Controlled by algorithms

A study about the external bureaucratization of employer branding efforts caused by social media

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Abstract

Title:	Controlled by algorithms – A study about the external bureaucratization of employer branding efforts via social media
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Authors:	Kerstin Lövrup and Melliz Draguanova Mihaylova
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Key words:	Employer branding, social media, public sector, algorithms bureaucracy, technology, control
Purpose:	The purpose of this study is to deepen the understanding on employer branding via social media in the public sector. The aim is to investigate how employees within a municipality make sense and meaning of employer branding via social media and how this creates and potentially consumes positive aspects e.g. effectivity and transparency for the organisation.
Methodology:	To be able to reach the purpose of this paper a qualitative case study was conducted at a municipality in Sweden with the aid of semi-structured interviews and observations. The study had an interpretative, critical and abductive approach.
Empirical findings:	We found that algorithms implied three different meanings to the employees in the municipality. The first category we found was that the algorithms implied control, the second implication we found was the increase of interaction and speed, and the third finding, lastly, was the anxious feelings around social media. By this, we uncovered several different meanings that all tied back to one certain meaning: the control by the algorithms and the rules around them.
Conclusion:	In our research we found one common thread of the meaning which was the underlying control by algorithms when working with employer branding specifically through social media. Thus, what we found was social media to become an external bureaucratization of employer branding efforts, which could be understood as causing both positive and negative effects in the organisation.

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We are very grateful for this experience and hope that you as a reader will find this thesis interesting and rewarding to read!

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1. Introduction

With a strong growth in both new economies and new industries, the finding of competent employees is regarded as an even more important factor for organisations to consider in order to be successful (Moroko & Uncles, 2008). During recent years many organisations has made employer branding their priority and hence making the idea a common strategy for both retaining and attracting competence within organisations (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Moroko & Uncles, 2008). Employer branding is described as 'the process of building an identifiable and unique employer identity' or, if one wants to be more specific, 'the promotion of a unique and attractive image as an employer' (Backhaus, 2004 p. 117; Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004 p. 502). To achieve value and influence within organisations, there is considered being a need to clarify and oversee their employment experience where the importance lies in making this experience specific for the certain organisation, offering something more than other organisations (Edwards, 2010). This is also commonly referred to as the employment offering where it is regarded as highly important to identify the benefits that an organisation offers to its employees and future employees in order to be successful in employer branding initiatives (Edwards, 2010).

Furthermore, it is evident that the digital age has reshaped the way organisations function today, where technology has become an important source of competitive advantage and where technical innovation is considered vital to be successful (Morabito, 2013). This reshaping has also caused a digitization of HR functions where there is new technology for both communication as well as learning, making the recruitment process and selection to some extent dependent on digital tools (Mihalcea, 2017). In this digital age, it is considered important for organisations to be both more agile and follow the technology, to be able to offer something more to potential employees where engagement, learning and development is looked upon as vital (Mihalcea, 2017). One of these technical tools are the organisation's use of social media, where it has become a well-used tool for them to work with during recruitment processes but also during employer branding campaigns (Micik & Micudova, 2018; Sivertzen et al., 2013). Social media has become a device to effectively identify and select high potential individuals for recruiting, making it considered to be of high importance for organisations to develop and act on (Mihalcea, 2017). Also, it is evident that the amount of effort the organisations put into their social media channels is potentially a major reason behind whether an employee applies for a job or not (Cober et al., 2000). Social media has revolutionized the way people

communicate to each other and to organisations, making marketing on social media an opportunity for organisations to interact with potential and current employees (Correia & Medina, 2014). Meanwhile, information spread very quickly and therefore it is considered important to develop a clear strategy on social media channels, to be successful in this interactive relationship (Correia & Medina, 2014). Moreover, many of these social media channels are governed by algorithms, that makes them function and direct content to the viewers, where the algorithms sort and prioritize this content (Statens medieråd, 2018). Since the algorithms are everywhere around, there is a need for organisations to act upon them (Bailey, 2018), especially when branding themselves on social media and trying to reach a certain amount of people. The algorithms are today controlling a large part of our digital society, making it important to consider them in order for organisations, to achieve both reach and competitive advantage when attracting new talent (Statens Medieråd, 2018).

At the same time, statistics show that the public sector will be needing a large amount of new employees in the future alongside with the youth having a contradicting view of the reality of working in the public sector, where employer branding is considered being an important tool to achieve this and change this view (SCB, 2017; SKL, 2013). The ability to find and retain competence is considered critical for the success of both the public and private sector (Dahlqvist & Melin, 2010; Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). However, one major difference between the sectors is mainly that the public sector is governed by political goals where a limited budget affects the possibility to perform employer branding due to financial limitations (Whelan et al., 2009). This makes it considered important for the public sector to take part in the digital age by for example using social media as a tool for employer branding, since it also determines whether talent really applies for the jobs and since recruitment today is dependent on these specific tools (Cober et al., 2000; Mihalcea, 2017).

Meanwhile, while there is this positive view of employer branding and social media, branding can also work in a more value-destructive way where it is rather destructed than created (Rennstam, 2013). The focus today mainly lies on the positive and value-creating sides of branding, but there have been discoveries of a more destructive part of it that has raised the question of branding rather being two-sided (Rennstam, 2013; Bertilsson & Rennstam, 2018). Where most researches focus on the positive aspects of branding as well as employer branding and how it can produce value such as finding the 'right' employees and reaching out further for organisations, it might be of great importance to look on the other side as well. A more critical

view on social media is for example presented by Fuchs (2017) where he states that social media channels owns and controls many processes online, where for example Facebook controls and owns all uploaded information on their channel. Another example is Van Dijck (2013) who argues that the algorithms on social media has gained more and more excessive control of users online where he questions the algorithms and their role. This, as Van Dijck (2013) further states, since they are more or less steering desires online with their power. Bailey (2018) also argue that the algorithms controls and decides ones reach online, making it hard for organisations to ignore their power. These aspects make it interesting to look on the other side of employer branding via social media and how it might have dual meanings in an organisation.

Moreover, many authors have also found branding to sometimes end up in potentially harmful consequences for the organisation, meaning that branding is not solely looked upon as being positive (Bertilsson & Rennstam, 2018; Müller, 2017; Rennstam, 2013; Alvesson, 2013). Branding is understood as becoming a double-edged sword where it creates much value but, in the meantime, destructs as much (Rennstam, 2013). Additionally, the view of the destructive side of branding is understood as particularly important to understand in public sectors, where social problems are dominated and cannot or at least should not be reduced by branding (Rennstam, 2013). Due to branding, specifically employer branding, being looked upon as not always working in favour of an organisation and especially interesting from a public sector perspective this awakens questions around employer branding via social media. Social media is regarded as a tool that effectively work in the favour of organisations in their employer branding work (Micik & Micudova, 2018; Sivertzen et al., 2013). In addition to this, social media channels are also looked upon as one of the most vital tools to reach success with both in recruiting as well as in employer branding efforts (Micik & Micudova, 2018; Sivertzen et al., 2013). However, this awakens a more specific question on if this is the only way that employer branding works in organisations, or if it might have more negative effects as well. Employer branding via social media is a rather new phenomenon and therefore it creates an incentive to research on the topic, since this is the reality in which most organisations acts today. As mentioned before, there is a great need of new competence in the public sector (SCB, 2017; SKL, 2013) and employer branding is considered a vital tool to find this competence. However, what if the employer branding via social media rather works as a double-edged sword and destructs as much values as it creates? What if the social media decide the order to such a large extent that they control the organisations employer branding work? These questions are awakened in a time where employer branding, also via social media, is to a great extent regarded

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as a tool of efficiency and value creation rather than something that could work unfavourably. Therefore, this thesis will be looking upon this rather uncharted terrain of employer branding via social media, to explore other sides than the solely value-creating one. The important social work of the public sector might be destructed by other aspects of branding than the ones that are solely positive or strengthened by its effectiveness. Therefore, we formulated the following research question:

- *What is the meaning of employer branding via social media for employees within the public sector?*

With this research question, this thesis will seek to discover the meaning of employer branding via social media in a municipality and what consequences this might cause for the organisation. The aim of this study is to research how employees within a municipality make sense of employer branding via social media and explore how this creates and potentially destructs positive aspects such as effectivity and transparency for the organisation. We found there to be limited amount of research done on this subject since social media is a rather new phenomenon in theoretical research. Also, in existing one it is often looked upon as something that solely creates effectivity and possibilities. However, we found critical research that emphasized social media's potential downsides and how it might act in controlling ways. Due to this, we found it interesting to study employer branding through social media to investigate how it might affect the public sector. Furthermore, as mentioned, due to the importance of the work of for example a municipality, it is important to seek understanding on the potential consequences of employer branding via social media. This, since it might work in an unfavourable way that could be considered not valuable for the purpose of a municipality.

1.2 Disposition of research

This research consists of seven different chapters that is presented in the following order: introduction, theoretical framework, method, analysis, discussion, conclusion and future research.

Theoretical framework: in this section, we begin by presenting a literature review on employer branding and social media to show previous research conducted in this area. The last part of this section presents the controlling aspects of social media.

Method: in this section, we present our methodological approach, our data collection, our data analysis as well as trustworthiness and authenticity.

Analysis: in this section, we present our empirical findings and our analysis of them. Here we sought to answer what the meaning of employer branding through social media was in a municipality. We present three different themes namely: *The control by the algorithms, Interaction and speed* and *Anxious feelings.*

Discussion: in this section we discuss our empirical findings through our theoretical framework. This section is divided by three themes namely, *social media as a strategy and enabling interaction, social media as a technologized external bureaucratization of employer branding* and *Employer branding via social media as value-destructive?*

Conclusion: in this section, we conclude our findings and what implications they might have.

Future research: in this section, we suggest topics for future research in the field of employer branding via social media. These suggestions are based on interesting tendencies that we found in our research but were not able to solely focus on.

2. Theoretical background

In the following chapter the theoretical background will be presented, firstly a literature review of employer branding will be introduced in order to present previous studies on employer branding. Also, some of the more critical approaches to branding will be acknowledged in the literature review as well. Secondly, a section presenting social media and its role in society today, as well as an explanation on algorithms and how they function will be followed. Lastly, a section on the controlling aspects of social media will be given and discussed, presenting how social media can be linked to both bureaucracy and control.

2.1 Employer branding

Marketing researchers Ambler and Barrow (1996) coined the concept of employer branding as a new technique where brand management was applied to the field of human resource management and blended together. Additionally, Edwards (2010) further argued that by this the principles of marketing was applied to human resources (HR), specifically in relation to current and future employees, creating the employer branding concept. This also made the concept around employer branding increasingly relevant to HR within organisations (Edwards, 2010). Furthermore, originally the concept of branding was intended for marketing practitioners, however it has also developed into being considered a vital part of HR within organisations (Edwards, 2010).

Moreover, in order to fully grasp employer branding and the meaning behind it, it is equally as important, according to Edwards (2010), to comprehend the concept of a brand. Swystyn (2007) define a brand as a mixture of tangible and intangible attributes symbolizing a trademark and creating value and influence for an organisation if managed successfully. Within organizational studies, the concept of branding has enabled organisations to understand themselves from an outside perspective alongside with managing the internal functioning of the organisation such as the values and identities (Hatch & Schulz, 2001; Rennstam, 2013).

Additionally, the employer brand was explained by Ambler and Barrow (1996) as the sum of benefits of an employer and a job. This refers to benefits such as economic, psychological and functional ones gained by employment that also identifies a certain employer (Ambler & Barrow, 1996). Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) further conceptualized the concept of Ambler and

Barrow (1996) by presenting a framework in which they defined employer branding as 'the process of building an identifiable and unique employer identity' (p. 502). With these definitions some new criterion was also developed for organisations, such as the employer branding being consistent with reality, being attractive to the targeted audience and the importance of differentiating oneself from competitors (Ambler & Barrow, 1996; Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). In more recent years, employer branding has also become a modern organisational concept and is a priority within many companies and organisations (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). Several organisations have chosen to embrace the activity and performing of employer branding as a strategy to both attract the right competence as a competitive advantage alongside with retaining competence within the organisation (Moroko & Uncles, 2008). As of today, there is a strong growth in societies, making the finding of competent employees looked upon as an even more important factor of success within organisations (Moroko & Uncles, 2008). Furthermore, due to employer branding being incorporated in both marketing as well as HR, it is today considered being a strategic framework to both retain, attract and motivate employees within organisations (Barrow & Mosley, 2005; Edwards, 2010). To do this, organisations often create unique criterion in an employment offer, presenting the main advantages of the organisation itself that they have to offer the employees, often called 'employer value proposition' (Barrow & Mosley, 2005; Edwards, 2010, p.7). The role of employer branding has become to work as an enabler to help fulfil this proposition of value (Uncles & Moroko, 2005), and by this making the organisation competitive.

Throughout the years this has been the way of looking upon branding as a whole and thus potentially employer branding: as something solely positive and value producing. However, researches have begun to explore the possible harmful consequences of branding (Bertilsson & Rennstam, 2018; Müller, 2017; Rennstam, 2013; Alvesson, 2013). Often, branding is limited to be about the managerial perspective as presented above, where there is only the production of value through branding for the organisation that is regarded and not the potential destruction that it might cause (Rennstam, 2013; Bertilsson & Rennstam, 2018).

In addition to the debate on value, there are according to Boltanski and Thévenot (2006) different worlds that understand value each in their own specific way. One of these worlds is further explained by Boltanski and Thévenot (2006) as the civic world where value is created by contributing to the common good. Another world is the world of fame where the value is measured by the amount of contacts and fame one has according to others (Boltanski &

Thévenot, 2006). This framework was not mainly constructed to understand branding, but rather used to see how agreement is reached between actors (Bertilsson & Rennstam, 2018). However, Bertilsson and Rennstam (2018) have integrated this framework presented by Boltanski and Thévenot (2006) to the field of branding in order to analyse how these different worlds might clash and intersect as well as to critique some branding initiatives.

Furthermore, Rennstam (2013) presents a more destructive side of branding where it is not only looked upon as producing value but also destructs value, becoming somewhat a double-edged sword; where much value could be gained but as easily lost. Arvidsson (2005) even argues that the brand might consume people, or at least exploit them in new ways. Moreover, the destructing view of branding is understood as particularly interesting for public organisations, where societal interests are the most common, rather than business interests that are often dominating in the private sector (Rennstam, 2013). When public organisations reduce the complexity of their problems through branding efforts, they risk losing democratic values such as transparency and accountability towards their citizens (Rennstam, 2013). With these new views of branding, and employer branding being a part of this, we see a shift of the view being more nuanced since there is both value-creating aspects as well as value-destructive aspects to it.

2.2 Social media and employer branding

Furthermore, it is evident that the most common view of social media is that it is being regarded as an appealing phenomenon for organisations to use when recruiting future employees (Robert Walters, nd). Social media is defined by Oxford Living Dictionaries (2019a) as 'Websites and applications that enable users to create and share content or to participate in social networking'. Additionally, social media is considered to be an important tool for organisations to make use of during their recruitment processes alongside working with employer branding campaigns (Micik & Micudova, 2018; Sivertzen et al., 2013). Backhaus (2016) further elaborate on this by arguing for social media to be an important part of employer branding and where companies use the internet to make their employer branding efforts work more efficiently. Also, the use of social media is considered being highly important for organisations and their employer brand strategy (Girard et al., 2013). Companies are looked upon as being given a genuine opportunity to recruit future employees by using different digital tools that could assist the companies in identifying potential employees in a more effective way (De Smet et al., 2016). This new age

has led to a digitization of HR processes which reshapes how organizations go about their recruitment processes (Mihalcea, 2017) where the Web 2.0 implies the evolution of the Web and is often associated, and most of the time conflated, with social media (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Web 2.0 is defined as 'the second stage of development of the Internet, characterized especially by the change from static web pages to dynamic or user-generated content and the growth of social media' (Oxford Living Dictionaries, 2019b). Hence, social media is described as a bundle of internet-based applications based on both ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, where user-generated content and its exchange is both created and allowed (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

Moreover, the usage of social media has over time differed from the more traditional usage of technology such as emails and forums (Treem & Leonardi, 2012). This, since the proliferation of it has developed a hope amongst managers that it can and will improve and simplify different organizational processes (Treem & Leonardi, 2012). Besides, it is no secret that social media is considered to have revolutionized the way information is communicated and shared between people, where the fortification of social media on a daily basis has become to a larger extent intense (Correia & Medina, 2014). This also, in accordance to Correia and Medina (2014), means that social media within organisations is mainly used to maximize and to streamline all their communication both the direct and interactive one. Today, common social media channels used by organisations are mainly Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter in order to promote their employer brand alongside with attracting employees, where Facebook at least is considered dominating in retaining and maintaining different relationships (Micik & Micudova, 2018; Davison et al., 2011; Correia & Medina, 2014). Meanwhile, even though social media is understood as being important by managers there sometimes is no effort put on this tool and its processes to be integrated throughout the organisation (Correia & Medina, 2014).

Also, not only is it understood as a two-way communication between employees and companies facilitated by social media (Kietzmann et al., 2011) but it is also looked upon as advantageous. This, since aspiring employees can apply and access desired job-openings more effortlessly and where employers easier can attract their desired talents (Sivertzen et al., 2013). The internet is used by companies in order to make their employer brand more efficient where, over time, social media has become a large part of it as well (Backhaus, 2016). It is further evident that

social media is acknowledged as being a tool where the company brand is enhanced (Minchington, 2014) and depending on the information found through social media, the attractiveness and the initial thought of the company is subsequently affected (Allen et al., 2007).

However, social media is something that is not solely looked upon as effective and helpful but has its downfall as well due to the communication on internet being endless (Backhaus, 2016). Therefore, it is important for employers to both control their social media and keep up with everything that is happening (Backhaus, 2016). Van Dijck (2013) states that, since the generation that is coming of age is regarding social media as given without questioning potential consequences, it is considered important to examine social media from a more critical perspective. One example of a more critical stance towards social media is taken by Fuchs (2017) who argues that social media owns and controls much of the processes online. For example, Facebook controls all the uploaded information from users as well as owning the right to sell this data to other companies (Fuchs, 2017). Others also argue that social media results in a lack of structure that usually enables rational debate (Lutz & du Toit, 2014). Fuchs (2017) further states that some users, such as organisations, are more promoted than others in terms of the power given to be heard, seen and read on social media, where more powerful actors get favoured in being visible online. Additionally, other authors argue that social media is something that is often used in employer branding for the sake of it, where it is more a following of fashion rather than having a strategic thought behind it (Backhaus, 2004; Grzesiuk & Wawer, 2018).

Additionally, it is argued that the rise of technologies and social media has increased the usage of so-called algorithms (OECD, 2017). These are all ranging amongst different organisational purposes where today's computer science has led to the development of the algorithms in order for complex and repetitive tasks to be performed successfully (Albinson et al., 2018, OECD, 2017, Haider & Sundin, 2017). An algorithm is a sequence of rules (OECD, 207) that contains certain instructions on what needs to be performed, with what measures and in what order (Haider & Sundin, 2017). OECD (2017) further describes algorithms as being rules that should be systematically followed to reach specific and wanted goals. Algorithms has also become, according to Posthumus et al., (2017), an important technology in HR recruitment processes

where this recruitment activity is considered being vital in employer branding (Moroko & Uncles, 2008). Moreover, algorithms are considered giving the recruiters in organisations a toolbox that enables them to select and identify the right talents (Posthumus et al., 2017). It is further evident that actions are considered necessary to be taken around algorithms where they are also described as being formulas, sometimes digital, that enables organisations to perform in a more agile manner (Bailey, 2018). Besides, in accordance to Bailey (2018), many businesses realize the importance of algorithms since the main reason behind their existence is their influence and drive towards taking different decisions. The decisions being controlled and driven by algorithms are decisions that are considered having a deep effect on an organization's employees (Albinson et al., 2018). However, there is still considered being an urge from the employees that the management should consistently work with understanding and upgrading the algorithms in order to reach success, even though this is urged, algorithms are still not prioritized at all times in organisations (Bailey, 2018). Furthermore, the importance of algorithms is something that is considered being the result of companies continuously incorporating them to their business processes in order to simplify them, hence strengthening their significance (OECD, 2017). This significance could be a result of what Bailey (2018) argues, that the algorithms have in a sense taken over and made complex data manageable and even better for companies to use due to its analytical skills.

2.3 The controlling aspects of social media

In contrary to the more beneficial view on algorithms however, Haider and Sundin (2017) states that algorithms control large parts of how society works online and decides much of its order. For example, the algorithms reward certain behaviours online with further reach on one's page, where Facebook suggests how to post in order to get the furthest reach by posting certain pictures or by encouraging interaction (Haider & Sundin, 2017). This increase of algorithms has also increased companies' reliance towards these rules when working with different business processes (OECD, 2017), where in fact employer branding is considered being an important process within organisations (Backhaus, 2004; Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). Therefore, the technology of social media could be regarded as important to follow when performing employer branding in an organisation. In addition to this, these aspects of the algorithms could be understood as a sort of technical control that refers to the technology controlling the employees and the work they do (Barker, 1993; Eriksson-Zetterquist et al., 2011). In this case, the algorithms on social media could be understood as the technology that controls society

online. Technical control means that organisations use technology to plan and control different processes of work where the technology creates a control within the structure of the organisation (Edwards, 1996). By this, it is the technology that decides the working tasks that needs to be performed, in earlier days this was often the assembly line, whereas today it could be other types of technology that controls the agenda, for example via social media (Barker, 1993; Kärreman & Rennstam, 2012).

Furthermore, Bailey (2018) also states that these algorithms can be found everywhere on the internet and therefore it is hard for organisations to ignore them since it both controls and decides one's reach. Van Dijck (2013) argues that the algorithms on social media has gained excessive control over its users' activity online. In addition, today, large social media channels, such as Facebook and Google, own algorithms that decide what we find, want and like online (Van Dijck, 2013). Moreover, Van Dijck (2013) further question the algorithms and their role since they are steering desires and got power over users by controlling their data, in these different cases the technology could be understood as controlling much of our lives online.

Additionally, as mentioned earlier, the algorithms are a sequence of rules with certain instructions on how things should be performed, with what measures and in what order and that these rules should be systematically followed to reach wanted goals (Haider & Sundin, 2017; OECD, 2017). This is much similar to a bureaucracy that is defined as a rule-bound execution of tasks by Diefenbach and Todnem (2012), who also means that the bureaucracy has had a large impact on the shaping of design in organisations as well as how to reason about them. Here, the algorithms could be understood as being at least a part of this rule-bound execution that is important to follow to reach success in an organisation. Therefore, the algorithms on social media could be regarded as another sort of control as well, namely bureaucratic control that means that the control is built on certain rules that guide the employees within the organisation (Barker, 1993; Kärreman & Rennsam, 2012). Kärreman and Rennstam (2012) further argues that bureaucratic control deals with the handling of certain rules, often ones that are written down and therefore aid employees in how to perform their work tasks. In this case, the algorithms are not necessarily written down, but do possess many of the features that can be linked to the bureaucratic control such as clear rules that needs to be followed for success online.

To further grasp what a bureaucracy is, Weber (in Waters and Waters, 2015) explained it as an organisation with top-down hierarchy where the rules are considered more important than the employees. A bureaucracy is often characterized by standardisation and being driven by routine, where the following of rules is considered to be of great importance (Kärreman & Rennstam, 2012), much like the following of the rules that an algorithm result in on social media. Certain competencies within the organisations are in a bureaucracy underpinned by certain rules and regulations, which means division of labour, strict chains of command and the following of these rules (Waters & Waters, 2015). Furthermore, Weaver (1986) argues for there to be tendencies to preferably avoid blame in a bureaucracy, namely blame-aversion, which is claimed to be a dominating motivation.

According to Adler and Borys (1996), there are also two conflicting views on bureaucracy, one negative and one positive view referred to as the enabling and coercive type of bureaucracies. The authors further state that the positive view regards the bureaucracy as giving guidance as well as clarifying certain responsibilities, that in turn ease certain stress of having the responsibility among employees (Adler & Borys, 1996). The more negative side, states that the bureaucracy fosters dissatisfaction alongside with demotivating employees and stifles creativity (Adler & Borys, 1996). This is similar to the dual view of the algorithms and social media that occurs in the literature. The algorithms and social media are, as mentioned above, on the one hand regarded as enabling interaction and to effectively work with employer branding (Moroko & Uncles, 2008; Posthumus et al., 2017). On the other hand, it is regarded has controlling the society and our lives online (Van Dijck, 2013), which is much similar to the more coercive side of the bureaucracy.

Based on our literature review, it is evident that employer branding via social media could be regarded as a form of technical control which also have some elements of a bureaucracy and bureaucratic control. Therefore, we find it interesting to look further into this relationship between employer branding via social media and the different types of control, since we see tendencies of a connection between these different concepts.

3. Method

In the following chapter an explanation will be given regarding the chosen methodological approach and other choices made. Firstly, we will discuss our philosophical grounding, which is the foundation of the whole research, where we to begin with found ourselves to be in a more interpretivist approach whereas we later also found ourselves in a more critical approach. Also, our research is further based on an abductive reasoning as well as being conducted qualitatively. Secondly, our method of research design and data collection will be presented followed by a detailed description on how we both collected and analysed the data. The quality of the study will be looked upon, by discussing the trustworthiness and authenticity of the research, as an end to the method chapter.

3.1 Interpretivist and critical approach

To reach the purpose and aim of this research, there is a need to understand the way we conducted it and how our method might have affected the outcome. The research was conducted with a qualitative method, since the qualitative method is about understanding a social phenomenon through the eyes of the people studied (Prasad, 2018). Meanwhile, our interest laid in the understandings, values and meanings of employer branding via social media within a municipality, which in the beginning of the study placed us in the interpretivist tradition. The interpretivist tradition takes human interpretation to develop knowledge on the social world, focusing on how people's norms, values, meanings are constructed and how an organisational phenomenon is understood by them (Prasad, 2018). The world in the interpretivist tradition could therefore be looked upon as socially constructed through the acts of our interpretations as humans (Prasad, 2018). Our research is constituted by the assumption that social reality is constructed and that individual realities are subjective. The research aimed to find understandings and meanings of employer branding in a municipality, meaning that each of these understandings originate from an individual reality of the phenomenon of employer branding in the organisation. Since our research explored individuals and their meanings, we strived to capture their own individual truth and understandings as subjective matters, a purpose that an interpretivist approach allowed us to reach. Therefore, we began our research in the interpretivist approach, but as the research was conducted, we also found ourselves in the critical tradition.

The critical tradition is explained by Prasad (2018) as 'a set of intellectual positions that examine social arrangements through the lenses of power, domination, and conflict.' (p. 125). In the critical tradition the world is also looked upon as socially constructed, however this reality is understood as governed by certain power relations (Prasad, 2018). In our research we found certain power aspects where we for example paid attention to the controlling effects of the algorithms in the municipality. The critical approach takes another stand in looking upon the constructed reality, as more sceptical than interpretivists and looks to different interests that govern actions within organisations (Prasad, 2018). This is one of the reasons that we found ourselves in the critical tradition, since we question the somewhat power-relation between the municipality and the social medias that the algorithms create. We have found that control is for example a factor in the employer branding work via social media, a concept that is often a part of power and domination (Prasad, 2018). The critical tradition is often critiquing a certain social order, the way things are done or performed, and question these matters as well (Prasad, 2018). Since our research developed in to questioning the way that employer branding via social media is performed, by looking upon it as controlled by algorithms, we found ourselves to work more and more in the critical approach. Therefore, our study is interpretivist to begin with, but as the research was conducted, we leaned towards a more critical stance when looking upon our case.

Furthermore, during our research we decided to have an abductive reasoning, where abduction is explained as the different explanations that could surface during a research based on the occurrences and circumstances encountered during the process (Swedberg, 2014). According to Atkinson et al., (2003), an abductive reasoning is performed when the researcher in the process shift in focus between existing literature and the empirical material. This type of reasoning could give a deeper and more interesting insight to our study without us specifying beforehand specifically what we are looking for. This method opens possibilities of many different interpretations and therefore we found it suiting for our aim of seeking understanding and meaning. With this method we could also embrace the qualitative method as well as interpretative and critical tradition more and let our studied participants own meaning and reality control the subject of the study. We began our data collection without deciding on what we were actually looking for, and instead we let the empirical material guide and show us what the research should be about, by looking upon interesting and somewhat unexplainable aspects that the material showed.

As mentioned before, we chose to use a qualitative research method, where qualitative research is concerned with understanding processes and its meaning (Prasad, 2018). Since we chose a qualitative method, which means understanding a social phenomenon through the perspective of the object of study (Prasad, 2018; Bryman & Bell, 2015), we wanted to "come close" to the employees. This, since we wanted to understand how the employees interpret and understand employer branding via social media, and what meanings this phenomenon creates. Our aim of the research was not to find generalizable results but rather to give a contextual understanding, which could be reached by conducting the research with a qualitative research method. Also, since we conduct the research within the interpretivist and critical tradition, where the world is socially constructed and subjective, the qualitative research method can capture meanings and understandings that we seek. Therefore, a qualitative research method was well suited to reach the purpose of the research.

3.2 Data collection

3.2.1 Case study

We have conducted a case study at a municipality in Sweden, to examine the meaning of employer branding via social media in this organisation. According to Bryman and Bell (2015) a case study is characterised by the fact that the study is focused towards one organisation or event, as well as the case of something. Our case is the use of social media when performing employer branding in a municipality, where we sought to understand this phenomenon. This is done in one specific municipality along with some focus on the case of the workshop given on employer branding via social media to the employees. Since we sought a deeper understanding of the employees in the municipality, of their thoughts, feelings and understandings of employer branding via social media we believed that a case study would help us reach our purpose. Since it was easier for us to focus on only one organisation as a case study, it enabled us to reach the more in-depth analysis that we aimed for when conducting this research. If we would have focused on more than one municipality and not on the workshop, then our material would most likely have lacked the same in-depth picture that we achieved by focusing on one municipality and the specific workshop on employer branding via social media.

Since our case organization is a municipality in Sweden and our case is social media use in employer branding work, we reach our purpose by talking with the employees in the

municipality. More specifically we talked with the employees that has been educated at the same workshop as we took part in. The workshop on employer branding in social media has been given to approximately 70 people in the municipality, to educate them on employer branding and how it should be conducted in the municipality's social media channels. Since the main focus of this workshops was on social media, and according to the people giving the workshop, this could be looked upon as the most important education on it within the municipality. Therefore, we found it suiting to emanate from this workshop when finding our object of study. Due to our purpose being to seek the employees within a municipality's understandings and meanings of employer branding via social media, we found it to be appropriate to focus on the workshop given. This, since the employees who work with this on a daily basis and have taken a workshop in it, probably regard themselves as having a rather clear understanding on the meaning of employer branding via social media. Therefore, we chose to interview 9 employees that has taken this workshop as well as the 2 employees that are responsible for giving this workshop to the other employees. We found it to be interesting to use these employees as an object of study, since they work with employer branding as well as being interested enough in the topic to attend a workshop on it, thus making them interesting in order to fulfil our purpose.

3.2.2 Interviews

Before we began our research at the municipality, we established a contact there by emailing the contact-centre to get in touch with a suitable person. When we had established a contact at the municipality, this person invited us to participate in the workshop and later provided us with the contact information to those attending the workshop. With this contact information we began to reach out to employees that had attended the workshop, to see if they were willing to participate in our research. Our object of study could be looked upon as a convenience sample (Bryman & Bell, 2015), since we got the contact via an established contact and decided to interview these employees due to them being present at the workshop. Also, since our research aimed to study how employees in a municipality subjectively reason on the meaning of employer branding via social media, we saw that this sample would benefit our purpose. However, the use of a convenience sample might have limited our possibilities of getting in contact with employees that possess the greatest knowledge on employer branding via social media. This, since we decided to interview the employees that we were given contact information on and interviewed the ones who answered when we emailed. This could have

resulted in us getting interviewees that might not be the ones who understands our phenomenon in the most extensive way. However, our goal was not to do any empirical generalisations, where one then would look for objectivity through for example random selection, so therefore this sample worked well. Also, a convenience sample is time efficient (Bryman & Bell, 2015), which was suiting due to us having a limited time to conduct the research.

Our primary data was collected through semi-structured interviews where the participants were employees in a municipality. Moreover, a good way to comprehend how people make sense of the world is through qualitative interviews where the interviewer also can get an insight on how the world is given meaning through the eyes of the participants (Kvale, 1996). The main purpose with the semi-structured interviews was to collect descriptions from the participants' and their view of the world in order to interpret the meaning behind the gathered descriptions (Kvale, 1996). Therefore, since the main premise of this study was to find the understanding and meaning of employer branding in municipalities, semi-structured interviews enabled us to find these understandings easier through the interviewed participants and their descriptions of employer branding.

We interviewed, as mentioned above, 11 employees in the municipality, every one of which had attended the workshop on employer branding via social media. Where 9 of the employees were those who attended the workshop and 2 of the employees the ones who held the workshop. The people worked on different parts of the municipality but had all in common that they worked with employer branding via social media to some extent. This enabled us to get a broad and nuanced picture of the understanding and the meaning of employer branding via social media. All the interviews were conducted on the different departments of the municipality, where the interviewee had their office, and the interviews took place between 3rd to 25th of April 2019. With these interviews we got a rather multifaceted picture of the work in the municipality since it provided us with several different understandings to employer branding via social media.

The interviews were conducted mainly by one employee being interviewed by the both of us. However, two of the interviews was conducted individually due to there being limited time for them to be done. According to Bechhofer et al., (1984) it can be rewarding to conduct interviews in pairs, since it allows the interviewers to take on different roles and focus on different aspects during the interview. In our case, one of us asked the questions whereas the other one observed

and noticed if something should be further elaborated on, trying to catch on to interesting patterns and asking more questions. By interviewing in pairs one can also create a more informal atmosphere, where the interviewee feels comfortable (Bechhofer et al., 1984), something that we made use of as well. However, by doing most of the interviews in pairs it took more time than it otherwise would have, but we felt that the benefits of working in pairs was greater, since it enabled us to uncover understandings together. Bechhofer et al., (1984) also states that sometimes the interviewee might feel intimidated by more than one interviewer, meaning that they might feel like they are in an interrogation rather than an interview or conversation. This could have been problematic for us, since we wanted to create a more relaxed conversation to be able to uncover certain meanings. To create a more relaxed environment where the interviewees felt that they could be comfortable we therefore decided on different roles during the interview. Where one of us was performing the interview and the other one kept more in the background, making the conversation more balanced. Although, there is both advantages and disadvantages to using one or more interviewers.

All the interviews lasted approximately between 30-60 minutes each. Each interview began with us presenting ourselves, the research and the purpose of the interview. We also informed the interviewees that both the municipality as well as themselves would be anonymous and that we were interested in hearing their understandings and perspectives, not something that is looked upon as the 'right' answer. Also, we introduced the possibility for the interviewee of reading the thesis when it was completed. We created an interview-guide with some examples of questions that guided us throughout the interviews. These questions were also changed throughout the process of the interviews, when we discovered interesting themes that we decided to look further in to. Kvale (1996) argues that it is important to thematize the interview, since this largely impacts the end-result. We decided to thematize the interview guide in accordance to our research question and with the observation of the workshop in mind, for us to use as a source of inspiration. Also, as we found interesting aspects, we thematized in more accordance to this, by adding and removing some questions. However, our questions were semi-structured, which means that our guide was structured by certain topics but still left space for the interviewee's own interpretation (Bryman & Bell, 2015; Kvale, 1996). Also, we often asked follow-up questions to gain a more in-depth answer and understanding, and we also found that this made the interview more like a conversation with a relaxed dialogue. We used the questions to be able to gain the employees own stories and insights. This means that even if we used the guide to ask questions, we did not lead the interviewees into certain topics or questions, instead

we allowed their own spontaneous thoughts to be the most important part. Our questions were thus rather general, such as asking about first reactions and thoughts of the phenomenon of employer branding via social media. This allowed us to gain stories that was not decided by us as authors but rather as genuine stories of the thoughts, feelings and understandings of the employees. However, Bryman and Bell (2015) posits that interviews sometimes are limited by the interviewee by them not discussing aspects that they take for granted. To get around this limitation we always tried to make the interviewee elaborate on their thoughts where they mentioned ideas and understandings that appeared self-evident to them. This helped us to gain insights that otherwise would have remained hidden, which provided us with more well-developed and in-depth answers to our questions.

All the interviews were recorded with the aid of our mobile phones and computer, where we always began to ask for permission from the interviewee to record. Afterwards, we began to transcribe all these interviews by listening to the recordings on our phones. By recording and transcribing we were able to understand and see everything that the interviewees told us, and our understanding of the material got more in-depth since we got to listen to it and read it several times. According to Heritage (1984), by transcribing, it enables the researcher to remember everything the interviewee says and to experience the material several times. However, the process of transcribing is rather time-consuming, which could potentially be a problem when researches has limited time (Heritage, 1984). Even if it took us much time to transcribe, we found that it in the end saved us time when starting our analysing process, otherwise the structuring and understanding would have been more time-consuming instead.

3.2.3 Observations

The research is conducted through document analysis, observations and interviews mainly since this aided us to seek 'convergence and corroboration' later in the research, through combining different methodologies (Bowen, 2009, p. 28). Moreover, we got the opportunity, from a spontaneous invitation, to take part in the municipality's employer branding workshop alongside with a brainstorming at two different occasions. According to Bryman and Bell (2015) this type of observation, the participant observation, is where an observer seeks to mainly observe the behaviour of the participants in order to obtain the meanings they ascribe to their environment. Here, the observers participate in the setting at hand (Bryman & Bell, 2015) that, in a sense, gave us the opportunity to get an in-depth understanding of the efforts taken

with employer branding through social media in the municipality, both from the managers' perspective and the employees. With this we began the process of taking on the role as an observer and observed the individuals involved. We focused mainly on how the workshop was conducted, namely what parts was considered being important and how they were presented alongside with seeing how it was perceived and received by the employees.

Furthermore, according to Sveningsson and Alvesson (2016), there is sometimes a disconnect between how an individual speaks, their meaning and how they behave. Therefore, our observations helped us in putting the employer branding efforts spoken about in to a context in terms of how it was perceived, talked about and actually experienced by our participants. For example, one thing that caught our attention during the workshop was that already then nobody questioned the algorithms or the rules around them, which made us curious with this phenomenon and enabled us to reach a focus with the thesis. This in turn gave us an valuable framework of employer branding through social media considering the limited timeframe for our research.

In alignment with Rennstam (2007) argument, observations are considered as having the advantage of in a way capturing more natural environments. This, in a way, helped us understanding and deriving the meaning from employees during the two workshops we participated in. The sole focus was on employer branding and hence showing their natural behaviour and meaning occurring naturally from the employees. Meanwhile, according to Bryman and Bell (2015) what could be looked upon as a disadvantage is namely the interpretations made by the observers since our own interpretations could interfere with the unbiased observation. However, throughout the observations we kept in mind that our interpretations might affect how we observed, whereas we tried to not have any preconceptions that would affect our result.

3.3 Data analysis

The empirical material that the analysis is based on was mainly collected through 11 interviews but also observed through the three-hour long workshop held by the municipality. This workshop was given to the employees within the municipality, mainly employees working with HR and communication, where the employees had voluntarily signed up beforehand. The

workshop began with an overall presentation of employer branding where the presentation soon got taken over by solely focusing on their social media part of employer branding which then permeated throughout the rest of the workshop. This workshop aided us in reaching our focus of the thesis, since much focus was put on social media, we decided to use this in our thesis. Therefore, the workshop enabled us to discover both our research question as well as what could be regarded as important in employer branding initiatives in the municipality. It also provided us with the interviewees that is the main source of empirical material in our research, since these employees has attended this workshop. We began our process by attending the workshop ourselves, where we discovered the great focus on social media and especially Facebook in the municipality. Much of the focus during the workshop was on the algorithms on Facebook and the rules the municipality have created around these, which made us more interested in discovering how the employees perceived employer branding via social media.

When we analysed the collected data, we followed the method of qualitative analysis presented by Rennstam and Wästerfors (2018). The authors suggest that a qualitative analysis could be conducted through three different stages namely sorting, reducing and arguing (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2018). These stages enabled us to better make sense of the collected data since it provided us with clear steps to follow and allowed us to review more blanket opinions of the employees. With our collected data we searched for different themes that emerged and by this we determined our focus based on the most interesting themes discovered, where those themes would be most suited to answer our research question. Furthermore, we followed the two theorizing processes presented by Styhre (2014) where the first part helped us to uncover what the empirical data could potentially mean; in our case we discovered three different themes namely 'The control of the algorithms', 'Interaction and speed' and 'Anxious feelings'. With the help of Styhres' (2014) second theorizing part, we translated the meanings from the emerged themes into theoretical statements which is presented in a concluding discussion.

The first step, sorting, is according to Rennstam and Wästerfors (2018) when the authors somewhat creates an order in the chaos that a large and rich empirical material might cause, to gain a clear overview. Our material was sorted by two main episodes, in the first one we got familiar with our material after transcribing it by reading it several times and attempting to see certain patterns in the quotes. We sorted the material in the first episode rather close to the empirical findings and interview questions, which was rather similar to the themes of the

interview questions in our guide. This sorting episode provided us with themes such as 'Private vs. public sector', 'Interaction' and 'Algorithms'.

The data was in the second episode then sorted and categorized depending on what different answers the quotes gave regarding the research question. With this, the data got a new structure of categories since they evolved more from interpretations rather than the explicit nature of them. What we did was to dig deeper and ask ourselves:" what is this quote really about" which developed the new set of categories. The quotes chosen under phase one of our analysis was the quotes we emanated from however, the initial collection of quotes was something we at times went back to in order to review them once again through a new set of eyes. Therefore, due to this some new quotes were used that we initially did not perceive as useful from the get-go.

Further, in accordance to Rennstam and Wästerfors (2018), reduction is about choosing what parts of an immense material that is going to be used since it is impossible to incorporate every single quote at hand. The thought behind this is mainly to give an adequate representation of the data and in a sense not to compromise the data with its interesting nuances despite the reduction process (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2018). The thought behind our reduction process was mainly to find and use quotes that best exemplified our themes and their underlying meaning. There were cases where some quotes emphasized the same matter however, in those cases the quote that illustrated the matter in the most outstanding way was chosen to represent that subcategory of quotes.

Rennstam and Wästerfors (2018) describes the last step as argumentation where researchers are supposed to argue for their findings with support from the empirical data and previous research. It is here, according to Rennstam and Wästerfors (2018), that the authors should metaphorically open their eyes in order to take the reasoning to a more abstract theoretical level. We conducted our analysis, where we found our three main topics on what the meaning of employer branding via social media could be. However, as we began to analyse deeper we found that these meanings where all revolved around the same thing: the control by the algorithms via rules that the municipality created around them. When we found this, we began to think about what this could mean both in accordance to literature on employer branding, social media and algorithms. With this, we saw tendencies of a bureaucracy in the employer branding via social media efforts, due to there being certain rules to follow to reach success. Therefore, we reached the conclusion

of the main meaning being an external bureaucratization, that took place in the employer branding via social media efforts. Also, we began to think about the broader consequences of this when looking upon value for a municipality, and how this external bureaucratization might create unfavourable value for the organisation.

Lastly, Rennstam and Wästerfors (2018) emphasize these steps in the analysis process as not being set in stone but rather that the process is more organic where the different steps can somewhat intertwine with one another. This was in fact something that was evident in our analysis process especially in the two phases of sorting that was conducted. During the first phase of sorting we began the process of reducing our collected material where we continuously made sure the focus with the analysis was put on reducing the data in such ways that could answer the research question. This direction was kept during the following phases where we continuously moved back and forth with sorting and reducing the material in order for the analysis to have the best possible outcome, namely, to answer the research question. This thorough process that was followed in order to create the analysis was something looked upon as useful for our research since it enabled us to be familiar with the collected material in a more comprehensive way. Through having the sole focus of trying to answer the research question with our analysis and working with the material accordingly, the experience of having the ability to raise our interpretations more abstractly when working with the analysis was enabled.

3.4 Trustworthiness and Authenticity

In the field of method studies there is a rather common opinion that studies performed with a qualitative method should not use the criteria of validity and reliability when assessing the quality of the qualitative research (Silverman, 2006) but rather trustworthiness and authenticity (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). One of the criteria that is of importance is to engage in source criticism to be able to seek trustworthiness in one's study (Schaefer & Alvesson, 2017), something that we tried to engage in throughout our study in order to be trustworthy in our results. We also tried to reflect on the results so that they were credible in accordance to the true situation, meaning how things 'are' in the municipality. Some of the other criterions for assessing trustworthiness is credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). To reach credibility, it is important to carry out the research according to good practice (Guba & Lincoln, 1994), in our research we have always made sure not to lead interviewees on and to not 'decide' their answers, but have rather been open to their own truth

and understandings. Alvesson (2003) also means that researches need to constantly challenge each other in order to be reflexive when conducting a credible study. We tried to look upon our empirical material from several different angles and always challenging our own opinions on it. It also meant that we did not take what was said in the interviews for granted but instead constantly reflected and discussed other meanings of what was said and why it might have been emphasized.

Dependability is dependent on whether the results is reflecting the reality that exists (Bryman & Bell, 2015; Guba & Lincoln, 1994), here it is important to consider that our study is looking upon the world as socially constructed. Therefore, our material shows a subjective reality that not necessary is the 'truest' or only reality of this phenomenon. We also guaranteed the interviewees anonymity both when regarding the municipality but also their role, gender and other traceable aspects. This hopefully made the interviewees more comfortable so that they also answered our question more honestly.

Confirmability is about acting in good faith as well as being able to prove this, since objectivity is not a possibility (Bryman & Bell, 2015; Guba & Lincoln, 1994). During the interviews, as mentioned before, we presented our study and the background of it as well as our thoughts around the content of the study. We explained for example that our empirical material would be guiding the theory, and that we did not have a very clear picture yet on the employer branding via social media in the municipality. Since we were clear on the purpose of the interviews and the usage of them, we would find ourselves to be confirmable in our study.

Furthermore, credibility can in turn be treated by the criteria of having a fair picture of the research as well as ontological, educative, catalytic and tactical authenticity where ontological authenticity is explained as the constructions of participants being enhanced or added by information (Bryman & Bell, 2015). During all of the interviews, the interviewees were given the chance to partake in reading the final version of the thesis. This was also something that worked as an incentive for us since the notion of knowing that the ones concerned in the municipality had the opportunity to read the material made us work closely and thoroughly with it without making broad-brushed interpretations. Also, we conducted our transcripts on a level that entails for every single word said in the recordings to be written down literally (Lundahl & Skärvad, 2016), in order to capture the different nuances in the material. With this, the ability for us to ensure the context of the chosen quotes was in a way simplified. The ambition was for

the employees to both recognize themselves within the material when given the opportunity to read it through rather than them feeling that their thoughts and opinions in ways had been distorted. What can be seen in our analysis chapter is the effort taken in distinguishing the quotes from our own interpretations and hence, we believe that our participants are represented in a fair way. With ontological authenticity it is possible for the employees participating in the interviews to have the opportunity to talk and articulate their thoughts regarding employer branding through social media in the municipality, that could in a sense increase their understanding of the topic at hand (Bryman & Bell, 2015). With this, we believe our research and its quality is good due to the many aforementioned criterion being met and acknowledged.

4. Analysis

In the following sections the empirical findings of this research will be presented and analysed. The first part will present the control of the algorithms, where the algorithms can be understood as controlling much of the order and rules in the municipality. The second part presents the interactive side of social media in the municipality, and how it in a sense works as a double-edged sword. The last part present anxious feelings, dealing with how often the rules of the algorithms create anxiousness among the employees. To conclude this section, there will also be a summary at the end of the analysis.

4.1 The control by the algorithms

At the municipality studied, they use Facebook, LinkedIn and Instagram as tools for employer branding. The use of Instagram is mainly to reach current employees, where the impression during the workshop we attended was that it was not as important as the other medias, since little time was spent on discussing it. The usage of Facebook is mainly towards citizens and to attract employees, often ones that are not on LinkedIn. According to the ones responsible for the workshop many, for example, nurses and social workers are not on LinkedIn, making Facebook a vital tool to reach these people. The main focus of the workshop was however on the rules that needed to be followed on the Facebook account of the municipality, where they seemed to be governed by following these to get, according to themselves, the greatest reach. These rules are based on what the municipality calls 'external environment monitoring'. This means that some employees work with trying out different ways of posting on their social media channels to see how the algorithms on Facebook react and respond to different posts. When they have tried these ways of posting, they are able to see what 'works' and what does not, meaning what gives the furthest reach for them online. After that, they continuously create rules on how to post on their social media channels. Some of the rules presented when we attended the workshop was:

- o Not more than one post per day, if anyone posted more the reach went down due to the algorithms, causing a domino-effect in the days to come as well and therefore affecting other posts too.

o The posts need to be up at 7 in the morning to get the furthest reach, then you get more comments and likes from people on their way to work.

o You need to book a slot for making a post, often 3 weeks in advance since many others want to post as well.

o You should not use pictures from a so-called "picture-bank", meaning that pictures you have not taken yourself is since it affects the reach in a negative way.

o They are not allowed to put too much text on the pictures, if they do, the reach gets affected in a negative way.

Here, it is rather clear that the meaning of employer branding via social media has become the following of certain rules to get the furthest reach on Facebook. There are many rules that needs to be followed to brand themselves on this media and if they do not follow them, the consequences are claimed to be large for the whole organisation. This view was also evident in the interviews and is illustrated with following three quotes:

[...].. I would say that it changes all the time… Due to external circumstances… Facebook chang[es].. Facebook and LinkedIn change their algorithms… We constantly learn that right now this works… Now this does not work anymore [...] To remind ourselves why we do this… That when you upload a bad post you pull down the reach for all of your colleagues and we do not want any shit in the channel then we would rather not have anything… Then we would rather have an empty day than something that is not quality filled [...](Interviewee 1)

But there is however a large freedom in how you chose to design the post. And there I try to come up with tips and advice, that this works best and in some cases we do have some recommendations like "we do not want to see this", because we know that if you do have text on a picture on Facebook, then it pulls down our reach very much, so avoid that [...] (Interviewee 7)

[...] then I noticed that I think as we get reminded to think, when it comes to how you upload a post on Facebook, I would probably not have thought that text on a picture would be something one should not have, there I would believe that "yes but text in a picture is not that strange" but it was a big no no. Do not have that! (Interviewee 6)

It is evident in these quotes that there is a view that following the rules is of great importance to get the furthest reach, where in the interviewees eyes the not following of the rules equals something one should not do or even as 'shit'. By having a text on a picture, the content is referred to as being shit since it lowers the reach the post could potentially have had, this shows that the following of the rules is considered of high importance. This also makes it rather clear that it is the algorithms that somewhat determines and controls the rules of the game to a large extent when looking upon the employer branding efforts via social media in the organisation. By this, it could be looked upon as algorithms being the controller of a large part of the employer branding via social media. Where submission to these reactions seems to be considered vital for a successful reach in social media channels.

There seems to be a perception of there not being any alternatives to the rules of the algorithms, since there is seemingly no choice; it is the rules way or no way. This is illustrated by the focus on the algorithms and rules around them, where content not following the rules is considered a 'big no, no' and even 'shit'. Therefore, it is not considered being any other way of posting on Facebook than by following the rules. Here, employer branding via social media in the municipality mainly becomes the following of certain rules and somewhat submission to the algorithms that decides these rules the municipality has on Facebook. The posts on the social media therefore seems to be done almost by reflex, where there is a 'right' way that you must follow to achieve the furthest reach. The fact that content not following these rules is perceived as not good enough one could argue that the algorithms control what is looked upon as right and wrong. Thus, the rules of the algorithms seemingly decide the order and rules of the different posts. Therefore, they are understood as governing a large part of the employer branding work as well, making the meaning of employer branding via social media controlled by a set of rules to follow.

Furthermore, in the third quote it is noticeable that the rules within the organisation is seemingly not questioned by the employees. This control and the rules are seen as being the way employer branding is performed in the municipality without anyone actually contradicting this view. Rather the employees follow the algorithms automatically without any thought and in a sense therefore giving in to reflex actions of not really reflecting on what one does, that permeates through their employer branding via social media work. There seems to be an underlying acceptance of the rules of the game amongst the employees which is illustrated by the following quotes:

But we do have, if one looks at Facebook, it is pretty much like 'this is how it should be'. (Interviewee 8)

No but it is so time consuming, to understand the medium is the disadvantage and we have very little [space] to be able to [decide] on our own… That we do not have any possibility to affect Facebook and how we want that channel to work instead we must play by the rules that applies… (Interviewee 1)

[…] to me, it was like this "well well, but okay they have decided that we should have one post a day at 7 in the morning" then that is what they came up with works the best so then it is only to accept that, but it felt like… (Interviewee 5)

[…] when we upload ads, we try to take inspiring pictures, we try to tag people, we try to not have text in picture and so rather we try to do as we have been told during the workshop. (Interviewee 6)

Throughout these quotes there is seemingly an acceptance of following the rules presented at the workshop. With the use of expressions such as 'it is only to accept' and 'we have to play by the rules' it could be understood as employees somewhat being subdued to the reflex manner of the employer branding via social media. The rules in the social media implies that the employees tend to produce a reflex to obey them, where they do not show any further reflection on why they actually obey. Here, the control by the algorithms decides the rules, and the employees make sense of this as the only way of performing employer branding on social media, and there being nothing to do about these rules. Employer branding via social media becomes an acceptance of the rules of the game, where you do as it has decided and follow the 'only way' created at the municipality and thus somewhat submission to the rules created around the algorithms.

There seems to be a tendency amongst the employees to not challenge the algorithms that is expected to be followed by them. Instead they in a sense obey these rules without questioning nor doubting the underlying control that is evident throughout the organisation. This could be looked upon as the employees within the municipality who work under strict rules are in a sense

more controlled by the algorithms than what is understood by themselves. Where they act in a sort of denial of this extensive control that social media got over them.

However, on the other hand there seems to be a vague questioning of the acceptance of these rules with for example the expression 'but it felt like…' which could indicate that there is some underlying contradicting opinion that challenge these rules. However, this could be understood as not really daring to actually question this since this expression shows that even though there might be questioning opinions one is not confident enough to actually speak their mind. The meaning of employer branding via social media is here that one does not question the rules to follow, even if there is a tendency to wonder why, the meaning of it is still not to question but only to follow the rules.

However, there were some employees who actually spoke their minds which could be illustrated in the following quotes:

[…] The disadvantage, the disadvantage with social media whatsoever is that it is not our channels […] it favours these […] monopolies that it is starting to become. […] they have total dominance; one has to correct themselves after what they decide. So that is the disadvantage with social media. (Interviewee 10)

But X got the task to recruit my current boss […] and then I know he did something on Facebook, but he showed it to his boss and then he had to correct it... The boss thought that is was not serious enough... And then I thought, no, he is not the kind who flies away in craziness and to me, that was only a step towards something more modern […] (Interviewee 2)

I have nagged a lot about that I want us to start to develop apps for the municipality, but, I get no audience for this anywhere, so now I sat down a week ago for a whole week and just tried to learn how to develop an app. I think that we can become much, much better at using other channels than only just Facebook and Instagram, so we are not really given the opportunity to do something strategic […] (Interviewee 6)

Here the employees seemingly question the order of how employer branding via social media is performed in the municipality, both through that they see the dominance, that they want to

create their own social media channels as well as being limited by their superiors. These employees seem to somewhat want to break free from the control of the algorithms by coming up with other solutions rather than giving in to the existing rules. However, the response to these break free efforts made by the employees is seemingly poor since there is seemingly low support in deviant ideas. This could be understood as these rules around employer branding on social media is being built in the organisation to the extent that it is hard to break free and try out your innovative and creative skills. The meaning here becomes once again to stick to the rules with a limited possibility to affect these.

Meanwhile, while you cannot break free from the rules of the algorithms, these rules of the algorithms also limit the possibility of using Facebook as a strategic tool where some employees choose not to use it due to the many rules. This is exemplified by the following quotes:

> *Often when we recruit we are in a great hurry, we do not have time to wait for two weeks or longer to get a time-slot in Trello that is our booking-tool [on Facebook] [...] So that ends up in us not using Facebook in many cases as a channel to [...] market and spread the word about that we search for employees for a certain role, which would have been exciting to have on there [...] yes, but two weeks of waiting, or you should be happy if there is a slot in two weeks, to post on Facebook for example. (Interviewee 8)*

> *We work a lot with social media, but we are pretty restrictive in some cases when it does not work... There is for example a requirement on how many posts one should have per week and then there are some that do not reach these and then they choose to delete that page for example as… So, there are 17 community youth centres, some of them have a Facebook page and some do not, it is all about the ability to maintain a certain level [...] (Interviewee 5)*

The strict rules behind uploading posts on Facebook alongside with the activities on the Facebook pages created by the different parts of the organisation such as community youth centres is a reason behind why some choose not to use those kinds of social media during their employer branding initiatives. This, since the rules affect whether there is time alongside with efforts taken with the Facebook pages not being sufficient enough. Here the algorithms seemingly control how one chooses to use the mediums or not. Due to the submission towards the algorithms some of the employees do not get the opportunity to use these social media channels, since the rules are looked upon as the most important factor to follow. Only one post

a day seems more important than giving the opportunity to a recruiter to find the "perfect fit' in their search for future employees. The meaning of employer branding via social media is here that there is not enough time to do it as well as efforts not being sufficient enough. It becomes more important to follow the rules of the algorithms rather than giving possibilities to recruiters to use Facebook as a tool in their recruiting. Showing that the meaning becomes, yet again, the following of certain rules and somewhat submission to the algorithms that 'decides' these rules.

Once again, the following of rules to get the furthest reach seems of greatest importance within the municipality, which made us wonder what employees believed would happen if they would not follow the order of the algorithms. We decided to ask one of the most well-educated people within employer branding via social media what their take was on what would happen, and the answer we got was:

> *..Yes well I think that we do then would not reach even close to as many people as we can and then we put unnecessary time on trying to write good texts and take good pictures or produce good videos, since then you do not reach as many making it not worth the time put on it.. A long reach is what we sacrifice if we do not follow the rules… (Interviewee 1)*

Here the following of the rules that is evidently permeating throughout the organisation is in a way motivated and justified due to its importance of reaching the largest number of employees and members active in social media. The quote goes as far as hinting that in order for employees work to be considered relevant and necessary, the emphasis should be on complying to the rules in order for the largest reach in social media not to be 'sacrificed'. In a sense, this could be understood as the employees within the municipality not having the choice of breaking free from the algorithms or questioning them. This, since the consequences of that would jeopardize the efforts taken revolving around employer branding through social media as a whole. This could imply in a sense that the meaning behind employer branding through social media is that there is no other choice but to follow the rules in order to not sacrifice anything for the organisation and its image portrayed externally. Thus, the sole meaning behind employer branding seems to be the reach and the reach only, with little acknowledgement to let employees be unrestrained when working through social media during their employer branding initiatives. Once again one can see that the following and submission to the rules of the algorithms are

considered being the far most important factor and thus being the meaning of employer branding via social media.

4.2 Interaction and speed

Interaction between the municipality and their followers is a theme that occurred both during the interviews along with the workshop given on employer branding via social media. For example, in the end of the workshop, the employees that attended got to post a fake Facebook post, as practice, to learn how to post and respond in accordance to the rules given. Both so that the algorithms would not limit the reach and to answer in accordance to the policy of the municipality. The interaction was also often discussed during the interviews for better or worse, something that is further elaborated on below.

They somewhat emphasized how one handles it in practice, that is the differences between the traditional advertisements and the material that ends up in social media is the open dialogue and that can have its pros and cons depending on what comes out of it. (Interviewee 4)

A recurring theme in our research was, as seen in the quote above, that many of the employees saw social media as a way to interact and keep an open dialogue with both the citizens and future employees. However, we found that there are two sides to a coin, where this interaction seemingly becomes a double-edged sword. On one hand, interaction via social media is looked upon as an opportunity, to communicate with both citizens and future as well as current employees. Where the interaction with citizens could be important to create a favourable image of the municipality since they then could potentially regard the municipality as a great place to work. On the other hand, this new possibility to interact has created new demands on employees to answer comments quickly and in a 'correct' way.

The view the employees had regarding employer branding through social media was mainly positive at least to begin with, where there was a somewhat positive underlying tone permeating throughout the descriptions given. The employees saw social media as a big opportunity to both reach people and interact with them, hence creating value for them. This is illustrated by the following quotes:

[...]but it is a little about that too, information going out and a dialogue with the citizens, a possibility for them to speak their minds simply, it becomes a channel like out, so there is a lot of value to go via social media to increase that possibility to get contact and so. (Interviewee 4)

I believe that we are good at dialogue in social medias as well [...] the dialogue there, that we want answers on everything that comes to us, all the questions or even when it is not a question, we try to meet as much as possible and that hopefully contributes to a more transparent picture of us, that we are open [...] our co-workers are on social medias but also our citizens and potential future employees, so of course we need to be there if we want to reach them. It becomes a great space for dialogue and get in contact with them. (Interviewee 7)

So two-way communication enables us to interact more with the citizens [...] that we yes but spread our brand, employer brand, in a whole different way and that is with shares and likes and all that, that enables more people to see us and get more knowledge about what is going on and what we do and so forth. So, it is very positive, richer with information and communication. (Interviewee 8)

Here, the employees evidently see social media channels as a great possibility to both communicate with citizens as well as reaching out to current and future employees. Where the view of the municipality among the citizens seems vital to be considered a 'good' organisation and therefore somewhere people could imagine themselves working. By this, the reputation of the municipality becomes important for the employer brand, both towards future employees, current employees and citizens in the municipality. There seems to be a strong belief that by being able to interact on for example Facebook the organisation can create value for both themselves and people outside of the organisation. Social media means that they have a new tool to reach and communicate further, hence creating value that they felt was not possible before. However, beneath all of these positive tones one could see an understanding of them 'needing' to be on social media since there is where everyone is, and that via social media is the only way to reach them. The most important thing is seemingly to be seen and reach as many people as possible, much like how the rules of the algorithms work as well. The positive view was met with a more contrary view too, where the 'downsides' of social media got

mentioned several times, such as it is creating a whole new type of work. This is exemplified by the following quotes:

This is a two-way communication. It is not an advertisement in a newspaper where we print our message except if there is a comment. Whether it is… What that comment is about we need to answer it. 'Thank you for giving a tip to your friend or thank you for your question or thank you for your input'. This is how it is… This is how we look at this… To understand that when we receive a comment, we answer… (Interviewee 1)

I also actually believe that this with Facebook for example, which is a possibility to a two-way communication with citizens and there it is, we do have requirements on us and we work a lot to meet comments that comes, it is a large device to handle, but those who work with it are really great at it […] it do require more resources from us to actually, yeah but have this dialogue. And I believe that it is very positive, very positive but of course this means a whole other type of work (Interviewee 8)

The advantage is that you reach many quickly, the disadvantage is that there are some trolls out there and they spread a lot of negativity and that is not only against us but generally in social media […] Nah, but I think that it can be a disadvantage since the image gets blackened by some who is just grumpy and tragic. (Interviewee 6)

In these quotes as well as during the workshop it is evident that something in the social media and technology around it speeds up the pace of employees' work. For example, there is a need to answers comments both quickly and in the 'right' and 'correct' way, which is looked upon as creating a whole new type of job. This also makes it even more important to have new kinds of rhetorical abilities to succeed in the employer branding via social media, something that might not have been needed to such a great extent before. Here, social media creates and controls these types of new jobs, where the speed and amount are decided by external parties. Also, this interaction is looked upon as users on for example Facebook being able to blacken the brand by being 'grumpy' and 'tragic', whereas the employer brand rather gets hurt than benefitted from it. This could be understood as social media being responsible for the brand of the municipality, where their channels can affect the image and reputation of the municipality through their users' opinions.

Here we can see that alongside with the social media having the perks of being a tool enabling two-way communication there is still a sense of it being a double-edged sword. On one side of the sword, the employees value employer branding through social media due to the opportunity to reach and interact with the citizens and future employees. However, on the other side of the sword there is this negative pressure that weighs heavy on the employees. A kind of pressure on them to answer fast, correct and seemingly in a way where they are treading on their toes. Therefore, there is one side being effectivity, reaching out to many people and enabling the organisation to brand themselves easily, the other side rather becomes the pressure, the fast pace and the feeling of not being enough. One could resemble this with a train in high speed, impossible to stop, where the interaction created via social media becomes the fuel of this train. Here, the logic of social media, that implies the speed of the employer branding rather than solely the algorithms, and the technology it is decides the pace of employer branding online.

The meaning of employer branding via social media becomes an acceptance of the rules of the game, where the rules is being on the high-speed train that social media is, since it is considered being of high importance in order to reach success. Employer branding via social media then becomes interaction as a double-edged sword, both creating beneficial and unbeneficial outcomes for the employees. Even though social media enables a better interaction and dialogue between the citizens and future employees however, the speed becomes sort of controlled by social media. This in turn controls how fast the municipality needs to work with employer branding.

Also, the double-edge sword of interaction revealed a pattern of anxious feelings around social media in the municipality, evident in the quote below:

> *And I believe that they see it as us having to be open and go in and answer and we should like, people say it all the time that we should dare to take the difficult debates. So that is what I am trying to do and so, that is what they have said. But then there are those rules and that is when I think people start to focus on these rules and then they do not dare to go in, and then they think like, yes, I do not know. (Interviewee 10)*

Here the rules of the algorithms once again impede the work with social media in the organisation, where people feel unsure to interact within the social media channels. The interaction becomes something that employees do not dare to do or try, even if encouraged to. The anxious feelings seem to take over, where the fright of doing wrong is stronger than the urge to try. These anxious feelings are a pattern found in both the interviews and during the workshop, which we will further elaborate on in the next section.

4.3 Anxious feelings

A recurring theme in our research was, as mentioned in the previous section, the employees showing anxious feelings around employer branding via social media. This was something that presented itself in various forms, both rather directly and some by implication. The more direct way of looking upon these anxious feelings is illustrated in the quotes below:

So you have to start crawling before you can walk and walk before you run and so there, but there is some anxious feelings in this whole organisation that I am not used to and I also think that I can see, even though they are forward, modern and so there is this anxious feeling and that is probably that you are afraid to be perceived as irresponsible.. That is what I think... So that is another thing that I react to since and I think maybe you should not... (Interviewee 2)

I think that we are a bit modest, we could have gone into it much, much more than what we actually do today. But I think that we do not have the resources and will to be as good in employer branding as we could have been. On the other hand, I believe that we are an attractive workplace, and therefore we might sometimes, rely on that when we would have needed to go out and be a bit more… innovative (Interviewee 6)

In these quotes one could see that there is an expression of anxious feeling permeating throughout the organisation amongst the employees. This feeling of anxiousness is what seemingly affects employees in a way that holds them back when working with employer branding through social media, since they seem to not dare disobeying the rules. As understood through the quotes, employees within the municipality are behaving in a somewhat modest way in order to not be perceived as irresponsible. This is most likely due to anxious feelings around

social media, hence affecting their employer branding initiatives. The meaning could be understood as the employees feeling anxious when working with employer branding via social media. Also, the employees understand the organisation as being modest when working with employer branding. This could potentially be caused by employer branding via social media being the following of certain rules and submission to the algorithms that decides these.

Meanwhile, there was seemingly a strong belief that employees are anxious about doing wrong and therefore holding back, where they are even perceived as requiring some sort of constant guidance in their work on social media. This is exemplified in the following quotes:

> *People want some type of guidance within this [employer branding via social media] so that you do not have to start from scratch and invent everything without getting any help with "yes what kind of post works and does it work to have this type of pictures or should we back something else, and how should you write to attract people so that they want to click the link" and that type of external monitoring and testing and like statistics and everything that gives us new knowledge. (Interviewee 7)*

> *I believe that there is a bigger fear of doing wrong and that we have considerably more eyes on us from different directions and we get very many comments and then often on different posts or so. Both positive and negative and since we are a public sector. (Interviewee 8)*

Even here the underlying feeling of anxiousness could be seen where employees in a sense wants to be guided in order for them to feel confident enough to work with employer branding via social media. These feelings are most likely due to the employees being afraid of doing wrong when posting online, which ends up in the feelings of needing to have rules to follow in order to perform employer branding via social media in the 'right' way. One reason behind why these anxious feelings emerge could be due to how things are performed within a municipality. The employees have another type of pressure of being perceived in a certain way and behaving accordingly. Therefore, these anxious feelings seemingly take over due to the employees wanting to fit into the organisation and please everyone by making the right decisions and behaving appropriately. Thus, having guidance and rules to give in to simplifies the employees working with employer branding via social media by always making sure the correct behaviour

and decisions are taken. By having these rules, the employees could be understood as being relieved from having pressure since if something goes wrong then you at least followed the rules, making you innocent and free from blame. Here the control of algorithms creates a sense of security since it helps to overcome these anxious feeling when posting on social media. However, the algorithms might also be the ones creating these anxious feelings, since there are rules to follow in order to perform employer branding via social media in the municipality in the 'right' way.

This might strengthen the feeling of there being a wrong way and therefore creating feelings of uncertainty around posting on for example Facebook. By this, it could be looked upon as these rules creating a somewhat 'fake' security, where they are perceived as helping but are rather limiting the work. The meaning of employer branding via social media becomes something that one feels a bit anxious about, but it also means that as long as there are rules, one can feel secure in following these rules. Meanwhile, the underlying meaning becomes the continuous following of the rules around the algorithms, where they create a somewhat 'fake' security to the employees. The following quote illustrates how these rules might rather work as limiting the work:

> *But then there are these rules as well and there is where I think people the, then they start to focus on these rules and so they do not dare to go in [on social media], and so they believe that it, yeah I do not know [...] but most of employees here might follow this 'yeah, but we post at seven and if you write like this...' like that, but they might want to make people dare to do more. (Interviewee 10)*

In this quote, it becomes rather clear that the rules of the algorithms somewhat govern whether employees dare to post on for example Facebook, where it rather limits the work than helps the employees.

At the same time, some of the employees saw the need of a change, where they seemingly find it important to overcome these anxious feelings and the certain way of for example posting things on social media. These feelings are illustrated in the quotes below:

> *Yes, I believe that it will come now like, we have worked pretty much like we always have done somewhat, and then we got these, yeah but we link to these*

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*job-ads and they are awful, no but, because they always begin with, you always
have to read this really long part about what the municipality does before you
come to that job you actually wanted to get to. (Interviewee 10)*

*[...].. but for me who looks at them think sometimes that yes now there is that
kind of picture again so people have to renew themselves in the way you choose
[...] yes but here we have funny group number 1 and then funny group number 2
comes and then 3 and then you think that well yes that... So, renewal amongst
which pictures to use is what I think you should work on... (Interviewee 9)*

*But here it is more like "ooh do we really dare..." do we really dare to take a photo
with a tree in it... [it] really reflects our culture of anxious feelings around social
media... when people experience us as not serious and that is like, whatever a
municipality post there will always be someone who writes 'do you really have
time to do these kinds of things?' 'is this what you are doing with our tax-money'
it does not matter what you do, so if you are afraid of them then you can be afraid
of... then you do not need to do anything at all... (Interviewee 2)*

Here one can see some rather clear opinions on the need of both renewing oneself as well as
not being afraid of posting on social media. These opinions could be looked upon as working
against the anxious feelings that permeates throughout the organisation, where they rather
believe that something needs to be changed. However, this also shows that there are a lot of
anxious feelings throughout the organisations, since there is such a strong belief that something
needs to be done to not subdue oneself to these feelings. These employees question the way of
performing employer branding via social media performed in the municipality, by calling
current ads that the municipality posts as 'awful' as well as calling for renewal and not being
afraid all the time. The organisation has ended up in a vicious circle, where it is the current way
or no way, while these employees see the need to break free from this circle and the following
of the rules. Also, these anxious feelings that employees experience could be seen as making it
harder for them to think outside the box, be innovative and creative in terms of their employer
branding initiatives taken. This in turn could be a reason that feeds in to this vicious circle
making it harder to break free from since the employees also affect each other. Here, the
meaning of employer branding via social media is once again the controlling by the algorithms
through the importance of following certain rules in the municipality that creates anxious
feelings.

4.4 Summary of findings

In this chapter we presented our findings from the case, where we found three meanings to employer branding through social media for the employees in the municipality.

Firstly, we found that employer branding via social media for the employees means the following of certain rules and that the social media and their algorithms seemingly controls the employees and their employer branding efforts.

Secondly, we found that employer branding via social media means the acceptance of the rules, where the rules is portrayed as being on a high-speed train, the high-speed train of social media, since it is considered being of high importance to reach success. Here, employer branding via social media means interaction as a double-edged sword where both positive and negative outcomes are created for the employees.

Lastly, we found that employer branding via social media generates anxious feelings among the employees, due to them often focusing on the rules created around the algorithms and by this feeling anxious about doing 'wrong'. Also, the meaning of this anxiousness becomes the fact that people are potentially afraid to be creative as well, due to not wanting to do 'wrong'.

However, all these meanings tied back to the same meaning, namely that the employer branding via social media becomes the following of certain rules created around the algorithms. These rules make the employees want to break free as well as feeling secure due to them, they also speed up the work of interaction on social media and causes the anxious feelings around the use of it. Therefore, we found the underlying meaning to most often be about the rules around the algorithms and how they control much of the work with employer branding via social media in the municipality.

5. Discussion

5.1 Social media as an employer branding strategy:

From our analysis we can see that the employees in the municipality found social media, when working with employer branding, as important, which is something that seemingly permeated throughout the organisation. This is in accordance to Backhaus (2016) and Girard et al., (2013), who argues that social media is in fact an important part of employer branding which also is in alignment with our findings. One example, from the analysis, that shows the importance of social media is the fact that the municipality works strategically with employer branding through specifically social media. This, by having for example the workshop we attended and a clear strategy of how it should be performed. They have a strategic thought behind their efforts when it comes to educating the employees on how to perform employer branding via social media to achieve the furthest reach in their channels. However, some authors state that there is sometimes no strategic thought behind the use of social media in employer branding and that it is more the following of fashion and a matter of performing it for the sake of it (Backhaus, 2004; Grzesiuk & Wawer, 2018). Our findings somewhat contradict this, since it is evident that the municipality do in fact have a clear strategy and is not only following a fashion when working with social media in employer branding. This, due to their strategies and thought behind their employer branding initiatives through social media. One example of this contradiction to the literature is that the municipality works strategically with testing the algorithms through external environment monitoring. This, results in the municipality developing rules around the algorithms that needs to be followed when working with employer branding via social media and to get the furthest reach there and be efficient.

Additionally, we could also see through our analysis that social media, when working with employer branding, is looked upon as an opportunity to interact with people in new ways which also enables a new tool for the employees to communicate. This is in alignment with what Correia and Medina (2014) claims, that social media is commonly used within organizations in order for them to maximize and streamline all their communication, both their direct and interactive one. This can be further strengthened through our analysis where we found that there was a strong belief amongst the employees that by being able to interact on for example Facebook, the municipality could create value for themselves as well as for the people outside their organisation. Moreover, De Smet et al., (2016) states that companies are seen as given a

genuine opportunity to recruit future employees by using different digital tools. This was also something that was found through our analysis where the municipality evidently cared to perform employer branding through social media by making use of it as a tool but also in the "correct" way. This could be seen for example, where in order for them to get the furthest reach, the municipality has developed rules around the algorithms to make the most of the opportunity the social media provides them with. By understanding and letting the digital tool of social media control them in what way to perform employer branding, the municipality is in the belief that it works in their favour. This, due to the aforementioned factors such as better interaction and better opportunities in recruiting future employees. Therefore, this is in alignment and strengthens what De Smet et al., (2016) states, that social media as a digital tool brings opportunities for the municipality.

5.2 Social media as a technologized external bureaucratization of employer branding

Furthermore, a more critical stand towards social media is argued by Fuchs (2017) and Van Dijck (2013) who states that social media and their algorithms both owns and controls much of the processes online. This is aligned with our analysis and can be seen throughout, where an underlying factor is the algorithms' control of the employer branding efforts taken through social media. One example of this is all the rules that is developed and applied to the work of employer branding through specifically social media, where for example having a text on a picture, that goes against one of the rules, is considered being 'shit'. In our analysis there seems to be a perception of there not being any other way than following the rules that the municipality has set up. This, since it is clear that there is a great focus on the algorithms and the following of the rules around them. Our findings show us the control by the algorithms that Van Dijck (2013) in fact states is evident in many processes online. This, since there is such a great focus on the reactions of the algorithms to get the furthest reach on Facebook. Additionally, since there are many rules to follow on social media in the municipality, we found it to have many similarities to a bureaucracy. A bureaucracy is characterized by standardisation and routine, where the following of rules is considered to be of great importance (Barker, 1993; Kärreman & Rennstam, 2012). In the municipality, the following of rules and a somewhat standardisation of their efforts is rather evident with how they for example post online. Also, for instance, the

main focus of the workshop was on the rules and how the algorithms changed, and employees regarding this as important permeated throughout the interviews as well. This also shows and strengthens Van Dijck (2013) and Fuchs (2017) arguments that the algorithms do in fact control the processes online since in the municipality and their employer branding work is mainly controlled and regulated by the social media and the algorithms built around it.

Moreover, through our analysis we also found that social media speeds up the pace of employees work where an example of this is the need for them to answer comments both quickly and "correctly", creating a new type of job. This could be regarded as a sort of technical control that is described as when technology controls employees and their work, for example by deciding the work tasks that needs to be performed (Barker, 1993; Edwards, 1996; Eriksson-Zetterquist et al., 2011; Kärreman & Rennstam, 2012). Here, the technology controls the pace of the work of employer branding via social media as well as how it should be conducted. The algorithms controls much of the work with social media in the municipality due to the technical control of it. Here, the speed is controlled by how the external technology, social media, works and favours certain efforts online, something that the municipality follows to a rather great extent.

However, the bureaucracy can also work as a sort of control, built on the rules that guides the employees in their work (Barker, 1993; Kärreman & Rennstam, 2012). The municipality has created rules that controls the employees and their employer branding efforts on social media to get the furthest reach and be more effective in their efforts. Therefore, we can see a type of bureaucratic control in our analysis through the following of the rules by the algorithms, where they are regarded as highly important to follow in order to reach success. This makes it evident that there is some sort of external bureaucratic control from social media in the employer branding work in the municipality. This, since these algorithms have generated certain rules to follow and are owned by external parties hence making the rules controlled by external parties as well; making the bureaucratization external. Here, due to social media, the municipality's employer branding becomes a technologized external bureaucratization, where the technology of social media externally controls the municipality with certain rules.

With this external bureaucratization, we also found in accordance to Adler and Borys (1996) there to be two sides on how this bureaucratization is regarded by the employees, as either enabling or coercive. On the enabling, more positive, side we found many employees to regard

the rules as an effective way to perform their employer branding on social media. This, since they can reach further with clear steps, much in accordance to what we presented earlier. Adler and Borys (1996) states that the ones who regards the bureaucracy as something positive often looks upon it as guidance and clarification of responsibilities. This is also aligned with what we found, where some employees felt that the rules gave them a sort of safety that potentially also could save them from blame if something goes wrong. Additionally, this is also something that Weaver (1986) states that the bureaucracy preferably works to free from blame, namely blame-aversion which is in accordance to our findings. Therefore, in the municipality one could understand the employees as being somewhat relieved of pressure, since if something goes wrong in their employer branding work on social media, at least they followed the rules and by this becomes free from blame. Therefore, the external bureaucratization via social media on the one hand works in an enabling way for the municipality in their employer branding efforts.

The other side, the more coercive one, claims that the bureaucracy fosters dissatisfaction, stifles creativity and demotivate employees (Adler & Borys, 1996). This view is evident in our analysis through the questioning of how things are as well as the will to break free from the rules around the algorithms. There are seemingly some efforts made in an attempt to be creative in the organisation, such as wanting to create an own app for the municipality. This creative effort is however stifled by the rules of the algorithms, since the work around them are regarded as the main factor to be followed. Most of the efforts to go against the rules and break free from them is typically answered with low support since deviant ideas are not favoured due to, yet again, the rules around the algorithms. This is also much in accordance to Van Dijck's (2013) statement of social media and their algorithms controlling most of the society online. In this case, it might work unfavourably towards innovative and creative ideas due to the external bureaucratization. The external bureaucratization could be the answer to why innovation and new ideas are in a way not taken into account in the municipality when working with employer branding through social media. This, since it goes against the algorithms and their control on what is considered working, which also further strengthens Van Dijcks (2013) statement.

Furthermore, this more coercive side of the external bureaucratization seemingly causes both a will to break free from the rules as well as employees developing anxious feelings. By stifling the more creative and innovative efforts, the municipality might demotivate the employees that wants to break free, since their 'deviant' ideas are not met with any support. This has ended up in a somewhat vicious circle of bureaucratization, where it is the rules way or no way, where

opinions on how for example posts should be designed is seemingly not regarded. However, there are employees that want to break free from these rules of the bureaucracy that the social media has become, and this could be looked upon as them having a more negative view on this bureaucratization that social media might contribute to.

In addition to this, we could also see that the employees working with employer branding through social media portrays somewhat anxious feelings, where the rules the external bureaucratization causes hold them back and where they do not dare to go against them. Haider and Sundin (2017) alongside Van Dijck (2013) states that the algorithms control large parts of society online, where certain behaviour gets rewarded with further reach. This view of the algorithms is evident in our analysis as well, where no one really dares to go against the rules made around the algorithms and get anxious when working around them. In the municipality they have also found out what 'works' and not online, where they constantly strive to follow how the algorithms react to for example certain posts to get further reach on their channels. Additionally, this could also be in accordance to what Fuchs (2017) argues, that some organizations are more promoted and favoured than others in terms of power to be heard, seen and read online. The municipality finds themselves reaching further and gaining more power online by following the rules around the algorithms, which could be an explanation to why they choose to follow the rules of the external bureaucratization so carefully.

With this said, our findings show that the meaning of social media becomes an external bureaucratization of employer branding efforts, that is also based on a form of technical control. This, since it is evident through our discussion that the municipality has created rules that controls the employees and their employer branding work through social media. These rules are something that has been developed around the algorithms in an effort to be effective and get the furthest reach in their channels on social media, resulting in them being regarded as highly important to follow. Therefore, it can be said that it is the algorithms that controls the municipality's work with employer branding through specifically social media which in turn is what could be seen as creating this external bureaucratization. Commonly there is a clear chain of command and division of labour in bureaucracies (Waters & Waters, 2015) however, in this case it is the social media channels that controls by their algorithms, putting them on top of this potential chain. Everything is somewhat controlled by the algorithms on social media, what employees can do, are allowed to do and how they feel about employer branding via social media. Here, it is evident that the rules of the algorithms are the ones who decides these feelings

and actions, where both employees and managers are affected by them to a greater or lesser extent.

Due to this standardization of employer branding efforts via social media, one can see clear evidence on a bureaucratization where the rules and the following of these to get the greatest reach are regarded as the most important factor for success and effectivity. However, we also found a view of the rules stifling creativity, where other social media efforts are often not looked upon as relevant or supported, which might result in what researchers claim to be a de-motivation of the employees that a bureaucracy cause. However, the meaning of employer branding via social media for the employees in the municipality is that social media becomes an external bureaucratization of employer branding efforts. These findings also awakens a question of the more broad consequences that this external bureaucratization might cause when looking upon value creation and destruction.

5.3 Employer branding via social media as value-destructive?

The municipality seemingly believes that they are able to create value through their strategic efforts on social media, by allowing for example interaction and reaching more people. The external bureaucratization is regarded as enabling them to create value in their employer branding efforts, since they can work with it in an effective way. However, value can be understood in different ways if looking upon the literature. Boltanski and Thévenot (2006) states that there are different worlds that understands and creates value in their own way, where Bertilsson and Rennstam (2018) integrated this framework to the field of branding. One of these worlds is the civic world, where value is created by contributing to the common good (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006) something that most likely would be of value for a municipality. This is probably the value-world in which most organisations in the public sector want to be and act within. Another world is the world of fame, where you measure value by the amount of contacts and how well known you are to others (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006). With this external bureaucratization of employer branding through social media, one can wonder in what value-world the municipality end up in their efforts. Since there is such a strict following of rules that the social media's algorithms cause, this external bureaucratization might have a broader consequence to the creation of value for the municipality.

In our analysis and discussion, we found in alignment to Boltanski and Thévenot, (2006) arguments on 'fame', since there is a large focus in the municipality on reach, almost the sole focus, with likes and shares on for example Facebook. There is seemingly a hunt for some sort of fame rather than contributing to the common good on social media, where the external bureaucratization of employer branding might have lured employees into this 'hunt'. By performing employer branding via social media, the municipality seems to somewhat end up in the world of fame when looking upon value, where the focus is on reaching far and getting seen by more people by following certain rules. Social media is regarded as a tool that enables effectivity in their important work in the civic world but ends up in them rather creating value in the world of fame. Here, the control by the algorithms and the external bureaucratization that it causes creates value that might not be desirable for a municipality, where the control lures them in the value regime of social media, which could be understood as the world of fame. Therefore, the rules of the algorithms could somewhat work value-destructive in a sense, since they produce value that might affect the municipality's true agenda of driving society forward, in an unfavourable way. This is also in accordance to Rennstam (2013) who argues that when public organisations reduce the complexity of their problems through branding efforts, they risk losing certain democratic values, such as transparency. Here, the hunt for further reach and more 'fame' lures the municipality into the 'wrong' value-world, where likes and shares become or is regarded as the most important factor for success.

Moreover, the hunt for fame through employer branding on social media might risk the important values of the municipality, where the reach becomes the most important factor and not for example being transparent if this affects the reach in a negative way. The focus on the algorithms and the reach might compromise the true purpose of the municipality, making their employer branding efforts work unfavourably for them. This could potentially result in the risk of losing track of the civic value, contributing to the common good that commonly guide municipalities and their organisations. This could potentially be a broader problem and consequence for the public sector, where it is important to remain in the civic world when acting on social media and not get 'lured' into the hunt for fame.

With this said, our findings show that social media becomes an external bureaucratization of employer branding efforts that causes the municipality's true purpose to be lost in the hunt for fame. Here, the external bureaucratization tends to lead the municipality into the world of fame

where value is measured by how well known you are which result in broader consequences since the municipality loses track due to focusing on fame rather than common good. This can also have a broader implication than only in the municipality studied, since this value-creation could be occurring in other parts of the public sector as well. Therefore, these broader consequences might be of great importance for the public sector to keep in consideration for the future when working with employer branding via social media.

6. Conclusion

The aim of this study was to research how employees within a municipality make sense of employer branding via social media and how this creates and potentially consumes positive aspects such as effectivity and transparency for the organisation. Where we more specifically wanted to answer the following question:

- *What is the meaning of employer branding via social media for employees within the public sector?*

During the process of answering our research question, we uncovered several different meanings of employer branding via social media but found that they were all connected to one specific meaning: that social media becomes a, technologized, external bureaucratization of employer branding efforts. This was uncovered since the underlying factor that came across during our investigation was the social media and their control through their algorithms. Due to this, the municipality has created rules that controls the employees and their employer branding work through social media where the rules have been created around the algorithms. These rules are something the municipality considers being effective and highly important and therefore vital to follow, where the main objective behind this is for them to get the furthest reach on social media.

However, we found other meanings in our analysis that answered our research question. These meanings were how the employer branding work on social media is controlled by algorithms, how this might create anxious feelings as well as how interaction means both higher speed and possibilities. Although, we uncovered different meanings they all came back to the control of the algorithms on social media channels, and how the rules around these algorithms affected the anxious feelings and the interaction for example. By this, the meaning as whole becomes the external bureaucratization of the employer branding work on social media, where the rules of the algorithms are considered very important to follow in order to reach success. This bureaucratization could also be looked upon from two different perspective, one positive and one more negative side. On a positive note, this bureaucratization enables the municipality to be effective and get furthest reach online; reaching out to more people in their channels. On a more negative note, this bureaucratization seemingly stifles some creativity in the municipality,

where it is the rules way or no way, which could potentially work as a de-motivator for employees now or in the future. By this, it is important to recognise both the up- and downsides of the external bureaucratization that the social media becomes when working with employer branding. Therefore, the answer to our research question becomes: the meaning of social media for employees within the municipality is that means an external bureaucratization of employer branding efforts.

Furthermore, a broader meaning of this external bureaucratization could be its more value-destructive side since there seems to be a hunt for fame rather than contributing to the common good. This external bureaucratization could be understood as having lured employees into the world of fame due to them hunting to be more well known, where the main purpose is on reaching far and be seen by many people on social media by following rules. Therefore, it could be said that social media becomes an external bureaucratization of employer branding efforts where the hunt for fame makes the municipality lose their true purpose. This leads them into the world of fame and distant from their true purpose of contributing to the common good.

Our study contributes to and enriches the current studies on employer branding efforts via social media. This, since we researched the effects of social media on employer branding and found out what it means to employees in a municipality. Also, we used the bureaucracy and control literature as tools to reach our purpose, where they become a part of the contribution to employer branding via social media literature. Our findings could aid the public sector alongside with other organisations as well in determining what role they want social media to play in their employer branding efforts.

7. Future Research

Overall, our research contributes with an in-depth and enriched understanding on employer branding efforts via social media. However, since this research is limited in scope there are several aspects that remain unchartered and therefore it is important to consider how this subject can be further researched on.

Firstly, our discovery on how the social media externally bureaucratize the employer branding efforts in an organisation calls for further research. For example, it would be interesting to look further into the effects of this bureaucratization in organisations and how it might affect the creativity and effectivity more broadly. More generally, it is an interesting subject on the effects of social media and their algorithms, and overall it would be an interesting topic to research further due to social media affecting our lives to a greater extent each day. Since employer branding is considered as rather important for organisations to perform, it would be interesting to further investigate how this bureaucratization via social media takes place.

Secondly, we see a need for more research on employer branding via social media as a whole. This, since we discovered several interesting aspects that we were not able to use in our study, for example on differences between the private and public sector, and how their challenges might be different. Here, the discussion of value and value-worlds might be interesting to look further into, and how this might differentiate between the private and public sector. Overall this subject is rather uncharted, due to social media in employer branding being a rather new phenomenon, and therefore we see it as important to further investigate on it.

Thirdly, we found more specific aspects that would be interesting to look further into. One of these aspects is one of our conclusions on the different value-worlds and how these get affected by how the municipality works with social media in their employer branding efforts. We would find it interesting to further investigate and elaborate on how social media might become more about the 'fame' than the common good in the public sector, since there are not many studies made other than ours on this topic. Also, because this hunt to be more 'well-known' ends up in the world of fame rather than the civic-world due to wanting to get the furthest reach and this might be interesting to look further into since it might become a larger problem in the future.

Lastly, we found that the pace of employer branding is speeded up due to social media, where new types of work-roles has been created due to it. This is another more specific topic that would be worthwhile to look in to, since it would be interesting to get a further understanding on the effects of this speed in employer branding. We found this interaction and speed to almost be compulsory and therefore it might be interesting to look further into these matters and how for example employees make meaning of them.

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