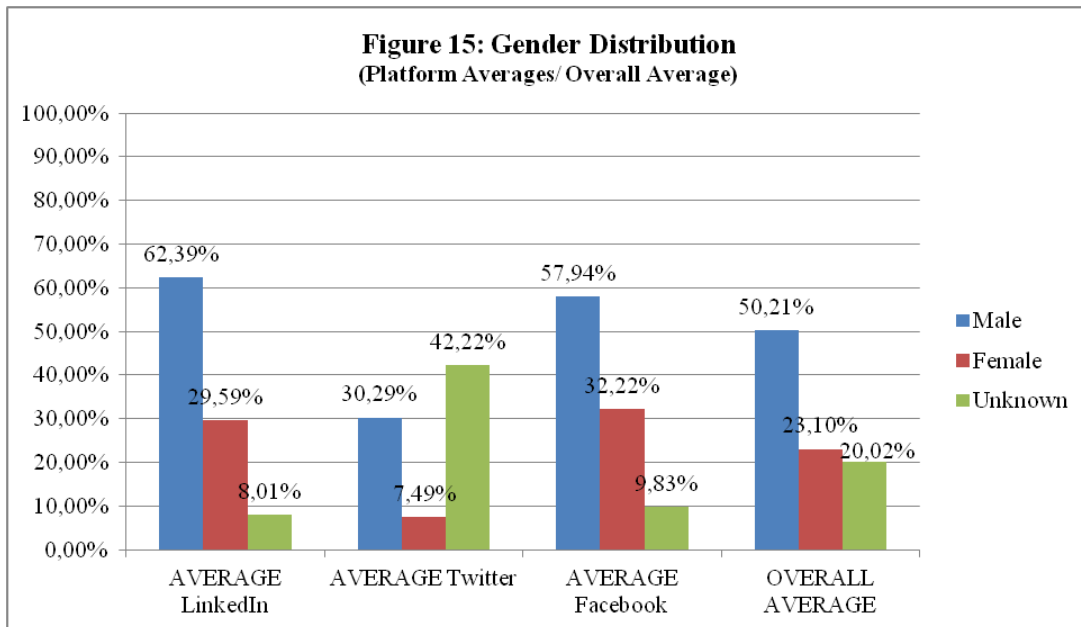
## 4.4. Additional Findings

Moreover, additional research results are presented which do not fit into the dimensions presented before.

### 4.4.1. General Potential Employee Profile

As established in the methodology, it was assumed to be interesting to further investigate the potential employees engaging with the employers as individuals on social media share

personal information about them through establishing profiles. It has to be noted that only the potential employees that *commented* were further investigated. Potential employees that shared content or liked content are excluded. As explained, it is the researchers' belief that comments are the highest form of engagement and therefore need to be investigated more thoroughly here.

In terms of gender distribution (Figure 15, p.71), the overall impression was a male dominance (50,21%) for the time period. However, in the unlikely event that all unknown potential employees end up being female, the distribution would be on average approximately 50%/50%. In terms of platforms, LinkedIn and Facebook also seemed to be male dominated (57,94 % and 62,39 % respectively) and this would also remain if the unknown amount would turn out to be female. The percentage of females on Facebook was 32,22% and on LinkedIn 29,59%. Nothing definite can be said about Twitter as there were too many unknowns (42,22%) to make an observation. This could indicate that individuals on Twitter like to remain largely unknown. On employer level (Figure 16, p. 71), Adidas seemed to be male dominated (77,06 % male) as was Google (76,84% male). The unknown variable cannot distort the picture here. Although HP also seemed overall male dominated (45,46 % male), the unknown variable was so great that no definite observation can be made. The same applies to L'Oreal with an overall female domination (41,96%), but a rather large unknown variable. P&G's numbers did not quite add up as for Twitter unfortunately no comments were registered and therefore, no data is available. However, the data from Facebook and LinkedIn suggest a rather even picture (34,12% male vs. 27,58 % female) where the unknown variable was small. The more or less male domination in Adidas, Google and HP may be as sports and technology are traditionally considered males areas of interest. L'Oreal's female domination may be as cosmetics and beauty is traditionally considered a female area of interest. As P&G appeals to many different people with their brands, an even picture makes sense. This suggests that the potential employees (in terms of gender) who engaged with the employers on their social media platforms were simultaneously also the brands' primary target market.

**Figure 15: Gender Distribution**
(Platform Averages/ Overall Average)



**Figure 16: Gender Distribution 2**
(Employer Averages)



In terms of geographic distribution, unfortunately no definite conclusion can be made as there were too many unknowns to make any observations; see figures 17 and 18 (appendices 10 & 11, pp.103 and 104).

### 4.4.2. The Functional Dimension

As has been demonstrated during the literature review and more specifically by Kietzman et al. (2011), different platforms support different functionalities and enable potential employees to do different things on platforms (see Figure 4, p.30). For example some platforms only allow a certain amount of characters or do not display media directly. Here, LinkedIn is mainly concerned with identity and secondly with relationships and reputation (see Figure 6, p.33); Twitter is mainly concerned with conversation and secondly with sharing, identity and

reputation (see Figure 7, p.33); and Facebook is mainly concerned with relationships and secondly with identity, reputation, conversation and presence (see Figure 5, p.33). In order to get a better overview of the platforms' different functionalities, a table was established for easier comparison (see Table 20 below). As LinkedIn was observed to be the most engaging platform overall on potential employees' cognitive dimension, it suggests that a functionality combination of identity, relationships and reputation may work best for engaging potential employees where identity is seen as the main contributing factor. As established, the identity block represents the extent to which users reveal their identities in a social media setting. This might contribute to engagement in the way that it facilitates the identification with an employer. The same can be said about the reputation building block representing the extent to which users can identify the standing of others, in this case the standing of other potential employees and employers. The relationships block represents the extent to which users can be related to other users which also facilitates the identification of other potential employees and employers. LinkedIn, Twitter and Facebook all share the functionalities of identity (illustrated in Table 20 with yellow) and reputation (illustrated in Table 20 with green) which strengthens their importance. Additionally, Facebook shares LinkedIn's third functionality as well, relationships (illustrated in Table 20 in italics) which would indicate that Facebook should have presented as second most engaging platform over Twitter. However, this is not the case which could be caused by the fact that Twitter's functionalities are more focused than Facebook's. This is also supported as LinkedIn only serves three functionalities, Twitter four and Facebook five which could lead to confusion among potential employees as too many functionalities are presented. This may indicate that the more focused the functionalities, the higher the engagement between potential employees and employers. Moreover Twitter, the second most engaging platform shares the building block conversation with Facebook, the extent to which users communicate with each other (illustrated in Table 20 in italics). This means that in terms of engagement on social media, certain functionalities are more supportive of engagement than others and that underlying the three engagement dimensions presented in this chapter (cognitive, emotional and behavioral) is a functional dimension.

| Table 20: Overview Functionalities per Platform (Ranking) | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | **Platforms** | | |
| | LinkedIn (1) | Twitter (2) | Facebook (3) |
| **Primary Functionality** | Identity | *Conversation* | *Relationships* |
| **Secondary Functionalities** | Reputation | Identity | Identity |
| | *Relationships* | Reputation | Reputation |
| | | Sharing | *Conversation* |
| | | | Presence |

## 5. Discussion of Research Results

From the analysis, several relevant observations were made which will now be discussed in the light of the theory concerning employer branding, social media and engagement. It will be looked at how the specific results support, contradict or add to the theory in order to arrive at conclusions and to further develop the *adapted model employer brand engagement Web 2.0* (Figure 8, p.36). First, results gathered on the potential employees' side will be discussed regarding all dimensions followed by results on the employers' side regarding all dimensions. Then, additional findings will be discussed whereas the last section will summarize the main findings in relation to theory.

First it can be said that all dimensions (cognitive, emotional and behavioral) were identified on the potential employees' side confirming theory regarding their existence (Brodie et al., 2011; Hollebeek, 2011a; Hollebeek 2011b). This indicates that social media is an effective channel to use for employer branding as activities successfully engaged potential employees on all three dimensions.

On the **potential employees' cognitive dimension**, dealing with how engrossed potential employees are with the employer brand, the results showed that the social media platform LinkedIn produced the most engagement with Twitter following in second place and Facebook in third place. This indicates that potential employees want to engage more on one platform over others. These results support theory; that depending on the social media platform, varying engagement intensity levels exist under particular contextual conditions (Sashi, 2012; Hollebeek, 2011a; Brodie et al, 2011). Also, as potential employees did engage with the content on a cognitive dimension through comments, shares or likes, the first step in the brand engagement model (Figure 2, p.25) can be supported as the existence of engagement implies involvement (Hollebeek, 2011a; Hanna et al, 2011; Briggs, 2010; Robertson, 2013; Ivey, 2013; Sashi, 2012). In other words, it can be concluded that potential employees got involved and saw personal relevance in the employers, so the potential employees chose to engage.

Moreover, it was observed that in terms of the strongest and weakest types of engagement (comments and likes), LinkedIn registered the most; furthermore confirming LinkedIn's dominant position on potential employees' cognitive dimension. As mentioned before, comments are considered the strongest form of engagement as *dialogue* is key to engagement (Brodie et al., 2011; Yan, 2011). Moreover, the dialogue needs to be relevant and meaningful

(Hollebeek, 2011a; Hermes, 2010) and only comments by potential employees can show a deeper meaning as shares or likes only require a mouse click and no further actions.

The results suggest that the cognitive dimension is rather strongly present on the potential employees' side, however this is relativized as little evidence was found to support prolonged engagement within interactions. Evidence has been presented that potential employees generally only interacted once leading to the conclusion that potential employees' cognitive dimension is not as strongly represented as assumed. The results also showed a non-reaction percentage (content that has not been interacted with) of approximately 40% during the investigated time period. This content was mostly associated with job postings. However, since content also did not receive any form of engagement, it supports theory that not all dimensions might be observable at all times (Hollebeek, 2011b). It also supports the theory that creating engagement is an ongoing process which is never stable, but can fluctuate a lot (Sashi, 2012; Hollebeek, 2011a; Brodie et al, 2011).

The results regarding the **potential employees' emotional dimension** support the theoretical definition of the theme passion and dedication, provided by the literature (Brodie et al., 2011; Hollebeek, 2011a) and called theme 1 *dedication and passion for the employer* in this study. This theme could be confirmed through the systematic examination of the comments given by potential employees on the employers' social media platforms. Due to numerous comments identified and assigned to theme 1, it is regarded as the strongest theme on the emotional dimension even though further meaningful themes could be identified. Significant examples of comments have been documented which strongly suggest the existence of four other themes on the emotional dimension. Thus the comments could be assigned to themes like *criticism/skepticism, nostalgia/retro, neutral* and *outliers*. Among the other four themes identified, *nostalgia/retro*, was also strongly represented. All in all, the emotional dimension was presented as the most frequent on the potential employees' side.

An observation which was made during data analysis is that different types of content affect potential employees' emotional dimension differently. More specifically, employee stories, content that mirrored the employer to be a good working place, or nostalgic content (such as an old iconic product establishing the company's long existence) seemed to have a positive influence on comments as potential employees were engaged on a personal level which facilitated identification with the employer (Hollebeek, 2011a; Sashi, 2012). These results support the theory in the way that in order to be engaging, employer brands need to contribute relevant *stories* (Briggs, 2010; Robertson, 2013; Ivey, 2013). Theory also mentions that

employees' *storytelling* is important in order to be a successful employer brand (Nillsson & Nordgren, 2012; Sullivan, 2004) which was confirmed as the results showed that employee stories contributed a lot to the expression of the emotional dimension of engagement. However, by presenting employees' stories, it confirms the overall employer branding process adapted from Robertson and Khatibi (2012) and represented in Figure 1 (p.19). By using employees' stories, employer brands simultaneously communicate their organizations' subcultures, simultaneously mirroring its organizational identities; a crucial factor for success (Sullivan, 2004). Moreover, it establishes their credibility as an employer and consequently raises trustworthiness (Rynes, Bretz & Gerhart, 1991; Martin, Gollan & Grigg, 2011) as reflected in the results as individuals entrusted the employers with their personal information or expressed their admiration without challenging the employers or the content they contributed. Employees' stories not only mirror the organizational identity, but also communicate a specific brand promise (psychological contract) and values which are inspired by the corporate brand (Barrow & Mosley, 2005; Fraser, 2009; Minchington, 2010; Balmer, 1998; Barwise & Meehan, 2010). Therefore, both identities, organizational and corporate identity, are presented equally in employees' stories which support theory stating that organizational and corporate identity must be aligned (Robertson & Khatiki, 2012). This alignment in turn creates a unique and distinct employer value proposition (EVP) which is marketed externally through social media and with which potential employees are able to identify (Sullivan, 2004; Moroko & Uncles, 2008; Robertson & Khatiki, 2012). As mentioned before, the easier the identification with the employer brand, the higher the engagement intensity among potential employees will be if recognized that expectations will be met (Rousseau & Greller, 1994).

Content which has been identified to have a strong influence on comments on the emotional dimension is also content regarding employers' achievements. By displaying the positive performance and efforts of the employer, the latter was able to present its company in an attractive light and more importantly symbolized *authenticity* and credibility. Both, authenticity and credibility have been established as one of the key elements in order to sustain a successful and engaging employer brand (Graeme et al., 2011; Briggs, 2010; Tripathi, 2009). Potential employees seemed to feel a stronger wish to belong to the employer and expressed further strong feelings of excitement when watching or reading about the content that reported about the employers' successes and achievements. Content which displayed the actual achievements of the employer further communicate the brand promise which at the same time contributes to a feeling of authenticity and relevance (Briggs, 2010).

As discussed in the literature review, a particular mode of engagement or *habitus* is acquired through lasting exposure to particular social conditions and conditionings within a social media platform, a way of thinking that makes sense of the particular field (Song, 2010). These modes of engagement or habitus are then influencing other individuals to manage identity, intimacy of interactions, and expression or handling of opinions in a similar manner. This can be supported as group discussions compiled of different individuals displayed similar comments. Interactions associated to theme 3, *nostalgia*, (on an emotional dimension) often illustrated one individual starting to speak about old memories using a lot of details and personal experiences and other individuals following in a similar manner. Also job postings and other posts meant to be amusing were generally commented in a similar way. The results, therefore, suggest that there is a tendency to adapt in expressing opinions and identities to other individuals which expressed at the same time the presence of an individual and group habitus.

The results regarding the **potential employees' behavioral dimension** as part of the activation theme which expresses an individual's level of energy spent in interacting with a brand, in this case the company has also been detected as rather strong during the research (Hollebeek, 2011a; Hollebeek, 2011b). Here, also several themes could be identified in regards to employer branding activities on social media platforms which add to the theory regarding the behavioral dimension. Therefore the existence of the following five themes is strongly supported: *excitement for the employer resulting in action, the intention to work for the employer resulting in action, criticism / skepticism and its behavioral consequences* (such as warning other people about the company)*, word of mouth (WOM)* and *the past in the present* (such as wishing to reverse past behavior or to take action based on nostalgic content).

The theme that is suggested to be present as the strongest on potential employees' behavioral dimension is connected to the *intention to work for the employer resulting in action*, theme 2. Here, the observation has been made that content plays a major role in generating comments which were assigned to theme 2. Numerous potential employees expressed their intention to work for the employer when content was provided that contained job advertisements, employee stories, and employers' achievements or in general content that described the employer as particularly good working place. That job advertisements produced comments on a behavioral dimension in connection with the intention to work for the employer can be regarded as a natural reaction. However comments made by content based on employee stories and employers' achievements can be led back by the same reasoning as described in

the discussion regarding the emotional dimension as employee stories and storytelling in general are important factors in order to be a successful employer brand and to achieve a high engagement level (Nillsson & Nordgren, 2012; Sullivan, 2004). As a result storytelling supports the communication of the employer value proposition which then facilitates the identification of the potential employee whether her or she really wants to work for the employer or not (Sullivan, 2004; Moroko & Uncles, 2008; Robertson & Khatiki, 2012).

A further interesting observation has been made based on the comments collected, is that engagement can be transferred and outside of the employers' particular social media platforms. The strongest evidence for this assumption is provided by theme 4, word of mouth (WOM). Potential employees forwarded job information to other individuals, tagged others in their comments and even stated that they would spread the word about the employer outside of the social media world. This behavior clearly supports the definition of e-word-of-mouth (eWOM) which is defined as "any positive or negative statement made by potential, actual, or former customers about a product or company, which is made available to a multitude of people and institutions (via the Internet)" (Chu & Kim, 2011, p.48); in this case statements by potential employees about the employer. This therefore suggests that engagement is linked to the phenomenon of eWOM as has been suggested due to research results.

A particular mode of engagement or *habitus* on an individual and group level can also be identified on the behavioral dimension. Therefore, language style concerning job offers were often kept on a formal level by all potential employees whereas content which generated positive, excited comments were often followed by comments in a similar tone. It was further observed that when one potential employee expressed his or her intention to work or belong to an employer, similar comments followed.

Following, the employer side will be discussed. Also, here it can be said that all dimensions were identified.

A lot of activity and results have been associated with the **employers' cognitive dimension**, dealing with how engrossed employers are with potential employees. The analysis showed a strong focus by employers on the cognitive dimension. The results concerning content output further suggest that employer brands may have concentrated on the wrong social media platforms in order to engage potential employees as the format or type of content posted was not always suitable for the specific platform. As has been established, LinkedIn is mostly suitable for visual/textual content, Twitter for textual content and Facebook for mainly visual

content. This has not always been followed through by companies. This also suggests that quantity contributed positively to engagement only if one, quantity of content is seen relative to quality of content and if two, the content was placed on the social media platform where potential employees want to engage. These results clearly showed that the potential employees' cognitive dimension is only strong when targeted appropriately by the employer. It was also concluded that different content was presented on different platforms in order to reach engagement. This again supports the theory that in order to reach a high level on potential employees' cognitive dimension, a mix of content quantity and quality content on the right platform is favorable. As stated, appealing content is important in order for engagement subjects to see personal relevance and get involved in order to engage (Hollebeek, 2011a; Sashi, 2012).

Furthermore, there is some indication that the more followers an employer brand has, the more it contributed positively towards engagement which may serve as a tool for employers to better focus their efforts. The amount of followers could be the result of being known as a best-practice employer brand which is one of the success factors for employer branding (Sullivan, 2004; Moroko and Uncles, 2008) simultaneously showing that the employer is authentic regarding its practices and assures a favorable management (Sullivan, 2004) furthermore supporting engagement. It has also been observed that mostly original content was presented in favor of curated content. However, results show that curated content may be more engaging, but since original content also received engagement on potential employees' cognitive dimension; it has also been deemed effective. This supports theory as it has been determined that in order to be successful in employer branding and branding on social media, authenticity is key (Martin, Gollan & Grigg, 2011; Graeme et al., 2011; Briggs, 2010). By presenting original content, employers are also able to differentiate themselves. It makes the employer brand noticeable, resonant and increases the opportunity to create a desirable image (Tüzüner & Yüksel, 2009).

Regarding the **employers' emotional dimension**, expressed by the employers' inspiration and/or pride towards the potential employee, it can be concluded that it was only minimally visible. This has been determined as the tone of voice used by employers was mostly a neutral tone and rarely positive. However, it is unclear if being active on an emotional dimension contributes to engagement overall. If true, this would support theory that suggests that employers on social media should demonstrate a personality rather than a lifeless object (Yan, 2011). However, as the results show, the potential employees' emotional dimension was

generally the most frequent of all of the three dimensions observed. Although employers' emotional dimension did not influence potential employees' emotional dimension as the relative non-existence of one did not impede the frequent existence of the other, it is not known how much higher engagement could have been if employers would have increased focus on their emotional dimension.

The **employers' behavioral dimension**, an employer's level of energy spent in interacting with a potential employee has been minimally visible as well as it has been observed that employers were generally non-responsive beyond the action of contributing content. However, little evidence was presented that employers' responsiveness added positively towards engagement on potential employees' behavioral dimension as it was also strongly present there. This does not necessarily contradict or support theory. It does show that employers do participate in co-creative interactions by at least contributing the content and starting the interaction. The potential employees then interpret the content in order to make sense of it, potentially leading to a new creation. Thus, it does support theory in the way that co-creative interactions and relationships between value-generating stakeholders had been formed which is a fundamental basis for engagement (Hollebeek, 2011b; Javornik & Mandelli, 2012; Vargo & Lusch, 2004; Fournier, 1998). The potential employees essentially become co-developers (Christodoulides, 2011; Deighton & Kornfeld, 2009; Hanna et al., 2011 Harrison & Barthel, 2009; Kietzmann et al., 2011; Vargo & Lusch, 2004; Fournier & Avery, 2011).

Additionally, the analysis also confirms that underlying the three dimensions discussed above (cognitive, emotional and behavioral), a fourth, **functional dimension** exists, when looking at engagement within a social media context. This fourth functional dimension refers to the different social media platform functionalities which have already been addressed in the theory; therefore supporting it (McKee, 2010; Kietzmann et al., 2011). The analysis furthermore showed that certain functionalities are more supportive of engagement; hence a functional dimension was introduced. For this study (only including LinkedIn, Facebook and Twitter), there is an indication that primarily the functionalities identity, reputation and relationships are most supportive of engagement. By establishing a functional dimension, the research adds to theory, as so far only three dimensions (cognitive, emotional and behavioral) have been identified. The existence of only these dimensions in a different context may be true, but on social media a fourth, functional dimension, needs to be considered that basically enables interaction, the other dimensions and essentially engagement.

**All in all** the investigation supports theory as all three dimensions were identified (cognitive, emotional and behavioral) on both the employers' and potential employees' side; although they were not all observable during each interaction or only minimally (Hollebeek, 2011b). This means that varying engagement intensities exist under particular contextual conditions also indicating that engagement is an ongoing process (Sashi, 2012; Hollebeek, 2011a; Brodie et al, 2011). Involvement as a precondition for engagement can furthermore be supported (Hollebeek, 2011a; Hanna et al, 2011; Briggs, 2010; Robertson, 2013; Ivey, 2013; Sashi, 2012) as the existence of the dimensions implies that potential employees were involved and saw personal relevance; therefore chose to engage. However, it has also been shown that the employers focus mainly on the cognitive dimension and less so on the emotional and behavioral dimensions whereas the potential employees focus mainly on the emotional dimension and somewhat less so on the cognitive and behavioral dimension. This shows varying dominance and importance of dimensions on either side. This adds to theory as these different weightings regarding engagement dimensionality have not been addressed. Also, employers sometimes contributed content inappropriately for potential employees (although the quality was good) to engage with as social media functionalities were not always taken into consideration (the right content was not communicated in the right format and was consequently unsuitable for the platform). The results also add to theory that variations of the emotional and behavioral dimensions exist in form of additional themes. Therefore the emotional dimension cannot be strictly regarded as passion and dedication and the behavioral dimension as activation (Hollebeek, 2011a; Hollebeek, 2011b). It has also been confirmed that relevant employee stories, companies' achievements and nostalgic content are important in order to reach potential employees on an emotional as well as on a behavioral dimension (Briggs, 2010; Robertson, 2013; Ivey, 2013; Nillsson & Nordgren, 2012; Sullivan, 2004) in order to create authenticity (Martin, Gollan & Grigg, 2011; Graeme et al., 2011; Briggs, 2010). Additionally, potential employees were most engaged by job postings on a behavioral dimensions as they motivated them the most to become active. It was also identified that potential employees do engage in word-of-mouth as they shared the content. A particular individual and group habitus was identified on an emotional and behavioral dimension confirming its existence (Song, 2010). Moreover, a fourth dimension should to be considered as mentioned before, deemed functional (referring to social media platform functionalities), which enables the other dimensions and makes engagement possible.

# 6. Conclusion

The following chapter presents the conclusions which can be made in regards to the research performed. Furthermore it discusses the research's theoretical contributions and managerial implications. Last, suggestions for future research are made.

## 6.1. Conceptual Model

The model below *Employer Brand Engagement Web 2.0* (seen Figure 19) was established and enriched with theory which was identified during this research. It is the end-result of the *adapted model Employer Brand Engagement Web 2.0* (Figure 8, p.36) that was previously introduced as theoretical framework in order to guide the analysis.
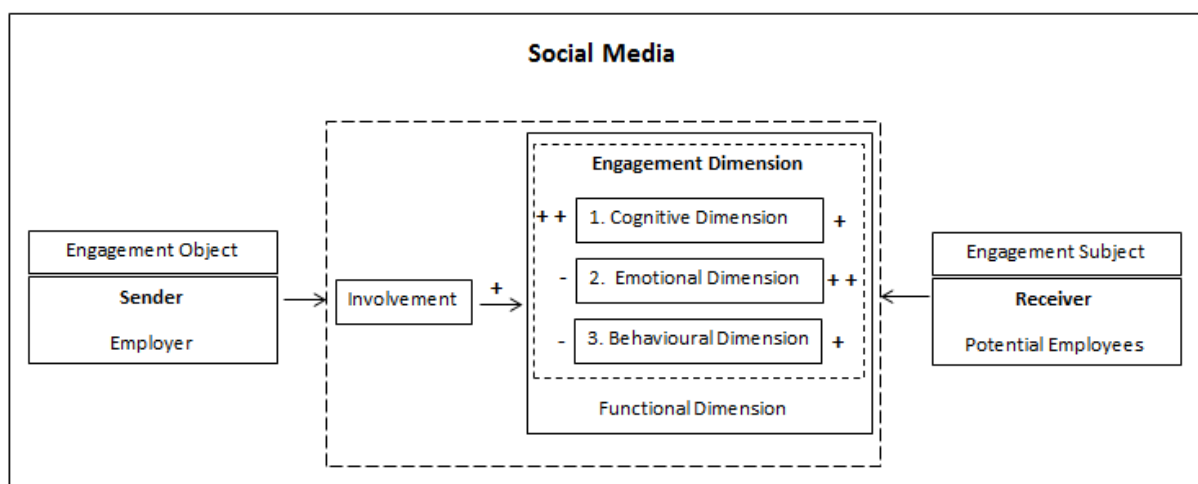


Figure 19: Employer Brand Engagement Web 2.0

The model *employer brand engagement Web 2.0* shows the engagement phenomenon at its core with involvement/ personal relevance as prerequisite (indicated by a plus sign). This then is assumed to lead towards engagement between the employer (engagement object/ sender) and the potential employee (engagement subject/ receiver) via two-way interactions displaying one or more dimensions during these interactions (cognitive, emotional and/or behavioral). The dimensions are varying in dominance on both, the potential employees' and employers' sides. Therefore, plus and minus signs are used to indicate their relative strengths.

As shown in the analysis, employers' cognitive dimension was the strongest (indicated by a double plus sign) in relation to the employers' emotional and behavioral dimensions which were minimally visible (indicated both by a minus sign). This means that employers generally chose to speak in a neutral or formal tone as opposed to a positive tone which did not interfere

with potential employees' engagement as they still discussed the content. It has also been shown that employers did generally not respond to potential employees' questions, negative or positive comments, but only contributed the content. However, this did also not stop potential employees from discussing the content among themselves. This means that although companies chose to be minimally present on a behavioral and emotional dimension, it did not interfere with potential employees' engagement. However, it could also be that, if employers' would engage on these dimensions more frequently, that it could affect potential employees' engagement more positively.

On the potential employees' side all dimensions were present as well. However, the potential employees' emotional dimension was the most frequent (indicated by a double plus sign) compared to the other two dimensions (indicated by one plus sign each). More specifically, potential employees' responses on the emotional dimension were categorized into five themes from which *dedication and passion* and *nostalgia/retro* were the most represented. These responses were often generated in relation to employee stories, companies' achievements and nostalgic content (such as an old product made by the company). Responses on the behavioral dimension were categorized into five themes as well from which the *intention to work for the employer resulting in action* has been the most frequent. These responses were most often registered in relation to job postings. Also, it was observed on potential employees' behavioral dimension that potential employees shared content, represented by the theme *word of mouth*, and therefore may have included new potential employees into the conversation, ultimately widening employers' target range of potential employees. It has also been observed that certain types of responses generated by potential employees (nostalgic, excitement, pride) were followed by similar responses by other potential employees, indicating a habitus (expression or handling of opinions in a similar manner). In a way, responses by potential employees on the different dimensions also led to some sort of co-creation as they made sense of the content in their own individual way.

The engagement phenomenon and corresponding engagement intensities are assumed to be furthermore influenced by a fourth dimension, which is called the functional dimension, originating from its social media context. This fourth dimension represents the specific functionalities of social media platforms which enable the presence of potential employees' dimensions and ultimately engagement. It has been found that the different functionalities had a different kind of impact on engagement as the investigated platforms also varied in engagement strength (LinkedIn was the most engaging, Twitter second and Facebook last).

Also, the format or type of content posted was not always suitable for the specific platform due to certain functional limitations. As has been established, LinkedIn is mostly suitable for visual/textual content, Twitter for textual content and Facebook for mainly visual content. This has not always been followed through by companies. Therefore, engagement responses could be assumed to be much higher if employers took into consideration the different social media functionalities. The functional dimension is therefore presented in the model as underlying of the other three dimensions (cognitive, emotional and behavioral) as it enables their presence.

Concluding, the analysis has shown how potential employees respond on the different dimensions to what companies are doing regarding their employer branding strategies on social media platforms; and Figure 19 (p.81) is a representation thereof.

## 6.2. Theoretical Contributions

The research addresses certain gaps that have been identified during the literature review. A main contribution is the *Employer Brand Engagement Web 2.0* model (Figure 19, p.81) that connects the domains of employer branding and social media with the engagement phenomenon at its core. As mentioned, all three areas have been investigated individually by other researchers, but have barely been investigated in relation to each other, less so been presented in a single model. The research therefore predominately adds to narrow the gap between these three research areas. The findings also generally support the theory that mass media techniques ignoring social media's reciprocity, interactivity and social character do not apply and that customized strategies are necessary in order to engage. Also, by combining the three research areas, it has been shown that social media is an effective channel to use for employer branding.

The data collected, moreover, has answered the research question and shows what employers are doing to engage potential employees and to create an attractive employer brand within the social media context (specifically on the social media platforms Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter). More specifically, the research supports certain theories that have been discussed in the literature review. It supports the components of the employer branding process (Figure 1, p.19) as well as theories regarding successful elements of employer and social media branding such as the importance of authenticity. However, it added how these elements are used in a social media context and how they relate to engagement. The research also contributed a tool, the engagement index, which is able to measure an individual's engagement on social media

in relation to activities/content contributed by employer brands. Moreover, the research supported theory regarding engagement as all three dimensions were identified during the research, but it also added towards the discussion regarding engagement dimensions. It introduced additional themes of the emotional and behavioral dimensions and how the expression of these themes relates to content provided by employers. It showed that the dimensions were not equally strong represented when comparing employers' and potential employees' expressions of dimensions. It was further shown that a fourth functional dimension supports different engagement levels adding to theories regarding engagement dimensionality in a social media context. The research also supports the notion of a particular habitus (expression or handling of opinions in a similar manner) within social media.

Moreover, the research has also contributed to advance research methods by using a mixed methods content analysis. Normally, a content analysis is applied purely quantitatively or qualitatively. However due to the type of empirical data, the researchers applied a content analysis that consisted of both quantitative and qualitative data simultaneously.

### 6.3. Managerial Implications

The research implies certain managerial implications. The model's implications (Figure 19, p.81) facilitate goal setting of engagement goals within social media and employer branding as it is known which elements could to be considered to achieve a high engagement level and consequently an attractive employer brand image. The model creates a deeper understanding of Web 2.0 and social media platforms, and how its specific functionalities facilitate engagement levels. More specifically, it helps managers to decide what type and format of content should be available on which kind of social media platform. Moreover, it helps managers to classify engagement according to its different dimensions. By being aware of the different engagement dimensions, planning can be much more targeted as managers may aim to engage on specific dimensions. For example, as potential employees' responses were the strongest on an emotional dimension, content relating to nostalgia (such as iconic products), relevant employee stories and content regarding the companies' achievements can be used. In order to reach potential employees on a behavioral dimension, job postings should be continuously provided as well. Also, by being aware of the habitus (expression or handling of opinions in a similar manner), managers may start a ripple effect by introducing few similar comments in order to kick-start potential employees' responses. These responses can be generally be used by managers to learn more about the potential employees their employer branding attracts as the potential employees imply their own individual meaning in the

content provided in order to make sense of it; they become co-creators. This collective intelligence can easily be harnessed by managers and it is free information. Also, it can be suggested that companies only need to contribute content which takes on a life on its own. This is as companies generally did not respond which did not interfere with potential employees' engagement; neither did using a neutral or formal tone. By introducing the engagement index, a basic tool to measure engagement on a quantitative level has been supplied as well. Generally, it has also been made clear that social media is an effective channel to use for employer branding and managers should consider including it if they have not done so, yet.

## 6.4. Suggestions for Future Research

Regarding this particular research, the researchers of this study propose the following future research in order to advance the research area even further. First, the engagement index as measurement tool for engagement on social media consisting of the sum of comments, shares and likes, can be improved and further developed. As it has been mentioned several times, it is assumed that comments are the strongest form of engagement, shares a medium form, and likes the weakest. However since the actual relation of these elements to each other could not and has not been investigated, it would be interesting to further research in order to apply weighting factors to the engagement index (as this has not been done in this research), making it a more precise measurement tool. Second, the same research can be extended as only three social media platforms of five best-practice employer brands during the time period of one month have been investigated. Therefore, future research may include more social media platforms, more best-practice employer brands and an extended time frame, perhaps even performing a longitudinal study in order to advance the model in this research (Figure 19, p.81). Third, it would be interesting to see the conversion rate of engaged individuals who actually apply for a position, therefore testing the relationship between engagement and loyalty to confirm its predictive power as this part of the phenomenon has not been investigated. Fourth, future research is also recommended to investigate the relationship between engagement, loyalty and e-Word-of-Mouth (eWOM) in order to further determine the phenomenon's importance in the context of employer branding and social media as most research regarding engagement is still in its infancy. Last, the research performed here should be extended to also include the internal side of employer branding as the focus here is on the external side only; specifically investigating how employees and management play a role in the context of employer branding in general, social media and the engagement phenomenon.

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# 8. Appendices

## 8.1. Appendix 1

Table 2 Best-Practice Employer Brands Chosen (Specific Website Addresses)

| | Employer | Facebook Page | Twitter Account | LinkedIn Page |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | Google Inc. | https://www.facebook.com/lifeatgoogle | https://twitter.com/googlejobs | http://www.linkedin.com/company/google |
| 2. | The Procter & Gamble Company | https://www.facebook.com/experiencepg | https://twitter.com/ExperiencePG | http://www.linkedin.com/company/procter-&-gamble |
| 3. | L'Oreal Group | https://www.facebook.com/LOrealTalentRecruitment | https://twitter.com/LOrealCareers | http://www.linkedin.com/company/loreal/careers |
| 4. | HP (Hewlett-Packard Company) | https://www.facebook.com/hpcareers?sk=app_4949752878 | https://twitter.com/hpcareers | http://www.linkedin.com/company/hewlett-packard/careers |
| 5. | The Adidas Group | https://www.facebook.com/futuretalents | https://twitter.com/adidasGroupJobs | http://www.linkedin.com/company/adidas-group/careers?trk=top_nav_careers |

## 8.2. Appendix 2

Table 5 Coding Schedule Platform

| Company: | Platform: | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **ID** | **MAIN Category: (P) Platform: General Information** | **Code** | **Count** | **Text** |
| (P) a. | Amount of Tabs | | | |
| (P) b. | Company Name is Integrated | | | |
| (P) c. | Header/ Background Image | | | |
| (P) d. | Colors Used Mainly on Platform | | | |
| (P) e. | Company Information Offered | | | |
| (P) f. | Links to other social media | | | |
| (P) g. | Number of Followers or Fans | | | |
| (P) h. | Average Posts per Day | | | |
| | **SUB: (T) Type of Content Used Most** | | | |
| (PT) a. | Amount of Infographics posted | | | |
| (PT) b. | Amount of Articles (other) posted | | | |
| (PT) c. | Amount of Videos posted | | | |
| (PT) d. | Amount of Images posted | | | |
| (PT) e. | Amount of Employee Stories posted | | | |
| (PT) f. | Amount of Job Postings posted | | | |
| (PT) g. | Amount of Competitons posted | | | |

## 8.3. Appendix 3

Table 6 Example Coding Schedule Platform

| Company: Google | Platform: Facebook | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **ID** | **MAIN Category: (P) Platform: General Information** | **Code** | **Count** | **Text** |
| (P) a. | Amount of Tabs | | 3 | |
| (P) b. | Company Name is Integrated | 1 | | |
| (P) c. | Header/ Background Image | | | No background image. Only the requested avatar which depicts a Google reception desk (colorful) |
| (P) d. | Colors Used Mainly on Platform | 6 | | |
| (P) e. | Company Information Offered | 1 | | |
| (P) f. | Links to other social media | 1 | | |
| (P) g. | Number of Followers or Fans | | 46.829 | |
| (P) h. | Average Posts per Day | | 0,2 | 6 in Total |
| | **SUB: (T) Type of Content Used Most** | | | |
| (PT) a. | Amount of Infographics posted | | 0 | |
| (PT) b. | Amount of Articles (other) posted | | 1 | |
| (PT) c. | Amount of Videos posted | | 5 | |
| (PT) d. | Amount of Images posted | | 1 | |
| (PT) e. | Amount of Employee Stories posted | | 5 | |
| (PT) f. | Amount of Job Postings posted | | 0 | |
| (PT) g. | Amount of Competitons posted | | 0 | |

## 8.4. Appendix 4

Table 7 Coding Schedule Content

| Company: | Platform: | Source File: | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **ID** | **MAIN Category: (U) Unit of Analysis- Specific** | **Code** | **Count** | **Text** |
| | **SUB: (F) Format** | | | |
| (UF) a. | Content Format | | | |
| (UF) b. | Direct Clickable Link | | | |
| (UF) c. | Original Content | | | |
| (UF) d. | Description | | | |
| | **SUB: (I) Interactions Registered per Content Type** | | | |
| (UI) a. | Number of Comments | | | |
| (UI) b. | Number of Shares | | | |
| (UI) c. | Number of Likes | | | |
| | **SUB: (O) Object Language used in Posts** | | | |
| (UO) a. | Disposition of the Engagement Object | | | |
| (UO) b. | Company Responsiveness | | | |
| | **SUB: (S) Subject** | | | |
| (US) a. | Number of Male Engagement Subjects | | | |
| (US) b. | Number of Female Engagement Subjects | | | |
| (US) c. | Number of Unknown Engagement Subjects | | | |
| (US) d. | Number of Europeans | | | |
| (US) e. | Number of North Americans | | | |
| (US) f. | Number of South Americans | | | |
| (US) g. | Number of Africans | | | |
| (US) h. | Number of Asians | | | |
| (US) i. | Number of Australians | | | |
| (US) j. | Number of Antarcticans | | | |
| (US) k. | Number of Unknown Origin | | | |
| | **SUB: (D) Dimensions Subject** | | | |
| (DU) a. | Behavioural Dimension | | | |
| (DU) b. | Cognitive Dimension | | | |
| (DU) c. | Emotional Dimension | | | |

## 8.5. Appendix 5

Table 8 Example Coding Schedule Content

| Company: Google | Platform: Facebook | | Source File: Google FB 3.jpeg - 4 | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **ID** | **MAIN Category: (U) Unit of Analysis- Specific** | **Code** | **Count** | **Text** |
| | **SUB: (F) Format** | | | |
| (UF) a. | Content Format | 2 | | |
| (UF) b. | Direct Clickable Link | 1 | | |
| (UF) c. | Original Content | 1 | | |
| (UF) d. | Description | | | Google informs about: Person Finder to help people caught in the explosions in Boston. |
| | **SUB: (I) Interactions Registered per Content Type** | | | |
| (UI) a. | Number of Comments | | 2 | |
| (UI) b. | Number of Shares | | 40 | |
| (UI) c. | Number of Likes | | 51 | |
| | **SUB: (O) Object Language used in Posts** | | | |
| (UO) a. | Disposition of the Engagement Object | 3 | | |
| (UO) b. | Company Responsiveness | 2 | | |
| | **SUB: (S) Subject** | | | |
| (US) a. | Number of Male Engagement Subjects | | 2 | |
| (US) b. | Number of Female Engagement Subjects | | 0 | |
| (US) c. | Number of Unknown Engagement Subjects | | 0 | |
| (US) d. | Number of Europeans | | 2 | |
| (US) e. | Number of North Americans | | 0 | |
| (US) f. | Number of South Americans | | 0 | |
| (US) g. | Number of Africans | | 0 | |
| (US) h. | Number of Asians | | 0 | |
| (US) i. | Number of Australians | | 0 | |
| (US) j. | Number of Antarcticans | | 0 | |
| (US) k. | Number of Uknown Origin | | 0 | |
| | **SUB: (D) Dimensions Subject** | | | |
| (DU) a. | Behavioural Dimension | | | John" I have spread the word about this Link." |
| (DU) b. | Cognitive Dimension | | 0 | |
| (DU) c. | Emotional Dimension | | | John" I Totally Respect Google for doing this. Its nice to know a company that can Help" Danilo" this is the best of Google, the kind of persons behind the code, thank you" |

**8.6. Appendix 6**

| Table 10: Most Engaging Employer Accross Platforms | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Employer (Ranking)** | **Platforms** | **Total Engagement Index** |
| **Adidas (5)** | LinkedIn | 196 |
| | Twitter | 100 |
| | Facebook | 246 |
| **Total** | | **542** |
| **Google (2)** | LinkedIn | 3054 |
| | Twitter | 1711 |
| | Facebook | 351 |
| **Total** | | **5116** |
| **HP (1)** | LinkedIn | 4961 |
| | Twitter | 154 |
| | Facebook | 326 |
| **Total** | | **5441** |
| **L'oreal (4)** | LinkedIn | 309 |
| | Twitter | 48 |
| | Facebook | 403 |
| **Total** | | **760** |
| **P&G (3)** | LinkedIn | 1440 |
| | Twitter | 59 |
| | Facebook | 351 |
| **Total** | | **1850** |

## 8.7. Appendix 7

| | | | Content Types | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | Infographic (1) | Article (2) | Video (3) | Image (4) | Employee Story (5) | Job Posting (6) | Competition (7) |
| **Engagement Ranking Platform** | **Engagement Ranking Employer** | **Employer / Platform** | | | | | | | |
| 1 | 5 | Adidas LinkedIn | 0 | 4 | 0 | 6 | 3 | 16 | 0 |
| | 4 | L'oreal LinkedIn | 0 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| | 3 | P&G LInkedIn | 4 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| | 2 | Google LinkedIn | 0 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 3 | 2 | 0 |
| | 1 | HP LinkedIn | 1 | 28 | 9 | 30 | 0 | 0 | 4 |
| | | **TOTALS LINKEDIN** | **5** | **36** | **15** | **40** | **6** | **19** | **4** |
| 2 | 5 | Adidas Twitter | 0 | 10 | 1 | 1 | 5 | 222 | 0 |
| | 4 | L'oreal Twitter | 4 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 0 | 5 | 0 |
| | 3 | P&G Twitter | 5 | 3 | 3 | 4 | 0 | 76 | 1 |
| | 2 | Google Twitter | 0 | 16 | 5 | 9 | 5 | 64 | 0 |
| | 1 | HP Twitter | 4 | 28 | 7 | 22 | 25 | 53 | 4 |
| | | **TOTALS TWITTER** | **13** | **58** | **18** | **39** | **35** | **420** | **5** |
| 3 | 5 | Adidas Facebook | 0 | 7 | 2 | 16 | 3 | 4 | 2 |
| | 4 | L'oreal Facebook | 6 | 2 | 9 | 15 | 5 | 2 | 0 |
| | 3 | P&G Facebook | 5 | 3 | 1 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| | 2 | Google Facebook | 0 | 1 | 5 | 1 | 5 | 0 | 0 |
| | 1 | HP Facebook | 0 | 13 | 1 | 6 | 5 | 6 | 0 |
| | | **TOTALS FACEBOOK** | **11** | **26** | **18** | **43** | **18** | **12** | **2** |
| | | | | | | | | | |
| | | **TOTAL SUM** | **29** | **120** | **51** | **122** | **59** | **451** | **11** |
| | | **TOTAL AVERAGE** | **9,7** | **40,0** | **17,0** | **40,7** | **19,7** | **150,3** | **3,7** |

*Table 14: Amount of Content Type per Employer per Platform*

* Red marked: Most engaging within Platforms

* excludes combinations

100

## 8.8. Appendix 8

| Platform (Engagement Ranking) | Content Type | Amount Comments | Amount Shares | Amount Likes | TOTAL ENGAGEMENT INDEX |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Table 15: What content produces the most comments/ shares/ likes?** | | | | | |
| LinkedIn (1) | 1- Infographic | 59 | N/A | 1014 | 1073 |
| | 2- Article | 84 | N/A | 1035 | 1119 |
| | 3- Video | 67 | N/A | 637 | 704 |
| | 4- Image | 152 | N/A | 1764 | 1916 |
| | 5- Employee Story | 0 | N/A | 0 | 0 |
| | 6- Job Posting | 26 | N/A | 257 | 283 |
| | 7- Competition | 0 | N/A | 0 | 0 |
| | 2,3- Article w/ Video | 2 | N/A | 9 | 11 |
| | 2,4- Article w/ Image | 202 | N/A | 2839 | 3041 |
| | 2,3,4- Article w/ Video & Image | 2 | N/A | 44 | 46 |
| | 4,3- Image & Video | 43 | N/A | 229 | 272 |
| | 5,3- Employee Story in Video Format | 44 | N/A | 1284 | 1328 |
| | 5,4- Employee Story w/ Image | 4 | N/A | 78 | 82 |
| | 7,4- Competiton w/ Image | 13 | N/A | 72 | 85 |
| Twitter (2) | 1- Infographic | 0 | 18 | 4 | 22 |
| | 2- Article | 19 | 190 | 73 | 282 |
| | 3- Video | 4 | 101 | 67 | 172 |
| | 4- Image | 0 | 6 | 0 | 6 |
| | 5- Employee Story | 2 | 18 | 19 | 39 |
| | 6- Job Posting | 114 | 795 | 238 | 1147 |
| | 7- Competition | 1 | 3 | 2 | 6 |
| | 2,3- Article w/ Video | 0 | 2 | 1 | 3 |
| | 2,4- Article w/ Image | 7 | 86 | 67 | 160 |
| | 2,3,4- Article w/ Video & Image | 0 | 3 | 0 | 3 |
| | 2,4,6- Article w/ Image and Job Posting | 1 | 7 | 3 | 11 |
| | 5,3- Employee Story in Video Format | 4 | 53 | 50 | 107 |
| | 5,4- Employee Story w/ Image | 0 | 11 | 1 | 12 |
| Facebook (3) | 1- Infographic | 8 | 37 | 250 | 295 |
| | 2- Article | 2 | 40 | 94 | 136 |
| | 3- Video | 1 | 7 | 63 | 71 |
| | 4- Image | 14 | 11 | 279 | 304 |
| | 5- Employee Story | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| | 6- Job Posting | 15 | 2 | 72 | 89 |
| | 7- Competition | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| | 2,4- Article w/ Image | 13 | 4 | 145 | 162 |
| | 5,3- Employee Story in Video Format | 11 | 12 | 166 | 189 |
| | 5,4- Employee Story w/ Image | 27 | 50 | 343 | 420 |
| | 7,4- Competiton w/ Image | 0 | 1 | 13 | 14 |

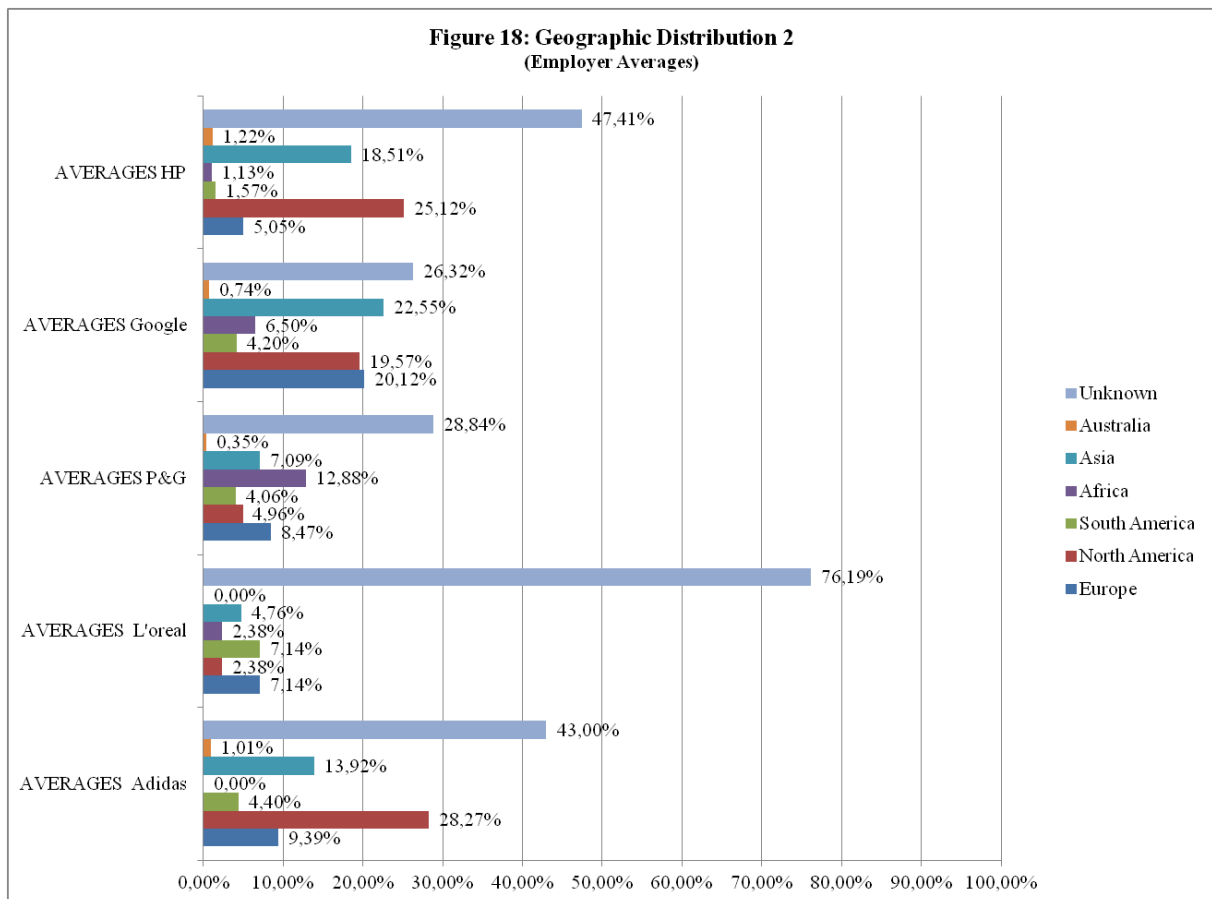| Legend | |
|---|---|
| (red) | Content that generated the most Comments, Likes & Shares |
| (green) | Content that generated the 2nd most Comments, Likes & Shares |
| (yellow) | Content that generated the 3rd most Comments, Likes & Shares |
| (grey) | Least Engaging Content |

## 8.9. Appendix 9

| | Table 16: Content Type Frequency and Variation | | | | | | | | | | | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| | **Content Type/ Platform** | | | | | | | | | | | |
| **Employers** | Infographic (1) | | | | Article (2) | | | | Video (3) | | | |
| | LinkedIN | Twitter | Facebook | Std. Deviation | LinkedIN | Twitter | Facebook | Std. Deviation | LinkedIN | Twitter | Facebook | Std. Deviation |
| Adidas | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 4 | 10 | 7 | 3 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 1 |
| L'oreal | 0 | 4 | 6 | 3,1 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 0,58 | 2 | 2 | 9 | 4,04 |
| P&G | 4 | 5 | 5 | 0,6 | 0 | 3 | 3 | 1,73 | 1 | 3 | 1 | 1,15 |
| Google | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 16 | 1 | 8,14 | 3 | 5 | 5 | 1,15 |
| HP | 1 | 4 | 0 | 2,08 | 28 | 28 | 13 | 8,66 | 9 | 7 | 1 | 4,16 |

| **Employers (continued)** | Image (4) | | | | Employee Story (5) | | | | Job Posting (6) | | | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| | LinkedIN | Twitter | Facebook | Std. Deviation | LinkedIN | Twitter | Facebook | Std. Deviation | LinkedIN | Twitter | Facebook | Std. Deviation |
| Adidas | 6 | 1 | 16 | 7,64 | 3 | 5 | 3 | 1,15 | 16 | 222 | 4 | 122,55 |
| L'oreal | 1 | 3 | 15 | 7,57 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 2,89 | 1 | 5 | 2 | 2,08 |
| P&G | 1 | 4 | 5 | 2,08 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 76 | 0 | 43,88 |
| Google | 2 | 9 | 1 | 4,36 | 3 | 5 | 5 | 1,15 | 2 | 64 | 0 | 36,39 |
| HP | 30 | 22 | 6 | 12,22 | 0 | 25 | 5 | 13,23 | 0 | 53 | 6 | 29,02 |

| **Employers (continued)** | Competition (7) | | | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| | LinkedIN | Twitter | Facebook | Std. Deviation |
| Adidas | 0 | 0 | 2 | 1,15 |
| L'oreal | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| P&G | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0,58 |
| Google | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| HP | 4 | 4 | 0 | 2,31 |

* No combinations included

## 8.10. Appendix 10



**Figure 17: Geographic Distribution (Platform Averages/ Overall Averages)**

Legend:
- Unknown
- Australia
- Asia
- Africa
- South America
- North America
- Europe

OVERALL AVERAGE:
- 44,35%
- 0,66%
- 13,37%
- 4,58%
- 4,27%
- 16,06%
- 10,03%

AVERAGE Facebook:
- 38,90%
- 0,61%
- 17,74%
- 10,09%
- 8,72%
- 7,58%
- 16,37%

AVERAGE Twitter:
- 57,42%
- 0,19%
- 2,43%
- 0,75%
- 0,75%
- 14,04%
- 4,43%

AVERAGE LinkedIn:
- 36,74%
- 1,20%
- 19,94%
- 2,90%
- 3,35%
- 26,56%
- 9,31%

## 8.11. Appendix 11

**Figure 18: Geographic Distribution 2**
(Employer Averages)



**AVERAGES HP**
- 47,41%
- 1,22%
- 18,51%
- 1,13%
- 1,57%
- 25,12%
- 5,05%

**AVERAGES Google**
- 26,32%
- 0,74%
- 22,55%
- 6,50%
- 4,20%
- 19,57%
- 20,12%

**AVERAGES P&G**
- 28,84%
- 0,35%
- 7,09%
- 12,88%
- 4,06%
- 4,96%
- 8,47%

**AVERAGES L'oreal**
- 76,19%
- 0,00%
- 4,76%
- 2,38%
- 7,14%
- 2,38%
- 7,14%

**AVERAGES Adidas**
- 43,00%
- 1,01%
- 13,92%
- 0,00%
- 4,40%
- 28,27%
- 9,39%

Legend:
- Unknown
- Australia
- Asia
- Africa
- South America
- North America
- Europe

0,00% 10,00% 20,00% 30,00% 40,00% 50,00% 60,00% 70,00% 80,00% 90,00% 100,00%

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