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Situational brand ambassadorship - a study of how part-time employees make sense of themselves as brand ambassadors

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Abstract

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The aim of this research is to understand and unpack the phenomenon of brand ambassadorship by examining the sensemaking and actualization as well as the consequences of it. The study adopts an employee-perspective on brand ambassadorship to scrutinize the phenomenon in terms of what is here referred to as 'situational' brand ambassadorship. The employee-perspective has been often neglected in previous research. The theoretical framework of the study relies on theories of sensemaking and identity as well as concepts of control, such as normative and brand-centred control. The empirical material of the study was collected via interviews with part-time employees working in different service industries with publicly recognized multinational brands. Applying a social constructivist approach to brand ambassadorship, three themes, namely situational actualization of brand ambassadorship, identity negotiation, and consequences of brand ambassadorship were conveyed to be discussed further in the analysis. The thesis concludes that the actualization of brand ambassadorship is situational and enacted through employees' sensemaking of belief-based, social expectations. In addition, the employees were seen to negotiate and occasionally compromise their identity in relation to brand ambassadorship. Finally, the thesis proposed situational brand ambassadorship and the sensemaking of it to have possible positive and negative consequences for the part-time employees. Consequences for the organizations and for example human resource management were also proposed and discussed.

Keyword: brand ambassador, employee ambassador, ambassadorship, sensemaking, identity, normative control, brand-centred control, situation

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Table of content

Acknowledgements	3
1. Introduction.....	4
Critical approach to brand ambassadorship	5
1.1 Purpose, aim and research questions.....	7
1.2 Delimitations	7
1.3 Disposition	8
2. Literature review	9
2.1 Employees as ambassadors	9
2.2 Brand ambassadorship.....	10
2.3 Reflections.....	13
3. Theoretical framework.....	14
3.1 Sensemaking.....	14
3.1.1 Identity construction.....	16
3.2 Control.....	17
3.3 Reflections.....	19
4. Methodology	21
4.1 Philosophical grounding.....	21
4.2 Research method	22
4.2.1 Access and sample	22
4.2.2 Preparing for the interviews	25
4.2.3 Conducting the interviews.....	26
4.2.4 The analytical process	27
4.2.5 Ethical considerations	28
5. Analysis.....	31
5.1 The situational actualisation of brand ambassadorship.....	31
5.1.1 The employees' relation to the brand.....	32
5.1.2 Belief-based sensemaking	34
5.1.3 Synthesis of the situational actualisation of brand ambassadorship	36
5.2 Negotiating the identity	37
5.2.1 Shifting through various identities	37
5.2.2 Coping with inconsistencies.....	41
5.2.3 Synthesis of the sensemaking of the identity	44

5.3	Consequences of sensemaking and actualization of situational brand ambassadorship	44
5.3.1	Being in control	44
5.3.2	Being controlled	47
5.3.3	Synthesis of the consequences	50
6.	Discussion and conclusions	51
6.1	Discussion and conclusions	51
6.1.1	Main findings	51
6.1.2	Discussion	52
6.1.3	Further research.....	55
	References.....	56
	Appendix 1: Interview Guide.....	62

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1. Introduction

Branding has spread to human resource management as a way of attracting employees. An attractive brand is a competitive advantage that helps to recruit and retain current and future employees (Figurska & Matuska, 2013). Furthermore, the role of brands is considered to be much more than a visual identity such as a logo or a name, as the communicative power of brands stretches to psychological associations produced in the minds of those acquainted with the brand (Kylander & Stone, 2012). In other words, the focus on corporate branding has shifted from products to using meaning creation and sensemaking as a tool for connecting identities and sharing culture (Kornberger 2010; Moor 2007), inside and outside the organisation. Brand meanings are not owned by anyone, but rely heavily on the interpretations that both external and internal audiences make (Kornberger, 2010). Brands are acting as an interface where these perceptions and interpretations of the organisation meet. Consequently, as meaning can be assigned to the brand by anyone aware of it, research has been interested in co-creation of the brand. For example, customers are suggested to bring added value to the brand with their communicative actions (Cova, Pace & Skålen, 2015).

In addition to customers, recently the research on both strategic communication and corporate branding has introduced employees as vital actors representing the organisation as well as co-creating the brand through their communicative efforts. Narrations of the employees living the brand or being a brand ambassador has gained interest in various research (Cheney et al., 2011; Endissat, Kärreman & Noppene 2017; Cushen 2009; Heide & Simonsson, 2011; Ind 2007; Andersson, 2019). This concept is referred to as ambassadorship or brand ambassadorship. Researchers have presented different stances on the desire to put the employees and their identities to use through the brand. Ind (2007) suggests that most people want to discover meaning in their work life and identify with the brand they are working for. Especially at service sectors, the employees are described, in an idealized situation, to internalize the brand and bring it to life through their work and

communication, which has claimed to be resulting in higher commitment and work satisfaction (Punjaisri & Wilson, 2011).

Heide & Simonsson (2011) have stated that more research should be done from an employee perspective to uncover the diverse role of the employees as communicators. Furthermore, Andersson (2020) argues that ambassadorship has often been researched from a management-focused view that understates the constitutive character of employees' communication. However, Andersson's (2020) research implies an assumption that workforce in the organisation would be ambassadors, when he examines the employees' experiences regarding this role that is assumed employees to have. What could be argued is that assuming employees are ambassadors, in other words representatives of the organisation, is after all a managerial perspective that disregards the employees' own view of the phenomenon. Instead of taking for granted that ambassadorship is enacted when working for an organisation, this thesis tries to critically examine the construction and actualisation of situations in which employees could act as brand ambassadors in their everyday life, both inside and outside the workplace. In other words, the thesis adopts a perspective that will be referred to as 'situational' brand ambassadorship.

Critical approach to brand ambassadorship

This thesis contributes to the critical stream of research on brand ambassadorship. Within strategic communication, this stream is relatively scarce and constrained. Critical research maintains that employees are even encouraged to blur the boundaries between work and private life through revealing more of their private selves at work (Fleming & Sturdy, 2009). Involving the employees in branding can also be portrayed as exploitation affecting the autonomy and subjectivity of the employees, (Cushen, 2009; Mumby, 2016), something that Cushen (2009) describes as a "a normative step too far" (p. 102). While brands can act as platforms of connecting identities, on the contrary, building one's identity through a brand that is undesirable or viewed negatively by others can lead to social rejection or resistance (Shukla, 2016; Müller, 2017). If employees feel stigmatized or judged through the organisation's brand, this might affect them significantly on both at work and in their private lives (Kärreman & Rylander, 2008). As Andersson (2019) has also suggested, discussion about the problematic aspects of employee ambassadorship is needed.

As employees are underlined to communicate the brand values, the concept of organisational identity has been stretched to sometimes include the employees' own identities as well. Discussing and managing the employees' identities has also been researched through new concepts of control (e.g. Fleming & Sturdy, 2009; Müller, 2017). In addition to branding shifting from products to people, management control has shifted from using bureaucratic mechanisms or policies towards knowledge work and normative control, meaning the employees are controlled through for example desired attitudes or values (Fleming & Sturdy, 2009; Frenkel et al., 1995).

While the focus on organisations has recently been on employees, meaning and identities, the way of working itself has also changed. Due to information technology and globalization the nature of business has changed, so that knowledge and information is accessible to all and the demands regarding employment relationships have grown (Ind, 2007). Sennett (1998) has argued that previously seen characteristics of work, such as stability and predictability have changed as short-time work, flexibility and networking have become mundane elements of work life. Whereas previously work provided safety and sense of identity, today's more shattered work life might cause clashes in identity work as it is common that employees are not engaged in one organisation for several years (Sennett, 1998).

Post-bureaucracy might be described as flexible or adaptive (e.g. Sennett, 1998; Alvesson & Thompson, 2006). George Ritzer (2018), however, introduces a different view of organizational bureaucracy, McDonaldization, where principles of fast food companies such as efficiency, calculability, predictability, and control reign the society and contemporary lifestyle. According to Ritzer (2018), the standardized model of McDonaldized work has been globalized and copied by many organisations, such as fast fashion and retail, as well as by salespeople or customer service representatives. This creates standardised, bureaucratic occupations where employees are regulated for instance on how they should look, interact, or think. The question raises on how part-time employees working for the allegedly standardised organisations navigate and make sense of their position and identity in relation to brand ambassadorship and how brand ambassadorship is actualised.

1.1 Purpose, aim and research questions

The aim of this thesis is to unpack the phenomenon of brand ambassadorship by providing new insights from the employees' point of view. The thesis contributes to research by examining the neglected employee perspective and this way also broadens the understanding of employees' communicative role. The aim of the thesis will be researched through answering the following research questions:

- How is brand ambassadorship actualised in part-time employees' everyday life?
- How do part-time employees make sense of their identity in relation to brand ambassadorship?
- What are the consequences of the sensemaking and actualisation of brand ambassadorship in part-time employees' everyday life?

The research strategy focuses on understanding the sensemaking processes of part-time employees working at the service sector of a globally operating, publicly recognized brand. As Heide and Simonsson (2011) explain, the brand is noticeably produced in interaction and communication between the personnel and customers, employees in service sector were chosen as the population that was considered to match the research aim. Further explanation of and argumentation for the research methods and criteria for the interviewees is found in Chapter 4.

In addition, the thesis will give a practical contribution by examining the consequences of employees' sensemaking of brand ambassadorship. For organizations, the recognition and diverse viewpoints of brand ambassadorship could help communication managers to understand and develop organizational communication with reference to employee branding.

1.2 Delimitations

As the empirical material is gathered from 11 Finnish employees working at multinational companies in the Nordics, the thesis gives insights to the Finnish as well as Nordic working culture. However, the purpose of this study is not to observe the organisations nor the brands as such, but the employees' understanding, experiences and relation to the brand

while working in these organisations and possibly representing them. Therefore, the thesis only focuses on the employee perspectives of the phenomenon at hand. In addition, what needs to be underlined is that the thesis has a limited sample of Finnish employees, and therefore cultural differences on the findings regarding the research of the phenomenon might apply.

1.3 Disposition

The thesis will be comprised of the following sections: Firstly, the introduction chapter introduces the topic and focus of the research, as well as the purpose statement with the aim and research questions. The outlook on previous research will discuss literature on ambassadorship and brand ambassadorship. The study's theoretical framework is combining sensemaking theory and theories of control, which will be presented in the third chapter. Further, the fourth chapter will describe the methodology and research design, followed by the analysis of empirical data in chapter 5. Lastly, the sixth chapter of the thesis includes the discussion and conclusion as well as gives suggestions for further research.

2. Literature review

2.1 Employees as ambassadors

The discipline of strategic communication is influenced by many strands of research (Falkheimer & Heide, 2018). Consequently, the phenomenon of employee ambassadorship is portrayed by researchers with different interests, including corporate communications, branding or for example human resource management. As focus of strategic communication has previously been given to leadership and communication professionals, researchers have lately underlined how employees' interpretations and communicative action constitutes organisations (Heide & Simonsson, 2011; Andersson, 2020; Frandsen & Johanssen, 2011). Employees are considered as active sensemakers that contribute to corporate communication internally and externally (Ravazzani, 2016).

Even though employees' complex role regarding communication has been noticed, ambassadorship has often been portrayed from a management point of view. The focal point has been to show the managers the benefits of employees as active communicators and ambassadors for the corporate messages (Andersson, 2019; Heide & Simonsson, 2011). The term ambassadorship has been described as for example "how employees should behave when interacting with external stakeholders" (Andersson, 2019, p. 704). However, there are many closely related terms such as employee advocacy or co-creation of the organisational communication or brand that have been used also to describe the position employees hold regarding delivering the corporate messages (e.g. Heide & Simonsson, 2011; Walden & Kingsley Westerman, 2018). According to Ind (2007), we uncover the organisational reality through the organisation's actions, communication, and employee behaviour. When these signals are in line with our experiences with the company, we tend to trust or even become an advocate, in other words, an ambassador for the organisation and this way the brand.

Furthermore, Andersson (2020) has called for a perspective shift to how employees have mostly been treated as recipients of corporate communication, instead of further

researching their perspective and support them from bottom up. Employees should not be seen or treated as static actors, as they can actively engage and communicate inside and outside the organisation and build its brand in multiple ways, also as private citizens (Frandsen & Johansen, 2011; Andersson, 2020). In addition, Frandsen and Johansen (2011) and Dreher (2014) have highlighted that employees also actively seek information from the media, use social media and participate in conversations while interpreting messages based on their own experiences, whether the management want them to do so or not.

2.2 Brand ambassadorship

Through their communication and interaction with the stakeholders, the employees are seen to create value especially for the organisation's intangible assets, such as the brand and reputation (Heide et al., 2018). According to Moor (2007), the growing service economy lead to managerial efforts to use employees as an extension of the brand. Employee training and conduct meant that customer contacts ensuring behavioural or fixed qualities of employees, such as behaviour or beauty, can be used as a communicative opportunity to enhance the brand equity (Moor, 2007). Internal branding and employee branding have gained attention as a way of increasing the credibility of the corporate brand, as brand messages are widely delivered by the employees (Nguyen, Hemsley-Brown & Melewar, 2016).

From the often-seen managerial perspective, ambassadorship has been explained as the employees aligning their identity with the organisational identity and this way the employees further representing the organisation (Heide et al., 2018). The idea of employees embodying the organisational identity has been both praised and criticized. For example, Cornelissen (2002) has criticized the whole concept of organisational identity to be urging employees to commit to predetermined collective feelings or thoughts. According to her, organisational identity is a controversial metaphor created from a managerialist viewpoint to accomplish corporate goals.

Identity has been widely discussed in branding literature as well. To create an iconic brand, Holt (2004) suggests that the brand should be deeply rooted in the audience's desires and anxieties, by appealing to cultural myths that are present in the society.

According to Holt (2004), the organisation should gain an understanding of the identity projects of the followers and insiders of the brand and the culture, in other words how the existing and potential customers think and behave in their world. In corporate branding, many authors have recognized the phenomenon of brands helping to build identities, when consumers appreciate the values that one brand expresses to carry and prefer one brand over another (Belk, 2016). Sometimes this leads to consumers taking on roles as co-creators of the brand value, acting as enthusiasts for the brand. For example, Cova, Pace & Skålen (2015) have introduced a co-creation concept of the brand value, where consumers engage in public, voluntary and unpaid activities to stimulate their own emotional attachment to the brand and share it forward.

However, corporate branding is not only limited to consumers, but to all the stakeholders, including the employees of the organisation. As interest has growingly been in harnessing employees to further communicate the brand, understanding the employees' identity projects seems inevitable as well. Though brands can help to build and communicate one's identity with desired identity groups, brands can also be avoided to separate oneself from certain identity groups or values believed the brand embodies. Representing or using a product of an unfavourable brand can cause rejection in social interactions with psychological or physical consequences (Shukla, 2016). From a managerial point of view, it is often described desirable if the employees act as active communicators to support the corporate brand (Roper, 2016). For this reason, employees' possible unwillingness to fulfil narratives of living the brand or act as a brand ambassador might be highly disappointing.

Monica Müller (2017) researched how the strong corporate culture and internal branding at IKEA affects the employees. In her research, she concluded that the employees reacted to brand ambassadorship in different ways, varying from being proud of the brand to resistance of representing it, both at the workplace as well as in their private lives. However, according to Müller, IKEA is known for its strong internal branding and often viewed positively by external audiences. This means the results might vary within different organisations or with different populations of interviewees. In addition to Müller's research, Andersson (2019) has investigated ambassadorship from the employee point of view. He has concluded that employees relate their persona to the imagined expectations of external audiences such as stakeholders as well as internal audiences such as colleagues

and managers. Some of the employees embrace the ambassadorship whereas in certain circumstances, especially during crises and scandals, being an ambassador was experienced as undesired. Andersson (2019) also concluded that brand ambassadorship caused difficulties in setting boundaries on representing the brand in private life.

The perception of a brand is to a great extent produced in interactions between personnel and customers (Heide & Simonsson, 2011). This means that especially employees interacting with customers have a unique position in meaning creation and this way in constructing and communicating the brand. Building relationships through the brand both internally and externally can offer various opportunities for the organisation, among others to differentiate themselves from competitors (Devlin & Azhar, 2004). Magnusson (2014) has researched brand ambassadorship of seasonal employees in amusement parks, concluding that with well-known amusement parks such as Disney World or Copenhagen Tivoli that are famous for their brand, the contribution of front-line service employees becomes crucial for the brand experience. However, due to the seasonal form of work and employee turnover, building relationships with the employees or maintaining commitment was discovered more challenging for the management.

Many companies rely on branded experiences produced by the employees' action, knowledge and skills that are aligned with the brand (Wheeler et al., 2006; Sirianni et al., 2013), which can explain why human resource management has recently focused on employees' role on communicating the brand further. Branding has spread to human resource management and recruiting, as organisations might aim to attract employees that willingly associate themselves with the brand by aligning their identity or lifestyle with it (Endissat, Kärreman & Noppeney, 2017). Organisations advertise possibilities for employees to build a desired identity, such as working for a cool organisation, having a meaningful profession or even having a job title of a sandwich artist or a barista that boost the desired sense of self or positive identity project that the organisation offers (Endissat, Kärreman & Noppeney, 2017).

However, with great power comes great responsibility. When the responsibility of communication or representing the brand is spread out to for example the employees and the HR department, it can become difficult to pinpoint who is eventually in control of the brand. Ind (2007) argues, that the brand should not be "a responsibility of someone with

a narrow perspective”, such as communication or brand manager, if it is supposed to be lived by everyone in the organisation. However, from the employees’ point of view, being an ambassador can create problematic consequences regarding work-life balance or identity work (Andersson, 2020). According to Andersson (2019), many problematic aspects of brand ambassadorship are often overlooked or neglected in research. As the management perspective of brand ambassadorship prevails, limited attention given to employees’ perspectives and their sensemaking call for more input.

2.3 Reflections

While employees’ role as an ambassador is recognized to be complex, there is a need for further research of brand ambassadorship from an employee perspective to shed light on how their communicative position is constructed. The research underlines the co-creative position of the employees as promoters of the brand messages. However, as previous critical research has argued, brand ambassadorship has adopted new means of control that might affect the identity projects and private life of the employees. As previously expressed, this study focuses to combining elements from the managerial and critical perspectives of brand ambassadorship to examine in which situations employees would act as brand ambassadors by referring to it as situational brand ambassadorship. Brand ambassadorship in this thesis is seen as positively representing and communicating the brand forward. In order to unpack how employees construct and make sense and actualise of brand ambassadorship, theoretical views of sensemaking, identity construction and control are presented in the next chapter.

3. Theoretical framework

The following chapter introduces theories that will be used as a framework for this study. Since the purpose of this thesis is to understand how employees make sense of themselves in relation to brand ambassadorship, sensemaking as a theory will be introduced. Furthermore, identity construction as a part of sensemaking theory as well as its applications in strategic communication research will be explained and discussed thoroughly. Lastly, the chapter goes through different theories of organisational control that are considered relevant to brand ambassadorship and therefore for the purpose of this study.

3.1 Sensemaking

As the research questions aim to understand how part-time employees make sense of themselves and their identity as brand ambassadors, a framework of sensemaking as a theory is needed. The American organisational psychologist Karl Weick (1995) has explained that sensemaking is a process where people assign meaning to their experiences to understand what is going on. This is done by organising the experiences and events into something that is understandable and makes sense for the individual (Weick, 1995). Weick (1995) has named seven different characteristics that describe the sensemaking concept, them being grounded in identity construction, retrospective, enactive of sensible environments, social, ongoing, focused on and by extracted cues and driven by plausibility rather than accuracy (p. 17). This chapter will go through the characteristics underlining the parts relevant particularly for this thesis. Due to the focus on identity in one of the research questions, identity construction will be discussed more thoroughly later in the chapter.

Weick (1995) is against the idea that organisations should be treated as objects or physical systems, rather he sees them and sensemaking as ongoing processes of organising. In an organisational environment sensemaking occurs when for example employees try to make sense of situations that seem uncertain by interpreting different clues from their environment to build a conclusion of the event occurred (Weick, 1995; Weick, Sutcliffe &

Obstfeld, 2005). In other words, the individuals "search for meaning, settle for plausibility, and move on" (Weick et al., 2005, p. 419). However, this plausibility is constantly reformulated and elaborated. Weick et al. (2005) remind that plausibility of for example stories that generate actions might differ from group to another, or even individual to an individual. In organisational context this means that the plausibility of for example the brand or different stories or narratives attached to it might differ between stakeholders or positions at the organisation, such as employees, external audiences, or managers.

Though continuity is a vital characteristic of sensemaking, Weick (1995) argues that sense can only be made of things that have already occurred. This characteristic is called retrospective, meaning that employees' can only reflect and explain what they have already done. Communication acts as a central concept in sensemaking and organising (Weick et al., 2005), which in relation to this study means that employees interviewed to gather the empirical data will make sense of experiences, stories and actions that have previously occurred through communicating with the researcher. According to Weick et al. (2005), though communication can represent circumstances, talking and acting are also seen as cycles that influence each other.

According to Weick (1995), sensemaking can begin through beliefs or through actions. In belief-based sensemaking, the individuals interpret and decode cues of information they notice and select from their environment. Beliefs are then used to make sense of a plausible understanding of the information. Belief-based sensemaking is according to Weick (1995) closely connected to expectations. Individuals aim to clarify their beliefs and expectations to act upon them. However, sensemaking can also start with actions. Then the focus on sensemaking would be to find acceptable explanation to what happened and what does it mean. A key operation of sensemaking is that whichever is clearer, belief or action, is going to commence the sensemaking process and link it to the one that is less clear. (Weick, 1995).

Another characteristic vital to sensemaking is it being a social process where the individuals are not apart from their environment, rather people are a part of and produce the environment themselves (Weick, 1995; Pondy & Mitroff, 1979, cited in Weick; 1995). The social side of sensemaking can be seen in organisations for example as shared

meaning between organisational members, but also as joint action, which can occur due to various reasons from sharing common values to being a necessity (Weick, 1995).

3.1.1 Identity construction

As seen from the literature review, identity is considered as one of the key concepts when discussing or researching brand ambassadorship. Since the topic of this thesis examines the employees' sensemaking of brand ambassadorship and their identity, understanding theorisation of identity construction is vital for the study. According to Weick (1995), personal identities are not and should not be treated as only one, but as multiple, on-going and shifting. By this, Weick (1995) means that identities are constructed in processes of interaction. Consequently, individuals are also able to shift the identities between interactions to define which self is appropriate for which interaction. Weick (1995) has declared that George Herbert Mead's theory of self as "the unofficial theory of sensemaking" (p. 41), and they both are closely associated with identity formulation. Mead (1974), a well-known symbolic interactionist philosopher, also explains the self of an individual to be socially constructed through interactions with others. According to Weick et al. (2005, p. 417), language, and therefore communication is at the core of constituting both individual and organisational identity.

In addition to being socially constructed, understanding how others may perceive us or our actions and choices influences the sensemaking process of identity. Karl Weick's understanding of identity is based on how an individual learns to understand who he is when looking at himself through other individual's eyes (Weick et al., 2005; Gioia & Thomas, 1996). This individual understanding of oneself affects how one makes sense and understands what is going on around him or her. Weick's understanding is close to what Mead (1974) also underlines when saying that individuals can adjust their behavior and actions to match what they think others expect from them. Mead (1974) calls this the Self and Generalized Other, in which the self means the individual's identity and the generalized other represents other people that the individual interacts with. In this thesis, the employee is seen as the individual mirroring themselves and their actions through different generalized others inside and outside of the organisation.

Though the thesis does not focus on organisational identity, it is a concept that is seen as vital for the employees' identity construction at work. Organisational identity has been defined to be what the members in the organisation "believe to be central, enduring and distinctive about their organisation" (Albert & Whetten, 1985, cited in Bouchkini et al., 1998). Furthermore, according to Dutton and Dukerich (1991, cited in Weick, 1995), individuals view their identity in relation to what they believe others think of the organisation they work in. Therefore, a connection between individual identity and the organisation's image urges the individual to retain a positive organisational image or on the contrary to disassociate themselves or repair a negative image (Dutton and Dukerich, 1991, cited in Weick, 1995). Weick (1995) argues that individuals want to confirm and maintain a positive self-conception, which means that if for example a negative image of the organisation seems unrepairable, the individual might seek for something else than the organisation that would maintain coherence regarding the identity.

Theories of identity construction have been widely applied in social sciences. According to Langley & Tsoukas (2016), many scholars with diverse areas of interest have considered Mead's work foundational, as among them interest in self and identity theory, social organisation, coordination, and emotion work. Especially Mead's outlook on social identity has been considered ground-breaking in organisational research, particularly on topics regarding organisational identity (Hatch & Schultz, 2002). For example, Hatch & Schultz (2002) have brought Mead's theory of Self and Generalized Other to an organisational environment and to corporate branding. In their application of the theory, the organisations are said to be reflecting the perceptions of their external audiences to the internal view of the organisation.

3.2 Control

In addition to Hatch & Schultz (2002), Monica Müller (2017) has discussed Mead's theory of self in her research on brand-centred control at IKEA. Müller (2017) discusses Mead's view on how individuals internalize attitudes of work communities through different generalized others and how this social process affects the individual's thinking and acting both at work and in private life. In her research, Müller concluded that the IKEA community and IKEA brand exercise control over individual employees as the employees became self-aware of themselves as representants of the brand. Müller introduced an

extended model of normative control, brand-centred control, in which the control operates through the organisation's brand. Müller (2017) concluded that in addition to the internal brand-based control, where employees deliver brand messages or become a brand message themselves, the employees recognize brand messages and view the imagined or real external audiences' perceptions of the organisation's brand. This way employees imagine how the external audiences would see them as a representative of the brand, which extends the normative control from work to their private lives as well.

As the literature review presented, responsibility of the brand communication is shared with management, employees, and even external audiences, which raises the need to discuss means of organisational control in connection with the brand. Organisational control is a term used to address the way workers and work have been organised and controlled regarding the interests of the organisation (Cheney et al., 2011). As the way of working has changed, organisational identity is no longer tied to only physical location or products, boundaries are created on psychological means such as values, knowledge, or ideologies (Cheney et. al, 2011). A rather recent concept of normative control is used to describe internal organisational operations where employees and their selves are controlled through established, shared standards such as attitudes, beliefs, and values (Fleming & Sturdy, 2009). However, for example Ritzer's (2018) view on McDonaldised organisations and employees argue that a more bureaucratic model of work exists due to the aspiration of standardized, effective, and controlled way of working. Yet, according to Ritzer (2018), approaches to this way of organising vary as some see it as an unpleasant and controlled iron cage, some as a bendable rubber cage with a possibility to escape. Consequently, those who enjoy for example the predictability, speed and impersonality see it as a pleasant velvet cage.

Regulation through brand or identities can also be seen as a new form of control, often following normative control (Endissat, Kärreman & Noppeney, 2017; Müller 2017; Alvesson & Willmott, 2002). Alvesson & Willmott (2002) have explored organisational control's link to identity regulation, calling it "the 'new' media of control" (p. 22), where employees "insides" (p. 22) are regulated. According to Alvesson & Willmott (2002), employees are more or less intentionally invited to construct their self-identities and this way question the more bureaucratic models of control. In addition, Fleming & Sturdy (2009) have extended the idea of normative control and provided a new perspective, neo-

normative control, where employees are encouraged to have fun and be themselves at work. Both Müller (2017) and Fleming and Sturdy (2009) have seen difficulties in blurring the boundaries between work life and private life. Fleming & Sturdy (2009) concluded that neo-normative control might be even more controlling as employees are wished not to align themselves with shared corporate standards but reveal authentic and private sides of their identity for the organisational advantage.

Closely related with normative control is also emotional labour and emotional work. According to Hochschild (1979), emotional work is unpaid and usually takes place in private settings, and emotional labour is considered as remunerated work. Though regulating one's emotions is needed to interact with other people on an organisational environment, the recent theorisation in emotional labour also discusses the issues relating to organisations' desire to control the employees' emotions (Hochschild, 2012). Coming back to sensemaking, Weick et al. (2005) have also suggested that power relations and emotions are closely connected with sensemaking in an organisational environment. The power in organisations is described to be expressed through actions of accepting, rejecting, or taking something or granted. According to Weick et al. (2005), more research should be done in order to describe whether sense is made in organisations more as "cold cognitive scripts built around rules or as hot emotional attitudes built around values" (Elsbach, 2002 p. 52, cited in Weick et al., 2005).

3.3 Reflections

As Andersson (2020) argues, many researchers to have described ambassadorship or employee communication almost as a one-way transmission model of communication, whereas the sensemaking and identity construction theories introduce a constructive model of communication as continuous processes of organising. However, due to both sensemaking and identity formulation being identified as ongoing processes that are continuously renegotiated, it means this thesis will only be able to examine and analyse parts of the employees' sensemaking and identity process. As Follett (1924, cited in Weick, 1995) puts it, sensemaking is only a moment in a process, not a result.

In addition, Müller's (2017) concept of extended normative control shares similarities with identity construction in sensemaking and Mead's (1974) theory of self as they all

refer to an external, general other that the individual mirrors to make sense of their self. This study adapts Müller's (2017) view on the external generalized other, which is why in addition to sensemaking theory and identity construction, a concept of control is relevant to examine when discussing the topic of brand ambassadorship. As new ways of organisational control, such as normative control, are introduced together with more standardized models of organising work, examining the employee perspective of the sensemaking processes regarding identity, control and this way brand ambassadorship are considered vital.

The next chapter will introduce the research method used to gather empirical data to examine the phenomenon.

4. Methodology

The following chapter introduces the epistemological and ontological standpoint of the thesis and the research design used to gather the empirical data. This chapter will go through the choice of the research method, argue for the selection and sample of the interviewees and thoroughly explain both the interview process as well as the analytical process. Lastly, the chapter ends with reflections of the research process.

4.1 Philosophical grounding

This thesis' epistemological grounding is in the interpretive tradition of social constructivism, which Burr (2015) describes as knowledge that is constructed and maintained socially. As Prasad (2018) explains, while the act of sensemaking is done by individuals, it is largely influenced by language and cognition learned in social dimensions of reality construction. Though personal interpretations are infinite, humans tend to arrive to shared or common interpretations as a social practice (Prasad, 2018). As the study also discusses organisational control, especially normative control, as a part of brand ambassadorship, the social constructivist perspective fits the study, when Burr (2015) argues that the social constructivist perspective sees power relations as embedded in our world. Power relations are represented when we socially construct how to we treat each other legitimately and which actions are acceptable. In other words, the employees' sensemaking of brand ambassadorship and concepts surrounding it are constructed and negotiated with other social actors.

I have applied abductive research approach, meaning that the theoretical understanding is grounded in the worldview and perspectives of the participants that are studied (Bryman, 2008), i.e. the empirical material. In this research it means that the literature review, theoretical understanding, and empirical material has been applied parallelly when crafting the research. As the thesis focuses on studying social reality and its different interpretations that are continuously changing, constructed, and renegotiated by different social actors, the ontological position has a constructivist character (Bryman & Bell, 2015). In

other words, the philosophical grounding of this thesis is that social acts of interpretation and sensemaking constructs reality.

4.2 Research method

In this study, qualitative research approach has been applied to examine the employees' perspectives and sensemaking of brand ambassadorship in their everyday life. According to Prasad (2018), qualitative research tends to emphasize the fundamental role of language, the social construction of reality and the value critique in research. Furthermore, Creswell (2007) argues that qualitative research is often used when existing theories or models partially uncovers the phenomenon at hand, but different contexts or populations can create further understanding of new dimensions of the topic. Qualitative research is often used to capture a more holistic view as well as the complexity of the research problem at hand while investigating and exploring the worldview of human problems (Creswell, 2007). As brand ambassadorship has been researched, yet focus on the employees' perspective has been negligible, a qualitative approach focusing on the employees' sensemaking and identity processes will offer broader understanding of the problem.

The chosen qualitative research method to gather empirical material for this thesis is semi-structured interviews. Brinkmann & Kvale (2015) suggest that when the research topic is examining people's interactions with their environment and/or behaviour, informal interviews are preferred over formal ones. Therefore, I have chosen to use semi-structured interviews, in which open-ended questions allow both the interviewees to describe their experiences while offering me as a researcher the necessary adaptability to elaborate on interesting points that allow theories or concepts to be discovered from the empirical material (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). Brinkmann & Kvale underline that interviewing in qualitative research is seen as a practise where knowledge is produced socially in interaction. Therefore, ethical reflections of the chosen research method will be reflected on in the end of this chapter.

4.2.1 Access and sample

As the aim of this thesis was not to examine the often-seen management views, rather to uncover the employees' sensemaking regarding the phenomenon, I wanted to gain access to interview the participants without contacting their management or the organisation.

Andersson (2019) and Men (2014) have remarked that employees consider their management or superiors when evaluating whether to embrace or reject being a brand ambassador. Though much of the previous research on ambassadorship or has been done as case studies in different organisations (e.g. Andersson, 2019; Müller, 2017), Brinkmann & Kvale (2015) point out that superiors giving consent to participate a study might sometimes lead to individuals in lower positions to feel pressured to take part. Management might select or suggest adequate employees as interviewees or employees could reject the opportunity to give an interview, if they consider it having negative consequences. In addition, contacting employees through the management or the organisation may not guarantee full anonymity for the interviewees, which I knew was needed as the topic discusses a work-related phenomenon. As a researcher I needed to think of the consequences of the interviews so that no harm would be done (Creswell, 2007), and I wanted the interviewees to be able to address any perspectives of the phenomenon as freely as possible.

Hence, as Ritzer's (2018) concept of McDonaldization and its influence on employees working for brands that allegedly are affected by the concept was introduced in previous chapters, purposive sampling strategy was used to gather participants that could offer understanding of the research problem and phenomenon studied. Furthermore, Heide & Simonsson (2011) have argued how the brand is notably created in communication and interactions between the personnel and the customers. Therefore, part-time employees currently working at the service sector of multinational brands were selected as the criterion of the sampling.

To gather interviewees for the thesis I posted announcements both on my own social media platforms as well as in different Facebook groups where people share different posts meant for big audiences, such as job applications or advertisements. In the announcements I introduced myself, briefly explained what the interviews would include, told the criterion for the participants as well as addressed the confidentiality and anonymity that would be guaranteed when participating the study. As Brinkmann & Kvale (2015) point out, I needed to balance between not giving too much information to gain as spontaneous and sincere answers as possible, yet the informed consent of the purpose of the study needed to be confirmed before the interviewees took part in the interviews.

The announcements posted in social media platforms resulted in five participants for the study. Though for example Bryman & Bell (2015) suggest snowballing as a sampling technique when participants for a study seem hard to find, only one of the interviews was conducted with snowballing technique. In this study it meant that one of the previous interviewees had talked with another employee, who later also offered to give an interview. Overall snowballing was discovered ineffective as a strategy to access the interviewees for this study, as other potential interviewees changed their mind and rejected the interview after discussing about it in work-related social media groups with colleagues and superiors. These potential interviewees explained that their superiors had advised them to answer that the researcher should contact the organisation's website or customer service to ask for interview possibilities.

As I knew I needed more interviewees to gather enough empirical material to be able to analyse the phenomenon deeply enough, I decided to contact interviewees that possibly met the criterion through searching employees of different multinational, publicly recognized brands from the employment-oriented service LinkedIn. In total I sent a message to 17 employees in LinkedIn from where six volunteered to take part in the study. A total of 11 employees from six different companies took part in the interviews. Though the messages were sent equally to both women and men, the distribution ended up being that nine of the interviewees were women and two of them were men. An overview of the interviewees with their name, company and working title is presented in the table below. However, the names of the employees have been changed to assure the anonymity and confidentiality promised for the participants.

Name of the employee	Company	Title
Oona	Subway	Sandwich Artist
Anniina	Subway	Sandwich Artist
Maria	H&M	Salesperson
Anna	H&M	Salesperson
Janika	Clas Ohlson	Salesperson
Matias	Telia	Salesperson
Elsa	McDonald's	Restaurant worker
Veera	McDonald's	Restaurant worker

Teemu	McDonald's	Restaurant worker
Katariina	Lidl	Salesperson
Sanni	Lidl	Salesperson

Table 1. An overview of the interviewees

I am aware how some of the participants having their position visible on LinkedIn might involve a possibility that the participants are individuals that are keen on talking about their work or see the brand and working for it as something positive. After all, the participants volunteered to take part in the interview to talk about their employment voluntarily. As the study stems from a point of view that aims to unpack brand ambassadorship yet avoids assuming that employees would inevitably enact as brand ambassadors, voluntary participation in the study is not seen as harmful regarding the analysis or results of the research.

4.2.2 Preparing for the interviews

Even though in a semi-structured interview the interviews will be informal and questions generally open, Brinkmann & Kvale (2015) emphasize to focus on the why, what, and how when preparing the interviews. For me as a researcher this means thematizing the interviews to be in line with the purpose of the study, the research questions, previous literature, and theoretical framework. Even though I have conducted qualitative research and interviews before, I familiarized myself with interview techniques and did a pilot interview before the first interview that was used as material for this thesis. This enabled me to take another look at some of the interview questions that appeared to be difficult to understand or needed to be reformulated.

It is not possible to track brand ambassadorship by asking questions such as whether the employees consider themselves as brand ambassadors, as the term is scarcely researched in academia or not mundanely used in practice or everyday life. In addition, revealing too much of the research topic might have resulted in the interviewees answering questions of brand ambassadorship in ways they thought they should be answered. As Brinkmann & Kvale (2015) suggest, sometimes it is useful to use a roundabout or more indirect interview techniques in order to track the meaning the interviewer is interested in.

I had to carefully consider how I would formulate the questions, so that the answers would provide deep enough insights of the interviewees' perspective as well as empirical data to answer the research questions. The questions are focused on tracking meaning, and more specifically finding out what the brand and working for it means for the employee. In addition, if and how they describe and make sense of themselves in relation to ambassador of the brand they work for was considered a vital theme. Instead of the interviewees talking about terms such as brand ambassadorship, I focused on how they discussed events, experiences, stories, and actions. In addition, I focused on finding out what possible consequences of the actualisation of brand ambassadorship might have in their everyday life. The interviews for this thesis were done with the help of an interview guide, which helps to structure the interviews and, if needed, focus the conversation to the topic. As Bryman and Bell (2015) express, interview guide allowed flexibility and gave me an opportunity to ask the interviewees to elaborate on something they brought up or ask follow-up questions on the topics discussed. The interview guide used in the interviews is presented in the Appendix 1.

4.2.3 Conducting the interviews

As Brinkmann & Kvale (2015) suggest, it is important to set the stage for the interviews, so that the interviewees feel that they can talk openly about their experiences. As O'Reilly (2005) points out, there is a hierarchical relationship between an interviewer and the interviewee, as the interviewer is controlling the situation by asking questions. This might lead to the interviewee feeling the need to answer what they think might be correct (O'Reilly, 2005). As Brinkmann & Kvale (2015) argue, it is important to obtain the informed consent of the participants to ensure the ethical guidelines of interviewing. In addition to explaining the study when searching for and contacting participants, I took time in the beginning of the interviews to explain the proceeding of the interviews, as well as reminding the participants of their rights to for example withdraw from the study at any point or expressing if they wish not to answer some of the questions placed. The permission to record the interviews was also asked in the beginning of each interview. In addition, I told all the participants that quotes from the interviews would be used in the final thesis to analyse the material, but with the names of the employees changed.

By first asking general questions about the interviewees and their work and underlining that there were no right or wrong answers to the questions proposed, I tried to build trust and make the interviewees feel comfortable talking about their experiences. On the other hand, as my aim was to gather as profound material as possible, Brinkmann & Kvale (2015) also remind that as a researcher I needed to be aware that the interview situation might lead to interviewees talking about subjects they later on regret sharing or addressing. Therefore, I needed to pay attention to listening carefully and directing the interview back to the theme and purpose of the study when necessary.

4.2.4 The analytical process

As Rennstam & Wästerfors (2015) and Patton (2002) argue, the analytical process is multi-layered and starts already when the interviews are conducted. During the interviews I already noticed similar themes or topics that many of the interviewees brought up and that made me think of interesting viewpoints regarding the analysis. All the interviews were recorded, and the recordings were carefully transcribed to Word documents as soon as possible after each interview. All the interviews were held in Finnish, which is the native language for both the researcher as well as all the interviewees. The transcriptions of the interviews are also in Finnish as transcribing the interviews to another language might have resulted in losing some of the meaning given by the interviewees. Losing or changing the meaning due to translations might have complicated or distorted the process of analysing the interviews later in the process. Therefore, the transcribing was done in Finnish, yet all the quotes from the interviews used in the analysis have been translated from Finnish to English by me.

I decided to follow Rennstam & Wästerfors' (2015) analysing method of sorting, organising, and analysing the material gathered. The method was applied together with a thematic analysis approach. The first step of the method, sorting, is used to code and produce keywords from the material in order to organise the material. For this thesis, it meant reading the transcriptions thoroughly several times and marking different words, parts or quotes of the transcriptions that I considered significant for the study to find the initial themes. As I was analyzing sensemaking, it means that I analysed the interviewees retrospective stories, narratives and experiences that they shared with me through language. As Taylor & Van Every (2000) explain, the sensemaking is "talked into existence" (p.

58) and this formulation of making sense of the circumstances lays the basis for action as well. In other words, as the research questions try to unpack the construction and actualisation of brand ambassadorship, I needed to track for example how, when, by whom and where the employees communicated brand ambassadorship to be constructed and actualised.

The material gathered from the 11 interviews was extensive and varied, and after reading through the interviews several times, I needed to reduce the material to determine the parts of empirical data that represents the results, as everything in the material could not be analysed. This was done by keeping in mind the research questions to see what the material gave answers to and searching for relationships between the themes, such as similarities, resemblances, and traits of sensemaking. This way the material from the initial themes was reduced to three different themes that would be analysed more in-depth. The last part of Rennstam & Wästerfors' (2015) method to analyse is argumentation, where the researcher analyses the results in connection with earlier research and theory to present his or her contribution to the research field. The descriptive and explanatory analysis and argumentation of three themes developed as well as the chosen citations from the interviews to support the analysis are presented in Chapter 5.

Due to the inductive-abductive research approach, the analytical process included a lot of going back and forth in different text documents and maps created to thematize the material, as well as later re-assessing the themes. As Creswell (2007) says, qualitative research does not follow firm guidelines as it is constantly evolving, which often makes the analytical process a time-consuming and challenging phase of the research. However, saving the audio recordings until the thesis process is over as well as transcribing and sorting the interviews carefully allowed me to go back to the material during the analysis in case there was something I needed to re-examine.

4.2.5 Reflections

As the interviews are conducted during spring 2020, the global pandemic, Covid-19 has influenced both practical implementation of the research as well as the questions asked in the interviews. During the time of conducting the interviews in April and May 2020, due to following the request for social distancing, the interviews were conducted through

audio/video conferencing platforms and by telephone instead of the originally planned physical meetings. In addition to this, due to the decisions implemented by the Finnish government, many organisations in Finland have had to for example change their procedures or temporarily lay off their workforce. As for example Andersson (2019) has noticed, especially in crisis situations, employees might see brand ambassador as undesired. As Covid-19 is a global crisis and might have affected the interviewees' personal and/or work life, this has been considered in designing the research as well as the semi-structured interviews.

In addition to considering different ethical issues regarding the interviews, I needed to reflect on how I position myself as a researcher. In qualitative research, the interpretations made by the researcher are inevitably affected by the researcher's own worldview, beliefs or personal values (Creswell, 2007; Miles, Huberman & Saldana, 2014). This is due to the researcher being the "key instrument of the study" (Creswell, 2007, p. 38) throughout the whole process. Though for example open-ended questions generate interesting empirical material when trying to make sense of how the interviewees make sense of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2007), I need to also recognize that the interpretive character of this study and my own sensemaking of the interviews will be informing the process. Although I see my nationality as a Finnish person to be beneficial when researching Finnish employees, it is important to remember that cultural or historical norms and background of both myself as a researcher as well as the interviewees will affect the process (Creswell, 2007).

Furthermore, the philosophical grounding of this thesis guided by social constructivism is also implicating that the interview is a process where knowledge is produced in social interactions. Hence, I am also a co-constructor of the meaning as the interviews were interpersonal situations where I took part in them as an interviewer. As the research approach relies on sensemaking and interpretations that are always somewhat subjective, I tried to make sure I understood the interviewees' views and explanations by repeating in my own words what they had said. This technique was following what Brinkmann & Kvale (2015) refer to as sending the meaning back to the interviewees to check if I had understood it as they did or if there was something that needed to be clarified.

In addition to ethical considerations of the research method applied, Brinkmann & Kvale (2015) emphasize that the transparency, validity, and reliability of the research should be thought of throughout the process. These aspects have been considered by carefully disclosing the whole research process, from designing the research to accessing interviewees and analysing the data. In addition, the pilot interviews conducted as well as double checking the meaning from the interviewees aim to make sure the research is trustworthy. In addition, I have tried to avoid the often seen criticism of qualitative research being influenced by positivism when reality is assumed to be commonsensical or concrete (Prasad, 2018) by understanding that the phenomenon at hand can only be captured partially, as the sensemaking and identity processes of the employees are and will be ongoing. In other words, I have considered that the complexity of the phenomenon studied should not be reduced or disregarded to produce knowledge or research findings.

5. Analysis

This chapter will present the analysis from the empirical material gathered through semi-structured interviews to answer the three research questions proposed. The chapter has been divided into three different sections according to analytical themes. The first theme describes the construction and actualisation of brand ambassadorship by introducing situational sensemaking that construct brand ambassadorship in part-time employees' everyday life. The second theme discusses the employees' identities in relation to brand ambassadorship and portrays how the employees negotiate between different identities and cope with inconsistencies. The last theme analyses the different consequences that sensemaking of and actualisation of brand ambassadorship could have. The last theme of consequences is discussed both in the last theme of this chapter as well as in the discussion and conclusion part of the thesis.

In the analysis, I have used [...] in some of the quotes to shorten a long citation or to emphasize the essential meaning why the quote was chosen to represent the analysis. In addition, I will refer to the interviewees that took part in the study either as employees as well as with their names introduced in Chapter 4.

5.1 The situational actualisation of brand ambassadorship

As the study aims to unpack the phenomenon of brand ambassadorship by examining the construction of it in part-time employees everyday life, the first theme tracks and introduces the sensemaking behind the situations in which brand ambassadorship is actualised by the part-time employees interviewed. As the viewpoint of the study avoids assuming employees enact brand ambassadorship, the first theme in concentrating on how brand ambassadorship appears to be actualised. The theme starts with a description of the part-time employees' relation to the brands they are working for and is afterwards explaining how the actualisation of brand ambassadorship was made sense of by the employees interviewed. Lastly, the theme provides a short synthesis of the previously mentioned sections.

5.1.1 The employees' relation to the brand

The employees interviewed had various views on how they assigned meaning to themselves as employees of the brand, in other words how they made sense of their own position regarding the organisation, the brand and possibly representing it. Perhaps the most pronounced and repetitive theme throughout the interviews was that the employees understand their position at the organisation to be temporary and most of them do not desire a further or a long-term career with the company.

I think it's kind of an interphase in life, but it's been easy to stay because it's flexible and close to my home (Veera, McDonald's)

I mean it's only a job that I do while studying, so when I get a job from the field I study, I'm gonna switch to that (Anniina, Subway)

For me, these kinds of big companies are the type that people work in when they're studying, because it's so easy and there's plenty of them out there. So for me it's basically that I just work here because someone needs to do that work and I need the money (Elsa, McDonald's)

As could be interpreted from these quotes, many of the employees did not consider the brand as very essential for them or their relation to and meaning of it was even belittled. According to Ind (2007), if people do not find meaningful work, they might settle for work that is done for safety and physiological reasons, which according to the analysis money and location could be an example of. Though all the employees said they knew the brand before applying for it, none of them told to have applied due to identifying with the brand or its values. On the contrary, in most of the interviews, the employees expressed that applying for the brand was either a coincidence or an outcome of a situation where someone they knew was working for the brand which made them feel confident applying.

Though the employees did not underline the meaning of the brand for them, when asked to describe the brand, most of the employees took some time thinking and then started listing words or phrases that they had been told by managers, or even tried to memorize different phrases used in the organisation's own advertisements.

Well... I mean what do we market... it is kind of that we are cheap, saying the cheapest food basket you will find (Katariina, Lidl)

Maybe young and fresh, or I think that's what Subway wants to be. Or that kind of message they are trying to send (Oona, Subway)

It can be argued that when straightforwardly asked about the brand, many of the employees might see it to be a situation in which the brand should be described as it would be presented to the external audiences of the organisation, for example in advertisements. This implies a suggestion that the employees consider external audiences views and the situation they are in when deciding how and what they should communicate about the brand. This has been introduced as making sense of a generalized other, by Mead (1974). Further on in the interviews, the employees disclose more thoroughly how believed views or expectations of others affect their different perspectives of the brand and situations in which they might represent it.

Furthermore, most of the employees thought that their coworkers, especially in the same position as themselves have a similar understanding of the brand. Many of the employees told to get the information about the brand from their superiors or through updates from internal communication channels, in addition to channels they follow on free time, such as social media. Some of the employees also thought that coworkers or managers that have worked longer or have a higher position may have different views of or a deeper attachment to the brand. As a consequence of this, these employees expressed that their superiors or managers might communicate or describe the brand more positively, as it might be their obligation to do so.

Our store manager would probably narrate some of our brand guidance word by word [...] that's also kind of because they get paid on commission, so that leads the work to branding and marketing. I mean none of the salesmen really gets paid to familiarize oneself with such directions (Matiias, Telia)

The analysis points towards the employees understanding that extra steps for the brand are not particularly expected from them, while talking about representing the brand they refer to managers or people who would have gained a longer relationship with the company to represent it. Expectations are according to Weick (1995) a part of a belief-driven sensemaking process. When expectations of actions are made sense of, the employees would choose whether to actualise brand ambassadorship or not. Consequently, it seems that merely the position of a part-time employee working in the service sector of a multinational, well-known brand does not imply that the employee would enact brand ambassadorship. On the contrary, the employees bring about situations in which it would be actualised. As variation in how the employees discuss the brand and their position seem to be extensive, the focus is shifted to what affects the situation in which brand ambassadorship is actualised, in other words, how is the actualisation constructed.

5.1.2 *Belief-based sensemaking*

In many of the interviews, the employees referred to other people as they talked about their actions regarding the brand or situations where they represent or decide not to represent the brand both when working and on free time. When talking about their identity, the employees referred to friends and family as actors that sometimes makes the employees feel like they are expected or should represent the brand. Friends or family are named as groups that ask specific questions regarding the brand, their work, the people the employees work with or for example new products that the brand has introduced.

All of my friends and people I know that I work for Subway so I think in that way it feels like it becomes a part of me (Anniina, Subway)

[...] others take it up as they know I work there (Matias, Telia)

As the employees are aware of how they are recognized to be working for the brand by other people, this can again be interpreted to be a sensemaking strategy of reflecting the generalized other in order to understand what is going on, meanwhile the sensemaking of this understanding can also affect the individuals behaviour and actions (Mead, 1974; Weick, 1995). Furthermore, this points towards an idea that brand ambassadorship as well as communication actions associated to it are socially constructed as employees reflect

other people when considering situations in which they would represent the brand. However, the reference to the generalized other was not always actual, yet the employees repeatedly referred to how they believe or imagine for example customers see their work, the advertising, the customer service, and other attributes of their work.

I feel like people just think that we only work here and that we don't really know anything (Veera, McDonald's)

These beliefs and expectations rose as a connecting theme when the employees explained their sensemaking of situations in which they would act on behalf of the brand. Therefore, empirical material suggests that actualisation of brand ambassadorship could be an example of a belief-driven process of sensemaking. Weick (1995) describes the process as individuals selectively believing and expecting something to happen and these beliefs initiate actions for self-fulfilling prophecies. By this Weick means that the employees aim for positive outcomes for themselves. The beliefs and expectations before acting might be noticed from different cues the employees constantly examine, such as the generalized other referred to earlier. What needs to be remembered is that as Weick et al. (2005) argue, actions and the stimuli that encourages actions are cycles or a flow that influence each other. As the employees make sense of the actualisation of brand ambassadorship, the actions, and experiences before the described sensemaking in the interviews have had an impact to the stimuli expressed.

However, as the study does not presume that the employees interviewed would be brand ambassadors yet tries to unpack the situations in which they would act as one. In addition to the social constructionist characteristic of brand ambassadorship, the interviews point to a direction that not all the employees enact brand ambassadorship at work or on their free time. This was especially underlined in one of the interviews.

Yeah well I mean now that I have many friends that are working part-time in McDonalds 'cause they're studying it feels like I have gotten into this kind of group again, so in that way it's kind of a little part of my identity, but I still don't feel like going around yelling hey I'm working at McDonald's or so (Elsa, McDonald's)

Though Elsa finds the work a part of her identity due to the sense of belonging, this identification does not make her want to communicate her position with the brand further. As Andersson (2020) and Müller (2017) discuss about resistance to or neglecting the role of being a brand ambassador, Elsa does not seem to resist the brand either. On the contrary, she describes to enjoy the simplicity the brand represents for her.

Well I don't know, for me it's only a job really. I go there and I get home. [...] There is no surprising events, I mean at most a burger is made wrong and you do it again and that's it. So it's kind of steady. [...] That's what I like about it that it is kind of brainless that you can forget about your studying and personal life and just be there for eight hours. It is like I turn my brain off when I go there and turn it on again when I leave from work to spend my free time (Elsa, McDonald's)

Furthermore, Elsa's point of view offers an interesting example on how the employee might identify with attributes of the brand, but her sensemaking of the beliefs and expectations of her role as a representative of it are narrated to be limited in routine work tasks instead of finding deeper attachment or meaning in the brand. It seems that she does not enact brand ambassadorship, because in her sensemaking the belief or expectation of doing so is not fulfilling self-fulfilling prophecy. This further argues that brand ambassadorship would be actualised in a situation when the employees' beliefs of their position and expectations would make acting on behalf of the brand sensible for the employee. It also argues against Andersson's (2020) assumption of the employees' role as brand ambassadors discussed in the introduction of this study.

5.1.3 Synthesis of the situational actualisation of brand ambassadorship

The analysis of the first theme points towards the construction and actualisation of brand ambassadorship to be merely situational and socially constructed with the employees' believed expectations other have for them and they have of outcomes. The construction of brand ambassadorship is therefore suggested to be an example of what Weick (1995) refers to as belief-driven sensemaking, through which the actualisation of brand ambassadorship is enacted.

The situations where employees' sensemaking believes brand ambassadorship to result in positive outcome, they are more willing to actualise brand ambassadorship. In addition, an important characteristic of both the expectations and the positive identity construction was how the employees reflected other people inside and outside the organisation as the generalized other when making sense of the construction and actualization of brand ambassadorship.

Though employees' actualisation of brand ambassadorship is considered to be socially negotiated while making sense of the expectations and their identity, what needs to be underlined is that all the employees sensemaking did not result in actualisation of brand ambassadorship even if they found positive attributions with their identity. This further strengthens how actualisation of the brand ambassadorship is situational and cues extracted from the environment as well as sensemaking through beliefs vary. The next theme will further discuss the negotiation and sensemaking of the employees' identity.

5.2 Negotiating the identity

As believed self-fulfilling prophecies rose as one of the main situations where brand ambassadorship would be actualised, the second theme in the analysis is closely examining how the employees navigate and make sense of their self-identity relating to brand ambassadorship. The theme further explains how the employees are navigating between different identities as well as how they cope with inconsistencies between these identities.

5.2.1 Shifting through various identities

The employees discussed were different attributes that build or add to their identity, also in relation to the brand they work for. Many of the employees expressed to be studying while working part-time for these brands, and they address the field they are studying to be the direction to which they want to build their identity, in addition to for example free-time hobbies and other interests.

*I think the job is also a part of my identity, but I wouldn't compare it to my studies, as it's not my dream job or any kind of goal to stay there
(Sanni, Lidl)*

Even though I like to work there, I don't identify myself with it [...] maybe through my studies or academia and then of course hobbies, I do a lot of sports and so on so I build it (the identity) through those. So not through this job but maybe through some other job I could (Matias, Telia)

This points towards what Weick (1995) describes as a sensemaking process of shifting through different identities to find a suitable one for each situation. Though most of the employees in the beginning of the interviews narrated the work not to be of great importance for their identity, further on in the interviews they do describe different attributes of the brand that they find appealing or important to them. The most pronounced theme throughout the interviews was how the employees enjoy the sense of community or atmosphere at work and consider their coworkers as a factor that makes them identify with the organisation.

A huge thing that makes the work better is the people working there. The job itself is not very glamorous [...] I've heard many say though the job might not be the best, it is the group that does it why people might stay there, that it is a really big part of it (Maria, H&M)

Though our work is sort of hasty, we do it with like a good spirit or I think that the work atmosphere is kind of supporting and energizing (Anniina, Subway)

As seen from the quotes above, the employees also make sense of their identity and workplace by negotiating the positive and negative sides of working in the organisation in relation to each other. The quotes express how the employees also discuss different sides of the brand and working for it internally with their colleagues. As Heide & Simonsson (2011) have underlined the communicative role of coworkership, the thesis supports this as the meaning brand in communicated together with their colleagues.

Other factors the employees express to positively add to their self, include for example the organisation to be internationally recognized in case they want to apply for jobs abroad or having the brand in their resume. Some of the employees express that the fact

that the organisation is publicly recognized and standardized mean that they do not need to explain it for example when applying for other jobs, as they imagine people knowing the brand and the work.

I think it's nice to be working for an international organisation that is globalized and so on. Surely, I could be working for a Finnish company as well but internationality is like an important thing to me and I'm also going to apply for an exchange at school. And when I think about my work in the future, I think I could easily work abroad as well (Katariina, Lidl)

One of the positive sides building the employee identity was that they found gratitude or assurance as they are working for a well-known, multinational company during the corona crisis. Most of the employees thought that even though the corona crisis is affecting jobs worldwide, working for a big brand brings needed security which makes them proudly talk with their coworkers as well as with people outside the organisation about their positive experiences.

But I mean these organisations are still running through such times, so I am really grateful that I'm working there. All my coworkers also try to encourage others even though some of them have been laid off (Veera, McDonald's)

I think a bigger company can be more stable, though in everyday life it can be a bit stiff, but in crises like this it is probably better for the employee to be working for a company than a smaller one. [...] It results in a sense of safety or stability (Matias, Telia)

The themes of stability and standardization are closely related to what Ritzer (2018) has described as the attributes of McDonaldized organisations, in other words organisations under a standardised and bureaucratic model of control. Ritzer (2018) argues that some of the employees at these organisations might value the rationalized and standardized working models due to for example predictability and safety. As Weick (1995) argues that the sensemaking process is initiated by searching and paying attention to cues in the organisational environment, these cues for the employees seem to be their beliefs and

expectations on what they believe might positively enhance their identity. The empirical data suggests that as a part of the belief-driven sensemaking process, the employees negotiate their identity together with other social actors to positively construct their self. These believed positively self-enhancing aspects of the brand they are willing to communicate further, in other words actualize as brand ambassadorship.

In addition to explaining how their identity is built elsewhere than at their work, a few of the employees expressed it to be difficult to think what they base their identity on. In addition, some of the employees seemed to struggle with making sense of their identity as it is constantly changing.

Yeah, that's a thing that I've thought of whether I want it to be a part of my identity because you can easily get stuck there (Teemu, McDonald's)

When asked to further explain getting stuck, Teemu continues

It is like not the job for the rest of your life but if you like it there, you could probably apply to school or elsewhere but then it is so deep in your identity already that you just stay in the same group and don't apply anywhere (Teemu, McDonald's)

Later on in the interview, Teemu adds

(....) when as a university student I think that that is my identity but then I also think like what the heck am I really. I played football and that was kind of a big thing for me that I was a football player but I guess now I'm only a student then. So that's kind of hard to think what the identity really consists of (Teemu, McDonald's)

According to Weick (1995), sensemaking is activated when individuals try to make sense of a situation with ambiguity. In the quote above, Teemu saw it hard to describe his identity as it is built by various attributes that might conflict with each other. Sennett (1998) has argued this to be a consequence of the scattered characteristic of work life, including

part-time work. As inconsistencies with the brand or representing it were brought up as an ambiguity in many of the interviews, a closer analysis of it will follow.

5.2.2 Coping with inconsistencies

In addition to finding positive attributions to identify oneself with the brand and communicate it further, the employees also referred to inconsistencies that make identity construction more difficult. Ind (2007) has argued that the main function of brands would be to reduce anxiety, by the brand proving that the signals received through communications, reporting and employee behaviour match with the experience of it. Though the employees named meaning through which the brand positively contributes to their identity, they also address that people outside the organisation tend to recall different occurrences or stories that they have heard and associate their work with these stories. The employees narrate how other people sometimes to question why they want to work for the organisation, which often results in them explaining their work or correcting beliefs that they believe are false or disagree with.

I notice that for example my parents still have the idea that for example chicken nuggets are made of chicken feet and so on [...] Sometimes I think about what if people have prejudice about my work, but then it's kind of fun to combat the prejudices (Teemu, McDonald's)

I feel like as a brand it is kind of misunderstood as there has been these child labour cases back in the days, so I think it has left a big scar to H&M's brand, but as an employee I feel like we are so much more than that [...] For example with this child labour case I have had to step up for, or maybe not fiercely defend the brand but said that things are not always so black and white (Maria, H&M)

Dutton and Dukerich (1991, cited in Weick, 1995) claim that individuals want to maintain a consistent and positive self-conception, which leads them to repair possible negative images believed or seen external others to have of the brand they work for. Both quotes are an example of a belief-based expectation that the employees make sense of and then actualise brand ambassadorship by communicating to correct what they think would be aligned with their beliefs.

In addition to external views communicated to the employees that are seen not to be in line with the employees' identities, some of them seemed to be struggling with knowing or imagining what the brand is representing externally and that idea clashing with what they know as they are working for the organisation. The following quote offers an example of a sensemaking process where the employee is trying to explain how she sees inconsistencies on how the brand is presented and how she sees it herself.

Maybe young and fresh, or I think that's what Subway wants to be or that kind of message they are trying to send but then it can be discussed that is it actually that or not. I mean for example all of our breads are from the freezer so you can think of how fresh they really are [...] I mean it's still different than like McDonald's where you might only think about fat and so on. So, in that sense it is healthier and fresh. But then again, they are all fast food chains (Oona, Subway)

Hence, some of the employees seem to struggle with identifying with what the organisation or brand promises and therefore the identity construction also becomes a juggle between representing what the organisation and the brand promises or wants you to represent and having a different opinion as an insider working for the brand. Müller (2017) has previously analysed a similar phenomenon by addressing how the employees' position is divided into being a recipient of the external brand messages as well as being the brand messenger as an employee of the organisation. Oona also refers to this by saying

[...] then of course when I've been a customer before, I had a certain view of the company and now I know ever more how my work matches that view (Oona, McDonalds)

Though previous research has suggested external views of the brand as a factor why the employees might feel neglected to represent the brand (Müller, 2017; Andersson, 2019), in some of the interviews the employees express the inconsistency or ambiguity regarding their sensemaking to be stemming from their own opinions or even their personal values, rather than from the brand image being perceived negatively by others.

I don't want to use fast fashion since it is not so good for climate change and other things. Even though I am working for this company I try to buy most of my clothes second-hand (Maria, H&M)

Furthermore, the interviews also revealed that inconsistencies might stem from even the job title that the employees work under. Namely, as Endissat, Kärreman & Noppene (2017) argued that a meaningful or cool job title such as sandwich artist might help to build a desired identity, both employees from Subway that were interviewed for this thesis either found the title amusing or neglected it.

Well... I am a subway artist (laughs) so in practice I make the breads and serve customers, do some cleaning, then prepare the meat and vegetables and... that is about it (Anniina, Subway)

Well for me it feels mainly embarrassing that I'm called a sandwich artist, I mean I would rather just be like a Subway worker (Oona, Subway)

This follows what Weick et al. (2005) discuss when addressing the sensemaking and plausibility of stories can appear differently for separate groups or individuals. As the sensemaking, more specifically meaning and motivation behind creating the work title might have been to increase the sense of identity through an artistic title, the employees see it as inconsistent with the way they make sense of their work.

The previous research points out that inconsistencies with identity might result in resistance to represent the brand (Müller, 2017). What is interesting is that even though these inconsistencies are undoubtedly noticed, rather than active resistance or always aiming to correct the inconsistencies, the employees seem to also compromise between finding positive attributes that enhance the identity and also being aware of the contradictions between their identity and the perception of the brand. As Ind (2007) argues, most people want to find identification with their work, yet Weick (1995) explains how the sensemaking individuals eventually settles for plausibility, which on the basis of the empirical material could be expressed as the balance of "good enough" self-fulfilling prophecies.

5.2.3 Synthesis of the sensemaking of the identity

The employees reflected on various attributes of the brand and how they make sense of their identity with reference to these attributes. The employees understand inconsistencies regarding the brand and their own knowledge as well as how the opinion of what Mead (1972) refers to as the generalized other affect their sensemaking processes. As they express various ways of negotiating and coping with their identity construction regarding their work and the brand, the employees show understanding that they are able to shift through different identities. However, the complexity and consequences regarding these shifts are also present. The employees' identity work seems to point towards a balance between cherry-picking positive attributions of the work to build and enhance their self-identity, as well as, if needed, compromising with possible inconsistencies to find a self-fulfilling prophecy that the employee can settle with.

5.3 Consequences of sensemaking and actualization of situational brand ambassadorship

The last theme is analysing the consequences of sensemaking and actualisation of situational brand ambassadorship the employees brought up. Following the layout of the first two themes, this chapter is divided into two different sections that are then concluded in a synthesis. In addition to consequences for the employees themselves, consequences for the organisation, brand as well as for example human resource management are also scrutinized in Chapter 6, where the analysis and findings are further discussed.

5.3.1 Being in control

When it comes to the consequences of the sensemaking regarding situational brand ambassadorship, being in control of the brand is introduced. Employees give examples on how they draw the line regarding their responsibilities or control of the brand communication. The employees explain their unwillingness to take control of the communication partly because they feel like they have no control over the brand or for example because they are not remunerated on learning about the different dimensions of the brand.

Sometimes customers or people I know come and ask why is it that at Lidl you do this or that compared to another store and those are the kind of

*things I don't have anything to do with, because it comes from above me
(Katarina, Lidl)*

*[...] they get paid on commission, so that leads the work to branding and
marketing. I mean none of the salesmen really gets paid to familiarize one-
self with such directions (Matias, Telia)*

The employees understand the competitive environment the organisations are in and express understanding that the customer has a control over which brand she or he wants to choose. Furthermore, the social process of sensemaking is also enacted when the employees consider the customers' responsibility regarding the brand and the ambiguity of having to represent something that the customers themselves take part in. This is an example of how the employees understand their position as well as the customers position as a co-creator of the brand.

*I think it's funny that customers come and talk about child labour to me,
an employee at H&M, but at the same time they buy the products (Maria,
H&M)*

As employees also bring up how they have either apps created by the organisation or they use WhatsApp for communication with their colleagues and sometimes superiors. The discussions are both about practical work-related topics as well as private life matters. Feelings regarding the communication on the free time vary, yet most of the employees consider it positive to build the relationship with colleagues also outside work. Many of them also have positive feelings about the communication as they describe that it is good to keep informed and inform others since the nature of working part-time means that when for example campaigns or important instructions at work might change quickly, the employees believe they should still be aware of them even if they do not work full time.

*Now that I'm with a 10-hour agreement and it means that I work like 2
days a week and then I might miss out on a lot of the new info that have
been brought up (Katarina, Lidl)*

In addition to the organisation's internal social media platforms that employees use also in their free time, different social media channels stand out as platforms in which part-time employees notice communication or take part in conversations about the brand or their job with external audiences as well. If they do not take part themselves, many of the employees narrate their coworkers to be active in following these discussions and how it is often shared between employees at work.

Well not me, but I know that my coworkers have commented on social media why the vegetarian beef needs to be with that name since it is not vegan and so on, so then they have had a discussion about it (Oona, Subway)

Furthermore, Oona explains that she does not usually comment on anything in Facebook, yet if it would be anonymous, she could correct if someone is accusing Subway for something that she thinks is not true. Other employees also bring up the perspective of commenting on their job or the brand anonymously, for example on the anonymous social media platform Jodel.

Many of us are active in Jodel (laughs). I think there is like a thread or something for almost every McDonald's, including ours, so there's positive and negative stories there [...] If there's like a false rumor of how our McDonald's has done something or something like that, then people have gone and said it wasn't like this (Veera, McDonalds)

We have been told not to comment on social media, so it's the customer service team that answers and as private persons we can't take part in Telia's conversations. [...] Sometimes I would like to but then it's good to have the prohibition so then I don't have to. Anonymously maybe I could, but I'm not very keen on that either (Matias, Telia).

Though the employees do not seem to mind the communication on free time, getting to know campaigns or branding material as well as taking part in conversations online seem to become a voluntary actualisation of brand ambassadorship. Yet again, the actualisation is considered situational and, in many of the interviews, based on the employee's belief

that it is beneficial to keep oneself posted of matters relating to the brand even in free time. If the employees do not actualise this believe of for example correcting false rumours themselves, they still follow the communication about the brand or discuss it with their colleagues. This becomes a socially constructed situation of co-creating the brand, which the employees consider as worthy to follow.

5.3.2 *Being controlled*

As in this study brand ambassadorship was considered as a possible example of normative control stemming from both inside and outside the organisation, the employees further endorsed this view in the interviews. Many of the employees shared narrations or descriptions of the people working for the organisation being a family, having a sense of community or sharing a feeling. Some of them even narrate how everyone can come to work as they are, which is a by-the-book example of what Fleming & Sturdy (2009) has criticized to be neo-normative control used to reveal the employees' personal attributes and authenticity for branding purposes.

[...] it becomes kind of a shared feeling like think about it that half of Finland has been laid off and we still get to work (Veera, McDonalds)

Everyone can come as they are, so I think that's kind of a factor that brings us together (Anna, H&M)

Majority of the employees underline the people working at the organisation as the main reason why they want to continue working for exactly that brand instead of another one. The employees seem to be thinking that even though the work itself would not be great, or even though they would not like to talk about their work that much, the people working there make them identify with the brand. Many of the employees bring up similarities and characteristics among the people working for the organisation and especially the ones working in the same position as themselves as part-time workers. As the employees express to also share enjoying the atmosphere or the sense of community internally as well as if they are asked about it, it becomes a situation in which brand ambassadorship is yet again actualized due to believed positive addition to their identity.

For the moment we have really similar people working there, yet different, I mean all kinds of people with different personas, styles and characteristics but still we are all in the same wavelength so to say (Maria, H&M)

Somehow I think when they hire people that it's not only about how much education you have or how long have you worked in the field but it matters a lot what kind of person you are so that you fit the group and everyone comes along well (Janika, Clas Ohlson)

Though employees positively narrate the different pleasing attributes that the sense of community brings up, the phenomenon might also be viewed through normative control. Sense of community or being able to be yourself could be treated as a value that the organisation wants the employees to identify with, and by controlling this value in the organisation the employees are controlled as well. The focus on co-workers and sense of community also address the co-workers' important communicative position as the employees discuss the view on the brand with their colleagues, which Heide and Simonsson (2011) have also emphasized. However, the perspective of employees under normative control is further supported when one of the employees explains how desired behaviour of trustworthiness is remunerated by the organisation.

We have quite a low salary if you think about it so maybe that's why some people work for a while and then go to search for another place where you get better salary [...] then there's this thing called trustworthiness raise, that when you have been at McDonald's for a year, your salary will rise a bit because you're considered as more trustworthy as you have worked for longer (Teemu, McDonald's)

As Teemu refers to remuneration on trustworthiness as a competitive advantage the company tries to offer to retain workforce, it could be argued normative control is applied to present a value that the brand would carry and therefore be preferred over another, as Belk (2016) explains brands to operate. Furthermore, this example also stands against the bureaucratic control introduced by Ritzer (2018) at McDonaldized jobs. It seems like the organisational control at McDonald's itself is also, at least partly, based on a value of trustworthiness the employees are desired to commit to. For the employees working part-

time in these companies, the brand is meaningful or attractive due to the people working there.

In addition to normative control through desired values or the sense of community, some of the employees also discussed more problematic consequences of being recognized or treated as a representative of the brand. The employees addressed situations in which their friends or family are assuming they want to discuss matters relating to the brand they work for at their free time.

To be honest, that's just how it goes that I'm working there so everyone thinks they can ask me (Anniina, Subway)

Often it is that when we are spending the evening somewhere, then someone asks what kind of cell phone plans you have at Telia or should I buy from you [...] If I happen to have sold something for a friend or someone I know, then they assume that I am their 24/7 customer support [...] Maybe it is like the technical problems, as I don't solve them at work anyways. I send them forward at work so I wouldn't really like to discuss about or solve them on my free time [...] sometimes they don't even have Telia as their operator so then I know even less about their problem (Matias, Telia)

This example also points towards being under control that instead of the organisation is stemming from the external audiences of the brand and being recognized as a representative of the brand, which Müller (2017) has conceptualized as brand-centred control. The last quote offers an interesting example of what Müller (2017) refers to as a brand-centred control's "spill over" (p. 912). This means the employee is controlled by not only the brand that they work for yet companies in the same business field. Furthermore, Anderson (2019) has claimed how employees might see enacting the brand ambassador role as straining when they are spending their free time for example at parties. Though the employees narrate sometimes to be annoyed by having to discuss work-related matters on their free time, the employees expressed to help and discuss despite the frustration. It shows how external audiences have power in the sensemaking process as the employee is mirroring the expectations of others and accepts to act as a brand representative on his free time.

5.3.3 Synthesis of the consequences

The interviews point towards both negative and positive consequences of the construction and actualisation of brand ambassadorship for the employees. The themes in this chapter were divided into factors stemming from both being in control and being controlled by the brand. The employees were suggested to be under normative control while emphasizing the sense of community created in the organisation as well as control to represent the brand that stemmed from external audiences recognizing the employees to be working for the organisations. Employees also narrated situations in which they resisted taking control of the brand. In addition, an interesting finding of voluntary brand ambassadorship was found when the employees narrated to take part in for example social media discussions or despite sometimes being annoyed by it, representing the brand in their free time.

A further discussion on the main findings and conclusions are found in the next chapter.

6. Discussion and conclusions

In this chapter the findings of the analysis will be discussed more thoroughly and final conclusions to the research will be given. The chapter will also emphasize the consequences of situational ambassadorship to different actors in organisational environment as well as the contributions of this study to knowledge and practice. Lastly, suggestions for further research in brand ambassadorship within the field of Strategic Communication will be given.

6.1 Discussion and conclusions

The objective of the study was to unpack the phenomenon of brand ambassadorship by examining the sensemaking processes of part-time employees in relation to situational brand ambassadorship. From the analytical examination of the gathered empirical data, several results can be suggested. The main findings following the three research questions examined are presented below.

6.1.1 *Main findings*

The analysis results in three main findings. Firstly, it points towards a suggestion that brand ambassadorship is an example of what Weick (1995) discusses as a belief-driven process of sensemaking based also on expectations. The part-time employees interviewed for this study seem to make sense of and actualise brand ambassadorship by reflecting both their own beliefs and expectations of self as well as the beliefs or expectations they think other people have of them and the brand they are working for. The actualisation of brand ambassadorship is carried out situationally as a social process, throughout the employees' everyday life inside and outside the organisation, often when the employee considers it having a positive outcome. However, situational brand ambassadorship should not be assumed, as some of the employees did not make sense of their position to be a brand ambassador, but merely as an employee.

Secondly, the analysis shows that part-time employees negotiate their identity when making sense of their position relating to brand ambassadorship. The negotiation of the identity means that the employees try to build their identity towards a self-fulfilment. The material points out that inconsistencies in identity construction can occur. The employees made sense of the inconsistencies and reacted to them through communicating their view on the brand to align and enhance their self-identity. In addition, the employees were also seen to cope with or ignore some of the inconsistencies by finding the plausibility in the self-fulfilling prophecy elsewhere or shifting through different identities.

Lastly, the analysis demonstrates various consequences that the sensemaking of situational brand ambassadorship and the actualisation of it has for the employees. The consequences regarding the sensemaking of situation brand ambassadorship included the employees' unwillingness to take control of the brand communication. Furthermore, some of the employees were seen to enact voluntary brand ambassadorship on their free time due to expectations of other people or believing the communication is worthy for them. Being under normative control was proposed to be a consequence of the internal ideological branding of the sense of community as well as being externally assumed to be and treated as brand representatives.

6.1.2 Discussion

The findings of this study underline that employees are a heterogenous group of people with individual, complex sensemaking processes that are constantly changing. These sensemaking processes are suggested to be belief-driven and influenced by other people, such as co-workers and external audiences of the brand, including the employees themselves. This supports how constructing the meaning and this way brands are co-created (e.g. Cova, Pace & Skålen, 2015; Heide & Simonsson, 2011). The findings reinforce the view on employees' communication position to be complex, multi-layered, and undoubtedly not static (Heide & Simonsson, 2011). As the employees were seen to situationally actualise brand ambassadorship through belief-driven sensemaking, wanting the employees to represent the brand might become more difficult to implement or manage for the organisations. However, the study indicates how part-time employees are mostly a great asset for these brands as many of them enact brand ambassadorship, even voluntarily in

their private life. This happened regardless them not seeing their work or the brand to be of great importance or necessarily fundamental for them or their future.

Though there will never be a finalised identity, due to identity construction being an ongoing process, Weick et al. (2005) also explain how sensemaking becomes clearer and withstands criticism when it is redrafted with more observations. It leaves open a question, whether the part-time employees of these brands settle for plausibility regarding their position and representing the brand if the sensemaking of their professional identity might not be very established or profound, but only recently thought of. The findings of the study further support this as many of the employees describe considering the brand, they are working for usually to employ young people for their first jobs. The employees also explained the ambiguity of making sense of their identity when it is built via various attributes from hobbies to studies and part-time work.

The part-time employees can be argued to be in what Ritzer (2018) refers to as a rubber cage of control. They portray understanding of their responsibilities and standardized processes, yet they can bend the cage when socially making sense and negotiating their own identity or actualising brand ambassadorship through believed expectations and outcomes. As the employees recognize their position to be a temporary one, they settle for plausibility that is good enough. This is done by coping with identity inconsistencies by identifying with believed positive attributes of the brand, communicating their sensemaking to align their identity and, if needed, building the identity through other interests outside the organisation. What seems important is that the employee finds self-fulfilling prophecy in something at work, be it for example the sense of community or enjoying the simplicity. This fosters the willingness to actualize brand ambassadorship. In a wider context of branding, aiming towards building the identity through communicating positive attributes of the brand, for example for resumes, could also be considered an example of the employees' personal branding.

Though Ritzer (2018) refers to people being the greatest threat to for example predictability needed in so called McDonaldized jobs, the thesis points towards co-workers being of great importance when discussing branding efforts of employees. The emphasis on part-time employees identifying with their co-workers seems important for both the satisfaction of the employees as much as it is positive news for human resource management

or recruitment. Although the work itself would not be that pleasant, the word-of-mouth of the employees identifying with and enjoying their time with the co-workers or the atmosphere is a positive brand message to share in interactions with potential new employees. Especially important this might become if the turnover rate is high and as all the organisations studied in this thesis have many competitors in the market.

When critically examined, if the atmosphere and sense of community has been central to building the brand of these organisations, the interviewees also act as an example of employees under normative control. Though employees might not be aware of the concept of people being branded but see it as everyone being themselves, the identification can originate from an organisational intention to control the employees with an ideological belief or a value. Furthermore, as some of the potential participants for the interviews declined the participation after discussing the matter with their superiors, one could argue that the part-time employees' liberty is somewhat could be controlled by organisational intentions. The justification for this can be questioned.

However, as none of the employees said to have applied for the position due to identification with the brand, yet all of them named the work community as a factor to identify with, for the organisations this acts as a suggestion that normative control through building and communicating a sense of community is a successful brand management tool for part-time employees in similar positions as the interviewees. For human resource management, the findings of this thesis would imply that emphasizing the positive attributions of the work community might be beneficial especially with part-time employees as they seem to consider that as the main argument to stay at an organisation. The employees further communicating this also points out their position as a vital co-creator of the brand. Therefore, the sense of community becomes an attractive brand that Figurska & Matuska (2013) have argued to help retain current employees and possibly recruit new workforce.

Though the limited sample can be treated as a limitation to the generalizability of the study, I do argue that the research sheds light on the sensemaking and actualisation of brand ambassadorship as well as the concepts found essential to it, such as identity construction and normative control. It is arguable that employees are not a homogenous entity as multiple intricate perspectives and sensemaking processes of brand ambassadorship were analysed from the gathered empirical material. Therefore, the thesis supports the

view that instead of treating employees as recipients of communication (Andersson, 2020; Heide & Simonsson, 2011), their communicative actions and co-creation of the brand should not be taken for granted yet further researched.

6.1.3 Further research

Due to the social constructive approach and the sensemaking perspective adopted, the research at hand is only able to partially cover the phenomenon of brand ambassadorship. Consequently, to gain a more holistic view, suggestions for further research are introduced.

The focus on managerial perspective can be considered to have created a one-sided view of brand ambassadorship. To increase both the human knowledge and the scientific research on brand ambassadorship, more studies from the employee perspective would be recommendable. In addition, as qualitative interviews were used as the method to gather empirical data, a suggestion on more research combining a multimethod approach is proposed. For example, participant observations at the workplace might bring about interesting details of brand ambassadorship that the employees might not have narrated in the interviews.

In addition, from a branding perspective, the analysed example of a telecommunication employee answering questions of a customer of a different brand on his free time is an example that could be further researched. If brand ambassadorship can jump from one brand to another, so that the employee still volunteers to represent it, it would be interesting to research a whole field of work in order to see how far brand ambassadorship is able to stretch its boundaries.

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Appendix 1: Interview Guide

Information of the employee

1. Could you tell me a little bit about your work. Where do you work? How long have you worked there?
2. How/why did you decide to work at (name of the organisation)?
3. What do you do besides work at (name of the organisation)?
4. How is it to work there? What kind of culture or atmosphere does (name of the organisation) have?
5. How would you describe yourself as an employee of (name of the organisation)?
6. Have you planned a future at (name of the organisation)? Do you wish to become a full-time employee?

Employee's perception of the brand and him/herself in relation to brand ambassadorship

7. How would you describe (name of the organisation)'s brand?
8. How or where do you find information regarding (name of the organisation)'s brand? Do you follow the brand on your free time? Where? How?
9. What does it mean for you to work at (name of the organisation)?
10. Do you see working at (name of the organisation) being a part of your identity? In what way?
11. How often do you talk about your work at (name of the organisation)? In what kind of situations? With whom?
12. Are there situations when you decide not to talk about your work at (name of the organisation)? Why?
13. How does working at (name of the organisation) affect your free time?

Employee's perception of how others see the brand and themselves as brand ambassador

14. How do you think other people at (the name of the organisation) would describe the brand? Are there differences between how people would describe the brand?
15. How do you think others (external audience) would describe (name of the organisation)'s brand? How does that make you feel?
16. How do your friends/family react when you tell them you are working at (name of the organisation)? How does that make you feel?

Other questions

17. How has Covid-19 affected your work?
18. Has it changed your perception of the brand or the organisation?
19. Would you like to share anything else regarding what we have been talking about?