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**Employer Branding within Public Sector from a  
New Public Management perspective**  
- case study of the Swedish Armed Forces

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# Abstract

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## **Employer Branding within Public Sector from a New Public Management perspective.**

- case study on the Swedish Armed Forces

This qualitative mixed methods case study aims to seek understanding of employer branding within the public sector from a New Public Management perspective. The chosen case is two campaigns from the Swedish Armed Forces of 2011 and 2019. Due to political changes in Sweden, the Swedish Armed Forces faced major organizational changes regarding their staffing. Through a text analysis of the commercial videos from the two campaigns, a semiotic analysis and a critical discourse analysis provides New Public Management themes and Employer Branding themes. The identified themes are used to design a questionnaire for group interviews and a meaning condensations sheet in which the empirical material of the three group interviews are studied as a reception analysis. The participants of this study are divided into three groups depending on their sector of employment: public sector, private sector or employees within the Swedish Armed Forces.

This case study results in that utterances of stronger New Public Management trends indicates that the employer branding image alludes more to the individual's benefit of employment, and that user's choice is prominent. While low New Public Management trends indicates that the employer branding image alludes more to the collective's benefit of employment while higher purpose and citizen's responsibility is prominent.

*Keyword:* Employer Branding, Public Sector Employer Branding, New Public Management, NPM, the Swedish Armed Forces, Policy Branding, Public Sector Branding

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# 1. Introduction

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That fact that politics changes society is rather obvious however, some political impacts are difficult to identify how they affect organizations as well as individuals. This research is an aim to study how politics affects the recruitment and staffing of public sector organizations. In order to study this, two theoretical frameworks are central for the research, Employer Branding and New Public Management. Employer branding is conceptualized as a long-term strategy in order to attract prospective employees (Barrow & Mosley, 2005) by developing a coherent employer brand that can improve the recruitment process (Heery & Noon, 2017). New Public Management (hereinafter abbreviated as NPM) is a theory of how four megatrends have had an impact on public administration (Hood, 1991). By studying the case of the Swedish Armed Forces (hereinafter abbreviated as SAF) and two campaigns with employer branding utterances, an insight is provided of employer branding from an NPM perspective within the public sector is provided.

This chapter introduces the field of research for this study, with an overview of NPM perspective on the process of analyzing the stakeholder, NPM trends in Sweden, organizational changes of SAF due to political directions and Employer Branding. It is followed by a section that states the purpose of this study, the research questions, relevance and also demarcations. Finally the disposition of the research is presented.

## **1.1 New Public Management perspective on analyzing the stakeholder**

The cornerstone within the field of strategic communication is who the desired listener is and the term of the desired listener varies among terms such as publics, stakeholders, market, target group and audience (Cornelissen, 2020). There are some differences between the terms, but they all describe in a way whom the organization needs to communicate with and whom the organization is communicating with. In order to communicate with the desired listeners successfully, they need to be identified. After identifying whom the organization needs to communicate with, they also need to be analyzed in order to be able to communicate with

them effectively (Smith, 2017). As the importance of analyzing the desired listener is a central core of strategic communication, it raises a question of whether the process of analyzing the stakeholders might be implicated depending on political trends in the society, especially regarding public sector organizations. NPM provides a framework to understand the megatrends in society that have changed the public sector, one of the trends is the shift toward privatization (Hood, 1991). The trend of shift toward the privatization has had an impact on how the individuals in society is seen, either as mainly citizens or as consumers (Christensen & Lægheid, 2003) it has also had an impact on the approach on public sector from a collectivistic or individualistic perspective (Karlsson, 2017). The collectivistic and citizen approach is related to the socialistic ideology, and the opposite approach with an individualistic and consumer focus is related to the liberal ideology (Karlsson, 2017; Geoghegan, 2003; Eccleshall, 2003). The idea of this research came from a curiosity of whether the attributes of a consumer or a citizen have an impact on how they are analyzed as stakeholders, and thereby also whether contemporary dominant political ideologies have an impact on how public sector organizations communicate with their stakeholders.

### *1.1.1 NPM in Sweden*

The four NPM megatrends are; 1) attempts to slow down government growth by reversing the overt public spending and staffing; 2) the shift toward privatization; 3) the development of automation in information technology and 4) the development of a more international agenda (Hood, 1991). This study will mainly focus on the two former trends. In Sweden, the party Social Democrats dominated the political landscape since post world war two until the 1970's and the public sector was organized from the ideas of collectivism leading to a welfare state with a large public sector. The employees within the public sector came to increase with 100% between 1965 and 1977, which led to severe economic issues for Sweden. The first NPM megatrend, attempts to slow down government growth by reversing the overt public spending and staffing can be identified in Sweden during the late 1970's when the government issued actions to downsize the public sector (Karlsson, 2017).

The second NPM megatrend, shift toward privatization, has also been identified in Sweden and has had an impact on the Swedish public sector. Christensen and Lægheid (2003) argues that Sweden is an active reformer and has mainly operated within the modernizers group of NPM reform and only occasionally moved towards the privatization's category. Sweden has

had a dualistic approach to NPM reforms, meaning that the movement towards a greater focus on citizens as consumers, through stronger demands for productivity, privatizations and devolution, the Swedish public sector has also been influenced by collectivism and traditional democratic values. Hence, the second megatrend has been identified in Sweden, however not as strong as within other Anglo-Saxon countries (Christensen & Lægheid, 2003). However, in 2003 the (social democratic) government of Sweden appointed an inquiry with two aims; to evaluate the effects of the privatizations of the market for telephone, electricity, mail service and railway and later to present measurements on how to increase the positive effects of the privatizations (Karlsson, 2017). In other words, prepare for future privatizations that indicates an increased breakthrough of the second NPM megatrend. The privatizations came to increase during the early 21st century (Strandberg, 2013).

The movement of business-type managerialism within the public sector has also left significant traces in Sweden. The business-type managerialism includes the process of separation between politics and public administration (Hood, 1991), where politics has a strategic power over policies and legislations, while the public administration (i.e. the managers) has the executive power (Karlsson, 2017). The implementation of business-type managerialism within Swedish public sector was an attempt to increase transparency within public administration in order to decrease the amount of populist and opportunistic influences from politics over the public sector (Karlsson, 2017).

In 2016, the Social Democratic government initiated an inquiry to implement a trust reform in Sweden, which aims to create public services that are more efficient and enable a greater benefit for the citizens (SOU 2018:38). In the Official Report of the Swedish Government (SOU 2018:38) the NPM megatrends are criticized for causing severe consequences through the focus on marketizations, measurements, goal and result oriented management of the public sector. Marking a political statement to reverse the NPM megatrends.

- Municipalities and county councils need to be able to make greater use of employees' skills and experience in welfare in order to contribute to higher quality for citizens. Welfare professionals must be allowed to be professionals and then we must put an end to the superstition of New Public Management and instead begin to govern with confidence in the staff, says Minister of Civil Affairs Ardan Shekarabi. (Finansdepartementet, 2018). Author's translation.



In the literature review, previous research on the political ideologies socialism and liberalism is presented, together with previous research on privatization of public sector organizations in Sweden. Further, the term “citizen” and “consumer” will be used to conceptualize the approach and view on the stakeholder group, where citizen represents the socialist ideological view with low NPM trends, and consumer represents the liberalist ideological view with high NPM trends.

### ***1.1.2 NPM Perspective on Employer Branding: Case of the Swedish Armed Forces***

Every fourth year is election year in Sweden, as within many other countries. Every fourth year, the citizens of Sweden vote for a political party which they think will rule Sweden in the best direction. The voters make up their mind from contemporary issues that they find urging and cast their vote on the political party who promises to care for the issues in the best way fit. These issues, which the voters find specifically important, tend to shift from year to year, from migration issues to school issues, from healthcare issues to justice issues. When voting however, the voters do not only vote for a political party or specific issues, the voters also vote for an ideology which the political party identifies with. There are many definitions of ideology and in this case, it is referred to as political ideology; a package of ideas of how the relationship between the state and society should be organized and ideas the individuals part of the society (Hague & Harrop, 2010). The main ideology that has dominated in Sweden is socialism, with occasional liberal years. This can be related to the NPM trends where Sweden is identified mainly as a NPM reform group modernizers (due to the dominance of socialist ideology) but occasionally moving towards the NPM reform group of marketers (Christensen & Læg Reid, 2003) mainly when there has been a stronger support for liberalism.

In 2006 there was a shift of power in Sweden when Alliance for Sweden, containing the four liberal parties: Moderaterna, Folkpartiet (now Liberalerna), Centerpartiet and Kristdemokraterna gained majority in the Swedish parliament. In the government declaration by the newly appointed Prime Minister Fredrik Reinfeldt, he said that a free economy draws its power from people's free choice and volunteer's cooperation (Riksdagens protokoll 2006/07:6). An example of a political implementation in line with the liberal focus on the people's free choice and voluntary cooperation, was the political decision to change the law regarding muster and conscript in 2010. Due to this political decision, all military service in Sweden became based up-

on free choice and it changed the SAF staffing. (Försvarsmakten A, N.Y) Due to this, SAF faced a new situation for their staffing and an increased need for employer branding activities.

In 2014, the liberal parties lost majority in the parliament and the socialist party Social Democrats together with Swedish Green Party gained majority and could therefore form a government. This led to change from a liberal government to a government with a socialist ideology. In the government declaration the newly appointed Prime Minister, Stefan Löfven, emphasized that Sweden is going to be a country characterized by the equal value of people and solidarity and that all ministries and authorities are given clearer assignments to work with gender integration in all their activities. Also, more than ten percent of the government declaration was dedicated to military issues, where Löfven said that SAF and its societal support must be strengthened. (Riksdagens protokoll 2014/15:6). The year after the new government was appointed, an inquiry was made of SAF staffing, and in 2017 the government reinforced muster and conscript. Now compulsory muster, applies to both men and women of the age of 18, and if chosen by The Swedish Defence Conscription and Assessment Agency to do military service, they are obligated by the law of conscript. (Försvarsmakten A, N.Y).

This means that Sweden has during the past 15 years seen a shift of power between political parties, but also seen a shift of dominant political ideology with different approaches to the individuals of the society from either a collectivistic and citizen approach or an individualistic and a consumer approach. Also indicated as high or low NPM trends. Sweden has during these years also seen a radical change of staffing politics of SAF, going from muster and conscript for men to only be based upon the free choice of the individuals back to compulsory muster and law of conscript, but this time including both men and women. This means that the need for employer branding activities might vary as well as the employer branding utterances might differ during high or low NPM trends. The theoretical framework used in this study, Employer Branding, provides a perspective on how the public sector organizations work, or not work, on their employer image during high or low NPM trends.

## **1.2 Purpose and Research Questions**

When the political orientation changes within a country, many public sector organizations are affected and in need of organizational changes which in addition affects the communication activities of the organization. This research aims to contribute with insights on Employer

Branding to the field of Strategic Communication with an interdisciplinary approach related to political science.

On a general level, the purpose of this research is to study whether employer branding of public sector organizations differ during high or low NPM trends. On a case level, this research studies the two campaigns of SAF, 2011 and 2019, using a theoretical framework of Employer Branding combined with a NPM perspective using two qualitative methods; text analysis and group interviews.

*RQ 1: What themes of Employer Branding from an NPM perspective can a combination of semiotic analysis and CDA provide?*

*RQ 2: How can a reception analysis provide insights about how audiences perceive the themes on Employer Branding from an NPM perspective?*

### ***1.2.1 Relevance***

On a general level, the study contributes to the research field of strategic communication with insights of the affects politics has on employer branding within public sector from an NPM perspective. The view of the prospective employees, i.e. the primary stakeholder, is highlighted in the study, in which the attributes from either collectivism and a citizen approach or an individualistic and users choice approach brings insights on the process of analyzing the stakeholder. As the process of analyzing the stakeholder is a central core of strategic communication (Cornelissen, 2020; Smith, 2017) this study has high relevance for the research field of Strategic Communication.

As an interdisciplinary study. This thesis also contributes to the research field of strategic communication with insights of political science, public sector branding and policy branding.

### ***1.2.2 Demarcations***

This study aims to analyze employer branding of a public sector organization with an NPM perspective and does not take into consideration other political aspects such as for example a need for military rearmament. Further, this is a case study of a how employer branding with an NPM perspective appears in this specific case which can bring insights on the phenome-

non. However, it is not a study that can be generalized to apply on all employer branding of public sector organizations. As this study

### ***1.2.3 Disposition***

The study is introduced through the introduction chapter, followed by mapping the previous research field of relevant topics to this study. Further, two theoretical frameworks are presented, NPM and Employer branding, of which this research is conducted through with the following section of the methodology. The chosen methodology for this study is semiotics and critical discourse analysis (hereinafter abbreviated as CDA) for the text analysis, and additionally reception analysis is presented as a methodology for the group interviews. In the chapter of empirical material, the case material is presented as well as the conditions for the group interviews.

The analysis is the major part of this thesis, and contains two branches; text analysis which is the author's analysis of the text using semiotics and CDA from Employer Branding and NPM perspectives, which aims to answer the first research question and to identify themes used in the group interviews. The empirical material of the three group interviews are analyzed using reception analysis and aims to answer the second research question. Finally, a conclusive discussion with reflections on future research within the field of employer branding from an NPM perspective.

## 2. Literature Review

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This section provides an overview of previous researches that are of relevance for this research topic. First, earlier research on the limitations of traditional branding research within public sector branding is presented as a perspective to the importance of studying branding within the public sector particularly. This is followed by previous research on policy branding that provides an important perspective to this research as it is focused on the policy changes of muster and conscript. Further in this section, a literature review on the ideological divide of liberalism and socialism, with a following overview of earlier research on the ideological divide on the individual perceived as either a consumer or a citizen within public sector services in Sweden.

### **2.1 The Limitations of Traditional Branding Theories within Public Sector Branding**

For public sector organizations the main purpose is not to be competitively strong on the market, but to contribute to be of service and benefit of the society. Public sector organizations shall therefore work to ensure the societal needs and values, in which democracy, pluralism and security are central for a fair and impartial system for the citizens and the society. Hence, the main purpose of a public sector organization is to promote the mission of the organization, and not the brand itself. (Leijerholt, 2019a). However, a strong brand is of utmost importance for any service or organization, including public sector organizations. A strong brand is important in order to be able to distinguish its market offers from its competitors and the brand enhances the value of the service or product beyond its functional purposes. (Leijerholt, Biedenbach, & Hultén, 2019). However, the use of traditional branding strategies within public sector organizations might be harmful for the organization, argues Leijerholt in the dissertation *Public Sector Branding: An internal brand management perspective* (2019). Further, Leijerholt argues that the existing empirical research on branding and branding strategies are limited to fit the private sector (Leijerholt, 2019b). Due to increasing pressure on public or-

organizations to ensure their legitimacy, research on public sector branding is well needed. (Leijerholt, et. al., 2019).

Branding strategies are well researched and many theories are presented. However, the majority of branding theories derives from the ideas of branding within the private sector. Since organizations within the private sector and public sector have different needs and conditions, different branding strategies are needed in order to take the needs and conditions of public sector organizations into consideration. Differences between branding within the private sector versus the public sector are many, for example private sector organizations are often more dependent on branding in order to differentiate themselves from other organizations and to be a strong competitor on the market and through branding, private sector organizations aim to secure a future organizational survival. This means that branding is a rather central part of many private sector organizations and the financial resources put into branding is easier to justify. Public sector organizations on the other hand are not dependent on branding as much for its organizational survival as private sector organizations are. The purpose of branding for public sector organizations is therefore not always related to strengthen their competitiveness but to create value for the organization and most importantly claim its legitimacy (Leijerholt, 2019b).

The conditions of branding within the public sector also differ from the private sector due to the demand of openness, the organization being tax-based and the incalculable political governance. Because the organization is tax-based, expensive branding activities can be heavily criticized and questioned and therefore be harmful for the organization. The political governance and the public sector organization do not always agree on the needs of the organization nor how the organization should meet the societal needs, which can lead to a change of, e.g. financial support for the organization. In addition to this, Leijerholt presents three risk factors: 1) ideological differences between political groups, this can lead to a public sector organization being caught in the center of a political debate. 2) Political populism, where governance makes political decisions in order to secure and strengthen their position is another risk factor. 3) Politicians lack of knowledge about the organization is risked to lead to political changes such as laws, resources and mission. This challenging relationship between political governance and a public sector organization makes traditional branding strategies and brand knowledge non compatible (Leijerholt, 2019b).

## 2.2 Branding in Governance and Public Management

Branding has historically not been used as a strategy for governance and public management, as it has within the private sector. The major research on branding has dealt with branding within the private sector together with political branding. However, branding within the public management has lately become more and more used as a strategy, not only to brand politicians and political parties, but also to brand policies and policy programs that are often implemented by public sector organizations. The branding in governance and public management has gained relatively little attention within research, both within public administration and policy science, but also communication science (Eshuis & Klijn, 2011). Eshuis (2011) is an associate professor in public administration at Erasmus Universiteit Rotterdam and has through his book *Branding in Governance and Public Management* presented a research of branding within the context of governance and public sector. Historically the governance process has relied heavily on the text and rational discourse, and not so much on the visual type of symbols and emotions as branding strategies within the private sector has. Recently however, the public sector has adopted more and more features of branding from the private sector. Eshuis and Klijn write that branding has become one of the strategies that politicians and public managers undertake to brand policy and policy programmes in order to 1) influence perception through framing issues and branding solutions, 2) engage actors and gain loyal stakeholders and 3) address the media in order to reach and influence stakeholders (Eshuis & Klijn, 2011).

In Eshuis theory of branding in governance and public management, branding is defined as a brand is a sign which has a denotation function that identifies an object and a connotative function which is associated with an underlying meaning and evokes emotions. Brands är symbolic constructions, consisting of for example a name, term, sign, symbol or design, which add value and/or meaning. Thus, the brand is not the product itself, i.e the policy programme, it is what gives meaning and defines the identity of the product. Branding is used as a marketing tool and aims to create a symbolic meaning which is valuable in the psychological and social life of the consumer and/or user. Eshuis and Klijn describe branding processes within the public sector as branding of government provided services, i.e. education, health care and military service. Branding process also refers to branding of decision-making process and policies (Eshuis & Klijn, 2011).

In the past, communication of policies has mainly focused on rational and information communication, often where policy documents have been the primary communication channel. Lately, policy communication has progressed into the branding area where activating and binding stakeholders has gained more focus. Information overload is one reason for the uprising of branding of policies, where people simply do not have enough time to engage in as much as they would like to. It is argued that even though rational communication is important, branding as a way of triggering emotions increases the attention and likability of reaching the stakeholders. Eshuis and Klijn present two concepts of this: activating and binding. Activating refers to motivating the actors through emotions in order to gain support for the branded policy or project. Binding refers to the actors becoming attached and creating a relation to the branded policy or project over a prolonged period of time. The idea of branding of policies is to appeal more to the stakeholders and to gain loyal actors to the policy or project (Eshuis & Klijn, 2011).

A growing number of citizens do no longer consume newspapers or written documents, such as policy documents, as information retrieval. The main source of information is through visual media, for example television, movies and series which holds a crucial part of forming public opinion. Visual symbols and image events that appeal to emotions are pushing aside the traditional rational arguments often provided through press releases, formal public speeches and policy documents and therefore changing the landscape of persuasive communication and opinion formation. Eshuis and Klijn therefore argue that branding strategies in governance processes are dependent on solid media relations due to the growing importance of media in everyday life and the development of a visual culture (Eshuis & Klijn, 2011).

In summary, branding strategies for public management and implementing policies are therefore an efficient way to influence public opinion in a favorable way. Branding is persuasive communication and its main strategy is to appeal to emotions and through visual images. Activating and binding stakeholders is crucial to gain loyal stakeholders and influence opinion in a prolonged period. Brands are information carriers thriving by emotions and in the context of visual culture, which makes the attention from media crucial (Eshuis & Klijn, 2011).

### **2.3 The Ideological Dichotomy: the Individual vs. the Collective**



Eccleshall (2003) writes that liberalism has a long history where the radical Protestants are seen as the earliest liberals, advocating for individual rights and the emancipation from ecclesiastical hierarchies claiming that the ordinary people are competent to judge the affair of government as well as their path to eternal salvation. The core of liberalism has since the earliest liberalists to contemporary liberalists been within the free choice of the individual, and the individual's emancipation from all political, religious, economic and other constraints on the individual's life and activities (Eccleshall, 2003). In summary, liberalism advocates for a society with individual freedom and the individuals as the best judges of their own interests (Hague & Harrop, 2010).

According to Geoghegan (2003), the history of socialism is long and there are many different approaches to socialism crafted by different theorists. Socialism can be divided into three themes: a critique of society, an alternative and a way of transition. Amongst the theorists, the scope of the three themes varies. Some theorists mainly focus on the critique and some on the way for transition. It is therefore hard to find a general definition on what socialism is, which justifies the similarities and differences amongst the many theorists. Many socialists however agree on the saying 'no man is an island entirely of itself; every man is a part of the main and a piece of the continent'. A socialist critique to capitalism's view of freedom is that genuine freedom is not merely to be free of external pressures, but that freedom is fully developed amongst other free individuals in a collective. (Geoghegan, 2003)

During the 1980's, when Margret Thatcher was Prime Minister of Great Britain and Ronald Reagan was the President of the United States of America, a trend of marketization of the public sector drew over the western world (Furusten, 2007), i.e. the second NPM megatrend (Hood, 1991). An idea that all services from the public sector should be exposed to competition in the market in order to make the services of the public sector more efficient. An effect of the marketization is that the citizens, asking for example school or health care, has now come to be consumers of school or health care (Furusten, 2007). This is further described as a part of the Supermarket Model in chapter 3.

Strandberg (2013) writes that during the 20th century the ideological dividing line, the individual vs. the collective, was mainly expressed through the issues on organizing welfare, tax collection and business regulation. During the last decades, the ideological

dividing line has moved from the dichotomy of the individual vs. the collective towards the ideological differences regarding the view of freedom of choice, where the marketization of welfare has been the primary utterance of the ideological dividing line. The privatization of school and healthcare as a political issue has turned the citizens into customers, where school and healthcare services are exposed to competition in the market. Marketization of welfare is when the freedom of choice is emphasized regarding welfare services, the citizen is viewed as a customer of which supplier of welfare service is to be chosen and therefore also which service is to be “purchased”. Applying these market economy values, principles and practices that usually belong in the private sector to the public sector also makes the individuals choices directly decisive for the implementation of political decisions. (Strandberg, 2013).

The ideas of marketization of school services derive from the Nobel prize winner Milton Friedman's thoughts about parental influence on and the free choice of school would lead to better school results, diversity and development of the school sector. The move from the idea of “right to welfare services” towards the idea of “right to choose welfare services” sums up the debate of marketization of Swedish welfare. The marketization of school and healthcare services in Sweden is well researched and during 2016 profits of welfare businesses was heavily debated in Sweden due to two of the largest private schools being listed on the stock market (Dovemark & Lundström, 2017). The marketization of welfare institutions such as school and health care has positioned the citizen as a consumer where freedom of choice is valued high. However, other societal institutions have also faced the process of marketization in various stages. An example of this is the marketization of the area of societal security which function is secure law, order and national security. (Larsson, 2013).

## 3. Theoretical Framework

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This research is conducted through as an interdisciplinary study with the political science theory of NPM in combination with the field of communication science of Employer Branding. In this section, the main ideas of NPM is presented which includes the NPM trends, a former theory of New Institutional Economics. Additionally, the two major governance models, which are of importance for NPM, are presented in this section: The Sovereign State model and the Supermarket State model. The two governance models will be of focus in the analysis together with the two former NPM trends.

Further in this section, Employer Branding is presented as a theoretical framework. This study is centered to a model conducted by Backhaus & Tikoo (2004) which conceptualizes Employer Branding with two main outcomes: employer attraction and employee productivity. This study will focus on the former outcome, employer attraction.

### 3.1 New Public Management Theory (NPM)

In 1991, the political scientist Christopher Hood published the article *A public management for all seasons* in the journal *Public Administration* and the concept New Public Management (NPM) was introduced. The phenomenon itself however was not new, it had its roots back to post world war two, but had increased since the mid 1970's, but it wasn't until Hood's article in 1991 the phenomenon was conceptualized (Karlsson, 2017). In the article, Hood argues that four megatrends have changed public administration significantly, not only in the UK but internationally. The four NPM trends are: 1) attempts to slow down government growth by reversing the overt public spending and staffing; 2) the shift toward privatization; 3) the development of automation in information technology and 4) the development of a more international agenda. Further, Hood explains how NPM is a "marriage of opposites" where the field of new institutional economics is combined with business-type managerialism (Hood, 1991). New institutional economics refers to the movement of user's choice, transparency and incentive structures while the business-type managerialism refers to the internal structures

where the preconditions to operate an efficient organization is in focus (Karlsson, 2017), and the managers within the public sector have a high discretionary power (Christensen & Lægreid, 2003; Hood, 1991).

Two models of governance are identified as significant within NPM theory, the Sovereign State model and the Supermarket State model. These models provide explanations of how the public administration is organized within countries, but also as ideological models for socialism and liberalism and therefore provide an insight of the movements during socialistic or liberal governance. The Sovereign State model emphasizes on the role of the citizen as a part of the collective and where a centralized state, with a large public sector provides a standardization and secures equality amongst the citizens (Christensen & Lægreid, 2003). The idea of the collective is traced to the socialistic ideology and within countries where socialism has dominated the political landscape there is a larger public sector with a higher bureaucratic structure (Karlsson, 2017) and the Sovereign State model has been supported by socialistic parties (Christensen & Lægreid, 2003).

In opposite to the Sovereign State model there is the model of Supermarket State which emphasizes on efficiency and good quality of public sector services, where individualism dominates and the citizens are viewed as individual consumers, users or clients (Hood, 1998). The Supermarket State model relies on the market mechanism where the society controls the state more directly through their “consumption” of public sector services (Christensen & Lægreid, 2003). As the core of this model relies on the users choice the Supermarket State model is closely connected to the movement of New Institutional Economics (Hood, 1991), where at its extreme this model implies that if the public sector services are not satisfactory provided, efficiently and at a low price, it should be abolished or downsized (Christensen & Lægreid, 2003). The idea of the individual’s free choice, and the rampaging of the individual is a heritage from liberalism (Karlsson, 2017) and liberal parties have promoted the Supermarket State model (Christensen & Lægreid, 2003).

NPM is an apolitical theory that advocates for neither of the governance models, it present a theoretical framework of the governance and public sector process through the previously mentioned megatrends. NPM trends describe how efficiency and transparency, privatization, automation in information technology and globalization have had an impact on governance (Hood, 1991). NPM focuses on the shift from Sovereign State model towards the Supermar-

ket State model or vice versa. Through the framework and understanding of the two state models, the governance process and public sector reforms within countries can be identified as active or reluctant, and further analyzed through four groups of NPM reformers; the maintainers, the modernizers, the marketers and the minimal state category (Christensen & Lægheid, 2003).

### 3.2 Employer Branding Theory

The quality of an organization’s workforce is an important factor of the organization’s survival and success, hence a major challenge for organizations in the competitive environment is attraction of talent. Many organizations are now taking on branding strategies in order to retain employees and attract prospective employees (Chhabra & Sharma, 2014). An organization’s brand is one of the most valuable assets, and branding strategies are often used to brand tangible products however, branding has merged into the area of human resource management as well, termed as employer branding. (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). Employer branding can be conceptualized as a long-term strategy in order to attract prospective employees, to keep existing employees and to create engagement and a sense of coherence amongst the employees of the organization (Barrow & Mosley, 2005). The aim of employer branding is to develop a coherent brand that can improve the recruitment and retainment of staff through a combination of financial, economic, psychological and symbolic elements (Heery & Noon, 2017). Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) presents a framework for conceptualizing employer branding with two branches of desired outcome; employer attraction and employee productivity.

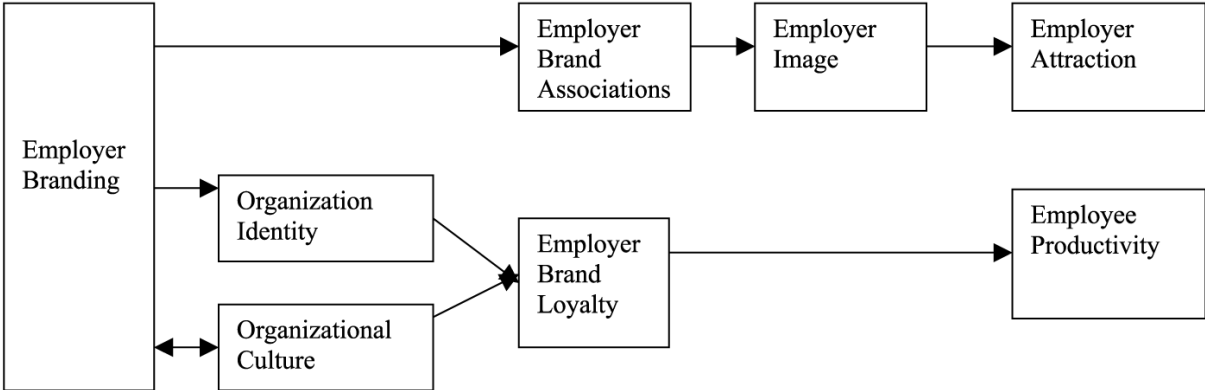


Figure 1 (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004: 505)

According to this model, employer attraction is a result of employer image and employer brand associations. Brand association conceptualizes as the thoughts and ideas that the brand

name evokes, on either a verbal or a sensory level (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). The brand associations' are the attributes that the brand name evokes in the memory of the stakeholder (Romaniuk & Nenycz-Thiel, 2013). The employer brand associations' determine the employer brand image (Biswas & Suar, 2016). Employer brand image is described as the functional and symbolic benefits the brand offers (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004), meaning that creating an employer brand image is focused on communicating the benefits of employments, such as economical, functional and physiological in order to attract new employees (Ambler & Barrow 1996). The Employer Image is what the organization actively tries to influence through communication strategies (Larsson, 2014). However, it is not only the employer brand image that is of interest, the general brand image is an important part of employer branding as well. Chhabra and Sharma (2014) found a positive correlation between students' likelihood to apply for a job at an organization and the organization's strong brand image. A theory, which supports the positive correlation between a strong brand image and likelihood to apply, is social identity theory. Social identity theory suggests that the feeling of membership with a brand increases the positive self-concept in which the stakeholder purchases the brand. Or, as regarding employer image, prospective employees apply for a job, i.e. "consumes" the brand, in order to seek membership with the brand which increases the sense of heightened self-image the membership offers. (Chhabra & Sharma, 2014).

Additionally, the framework of Backhaus and Tikoo (2005), presents another outcome of employer branding which is employee productivity that is a result of employer brand loyalty. Brand loyalty is explained with two dimensions; behavioral and attitudinal. The behavioral dimension refers to the willingness to repurchase a brand and the attitudinal dimension refers to the level of the commitment towards the brand (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001). Employer brand loyalty can therefore be described as the organizational commitment of the employees, and willingness to stay even during less fortunate conditions (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2005). Employee brand loyalty can also generate employee ambassadorship, which can increase the brand image and therefore the employer attraction. Cervellon and Lirio (2017) suggests that organizations should foster brand engagement, which will increase the brand commitment and strengthen the brand image.

According to Drury, the perceptions of the employer brand image is particularly important in recruitment of young workers. A study found that the interaction between functional brand attributes, such as salary, benefits, health care coverage and allowances, and symbolic brand

attributes, such as work culture, career development opportunities and prestige, was a strong success factor in employer attraction amongst the group of young workers (Drury, 2016). However, in a study by Mičík and Mičudová, they found that the biggest shortcoming of organizations branding was the communication of organizational culture and positive image creation on social media. In the same study, social media was found to be crucial for employer brand building and employer attraction amongst generation Y (Mičík & Mičudová, 2018).

## 4. Methodology

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This research is conducted as a mixed study; qualitative text analysis and group interviews. The text analysis, in which the author has analyzed two SAF campaigns with employer branding utterances, two frameworks are used; semiotics and CDA. The semiotic analysis of the text is centered to the concept of myths by Barthes and van Leeuwen's concept of social semiotics. In combination to the field of semiotics, a CDA of the case material is also conducted.

The second methodology of this study is group interviews, which is analyzed through Hall's framework of reception analysis and the provided concepts of encoding/decoding and positions of readings. In this chapter the research paradigm, conditions of the study and the frameworks of semiotics, CDA and reception analysis is presented.

### **4.1 Research Paradigm: Social Constructionism**

Social constructionism is a research paradigm often used within social sciences to study culture and society (Lindgren, 2009). Reality is perceived as an individual, cultural and social construction (Backman, 2008). The core of social constructionism is that all knowledge is shaped by culture and history, and that knowledge cannot be considered as an objective truth. Thus, the knowledge about the world is not a reflection of the reality; it is rather a product of our ways to categorize the world (Lindgren, 2009). Social constructionism positions social interaction as a source of knowledge, where knowledge is created between people, through everyday life and interactions. We are born into a culture and a world where frameworks and categories shape what we see as knowledge. Through embracing the inherited categories and frameworks, we reproduce them every day through language and culture. However the categories and frameworks that we define truth and knowledge from are constantly changed. This means that language and culture is more than just a tool for expressing ourselves, it is a tool for changing knowledge and the perception of the truth of the world. (Burr, 2003). As the research paradigm for this study is social constructionism, validity of the study can be described



as transparency that the findings of this study are a product of the author's social construction of knowledge, which is shaped by the societal, cultural and individual experiences.

## **4.2 Qualitative Research with an Inductive Approach**

This research is conducted through a qualitative method with an inductive approach. According to Frattaroli (2012), a qualitative research method is particularly suitable when the research question(s) are seeking an understanding of how. Qualitative research can provide important insights and clarity of topics that are not well researched, and where existing literature is limited as qualitative research seeks to understand phenomenon's and present detailed views of the topic (Frattaroli, 2012). As this study aims to seek understanding of NPM trends and Employer Branding can provide an insight of how contemporary political landscape effect employer branding within public sector a qualitative method is best fitted for the research. According to Backman, qualitative research within the field of social sciences applies more frequently to an inductive approach, i.e. hypothesis generating, rather than a deductive approach, i.e. hypothesis testing (Backman, 2008). Therefore, this study is conducted as a qualitative research with an inductive approach.

The reliability of the research concerns the consistency and trustworthiness of the study (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Reliability of the study, i.e. how reliable the results are, demands for a strong research design. Reliability within quantitative methods is often depending on the thorough description of the research design, making it possible to ensure the research's reproducibility. Within qualitative studies, the thorough description of the study is just as important, but not to ensure the reproducibility of the study, but to describe the conditions of the results (Kirk & Miller, 1986). Validity, referring to measuring what is intended to measure and nothing else (Gilljam, 2003), the validity of the research is also determined by the scrutiny of logical arguments and the empirical evidence to determine whether they support the findings of the study (Taylor, 2013). Regarding this study, which is an interdisciplinary research of two fields: communication and political science with two major qualitative methods: text analysis and reception analysis of group interviews, the reliability is secured by a thorough description of methodology and empirical material. The thorough description of the empirical material is presented in the next chapter and this chapter is focused on describing the concepts and thereby the conditions for the analysis.

### **4.3 Semiotics**

Semiotics is the study of signs and derives from two major theorists; Ferdinand de Saussure and Charles Sanders Peirce. Both Saussure and Peirce studied the language system and signs, and there are no objections between the two branches of semiotics, however there are some different concepts. Peirce categorizes the sign into three categories: icons, index and symbols. Saussure focused on the interpretation of the sign as a whole but consisting of; signifier (sound-image) and signified (concept). (Hawkes, 2005) As Saussure's version of semiotics (also referred to as semiology) is dominant within cultural studies and since Saussure's semiotics set the ground for Barthes' concept of mythologies (Lindgren, 2009), a framework also used in this research, this study will focus on semiotics from Saussure's semiotics.

Saussure also introduced the concept of *langue* and *parole*: *langue* is arbitrary (Gripsrud, 2011) but the societal conventions and rules of the language, which the individual cannot create or modify. *Parole* is the individual's concrete use of the language. *Parole* is therefore the underlying code, which we need in order to both make sense of our world and make sense of our interpersonal communication. Hence, we need *parole* to be able to communicate with each other because with only *langue* we would make nonsense for each other. With *langue* we create meaning of our usage of *parole* (Hawkes, 2005).

#### ***4.3.1 Roland Barthes Concept of Myths***

The sociologist and literary critic, Roland Barthes, introduced the concept of mythologies in 1957 (Lindgren, 2009) which was developed from Saussure's semiotics and concept of signifier and signified, but Barthes expanded it to also include non-linguistic signs (Hawkes, 2005). Barthes meant that the myth is a semiotic system built upon two levels: denotation and connotation. Barthes' denotation level is comparable to Saussure's sign, which consists of signifier and signified, which is the object language and is the language, which the myth uses. In addition to the denotation level, Barthes introduced the connotation level as a second language, in which you talk of the first language which Barthes called metalanguage. The connotation level is where the myth is, and is where the symbolic meaning is created (Lindgren, 2009). However connotation is not to be compared to associations. Connotations are culturally coded and upheld by the collective through for example popular culture, ads, interpersonal communication (Gripsrud, 2011). In short, the sign gains meaning from its signifier and signified in the first order of signification, the sign is then also the foundation for the second order

of signification. Which means that the signifier in relation with a new signified, creates a new sign which is the myth. (Hawkes, 2005). The myth aims to appear as it is reflecting the reality, meanwhile it is actually forming reality as an ideological function. An ideology, used within cultural studies, is a view/idea of the world as it should be. There are several ideologies in society, however the dominant ideology is the one that has the most power, and with that power, it gains more power to inflict even more power through (Lindgren, 2009). The myth portrays the dominant ideology as natural, and upholds a veil over the power structure, making the ideology seem obvious and perhaps even as fair. The myth also puts a veil over history, emphasizing on the parts that are beneficial for the ideology and hides the parts where the ideology was challenged by contemporary ideologies (Hawkes, 2005).

The concept of myth is used in this research to study e.g., how popular culture has framed military service which provides an insight of the chosen utterances in employer branding campaigns.

#### ***4.3.2 Social Semiotics***

The idea of that language as arbitrary but built upon societal conventions (Gripsrud, 2011) is challenged by Theo van Leeuwen who argues that just as a dictionary cannot predict how a word is used in a specific context and thereby predict its contextual meaning, signs cannot be studied as if they have a pre-given meaning (van Leeuwen, 2005). While traditional semiotics is focused on the sign, the branch social semiotics moves towards the process of sign-making (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996) where the meaning of a sign is bound to its contextual use and that signs cannot be divorced from a social context (van Leeuwen, 2005). Social semiotics introduces two core concepts; semiotic resources and semiotic potential (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996). Semiotic resources are signifiers who are observable actions and objects, which are used in social contexts, the social contexts, carry rules or best practices that regulate how the semiotic resources can be used and its meaning (van Leeuwen, 2005). The semiotic potential is defined by the available semiotic resources to a specific social context or for an individual (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996) and claims that the semiotic resources are constituted by all the past uses but most importantly by the potential use in social contexts (van Leeuwen, 2005). Wong (2019) argues that a social semiotic approach is central to the analysis of socially shaped semiotic artefacts and unpacking the multiplicity of meanings attached to them.

As this is a study within the social constructionist research paradigm, social semiotics is particularly appropriate as it considers the societal context and highlights it. Social semiotics is used in the text analysis to identify semiotic resources in the case material to analyze and find NPM and Employer Branding themes.

#### **4.4 Critical Discourse Analysis**

The research field of discourse is rather wide, and offers a wide selection of approaches and definitions. Discourse research derives from a heterogeneous field of research: sociology, social psychology, history, culture studies and linguistics amongst others. The different approaches to discourse research are however unified through their common ground in social constructionism. The concept of discourse appears both within the spectrum of micro level and on a macro level. (Cromdal, Sparrman, Evaldsson & Adelswärd, 2009). The philosopher Michel Foucault is well known for his interdisciplinary approach on the concept of discourse. His definition of the concept was discourse as an order of language with its rules and practices which makes meaningful utterances possible. Foucault argues that discourse leads to a power dimension of how something is expressed which refers to the preconditioned way of thinking, speaking and approach to social phenomenon's. Power permeates and occurs in all social activities, and is not exercised by a certain actor or a center of power. (Lindgren, 2009). Foucault's concept of power is thereby a relation, which is practiced within discourses. The linguist Norman Fairclough criticizes Foucault's approach on power and discourse and argues that the approach does not study human interaction or action in discourses. Fairclough advocates for a critical discourse approach which is characterized by its considerations of the relationship between language and society. This approach is formed by the intersection of language, discourse and social structure and enables to understand the relations between discourse, power and dominance. The critical discourse analysis, CDA, seeks to understand social power processes, orders of hierarchy, exclusion and subordination by going beyond established social orders and examining the power relations, which uphold these mechanisms in society. (Cromdal, et. al, 2009).

Fairclough's three dimensional model of CDA involves several traditions and differs from other discourse analysts. Initially he distinguishes himself from other discourse analysts by applying a linguistic focus on a thorough text analysis in which the use of language in social interactions is examined. However, by introducing an interdisciplinary perspective, by placing

the text analysis in relation to societal issues and phenomenon's, he distinguishes himself from other linguists. Fairclough offers both a method for text analysis and a theory as a basis for social analysis. In addition, Fairclough's CDA offers both micro and macro perspectives. Fairclough argues that discourses both constitute and are constituted. Discourse is thereby seen as both shaped by other discourse practices and structures, while it reproduces and reshapes other sociocultural practices such as identities, relationships and knowledge. CDA, contains of three levels: text, discourse practice and sociocultural practice. (Winther-Jørgensen & Phillips, 2000). The first level of analysis refers to describing how the text is structured. The second level is a more interpretive stage and examines the relationship between the text and discursive processes. The third level, the analysis is raised to a societal level and explains how the discursive processes are connected with social processes. (Fairclough, 2001).

The first dimension, *text*, emphasizes on semiosis, which is defined as a concept for all social activity and meaning creation such as language, pictures, tv-shows, songs, commercials or any other text verbal or non verbal. Both linguistic and semiotic analysis are included in the text dimension (Lindgren, 2009). In the first dimension, the analysis is descriptive and texts are analyzed by looking at vocabularies (wording and metaphors) which enables to identify representations, categories of participant, constructions of participant identity or participant relations (Fairclough, 1995). Thus, through a detailed semiotic and linguistic analysis of the text it can reveal how the discourses are conceptualised textually (Winther-Jørgensen & Phillips, 2000). In the text dimension, a process of intertextuality can also be identified, meaning that texts are linked to other discourses (Fairclough, 1995). By taking notice of patterns of co-occurrences and collocations of words in texts, the focus of the text can be identified. (Fairclough, 2003) The linguistic analysis of patterns of words can be extended to a semiotic analysis of patterns of illustrations, images and events.

Two concepts are introduced as important in the first dimension, transitivity and modality. The concept of transitivity refers to the connection and link between events and processes, or the absence of connection and link (Winther-Jørgensen & Phillips, 2000). How events and processes is linked or unlinked can result in a difference of how a message is perceived, thus revealing textual articulations of a discourse. The founding parts of transitivity contain three parts; processes (intentional acts and unintentional events), participants (sender and receiver) and circumstances (when and where) (Boréus & Bergström, 2012). The second concept, mo-

dality, is an interpersonal function, as an analytic tool. Modality refers to the extent of certainty of a statement the author of a text expresses. Modality is graded from high to low affinity, where words as “maybe”, “might” and “possibly” are modalities which reveals the author’s certainty of a statement. Modality can also be subjective or objective, where for example “I believe that the earth is not flat” is subjective and “the earth is not flat” is objective. Through minor choices of words or disclosure of words, an opinion for example, can transfer from being an opinion into perceived fact. The choice of modality has thereby consequences for the discourse construction of social relations, values and knowledge. (Winther-Jørgensen & Phillips, 2000)

The second dimension, *discourse practice*, deals with the process of the text, i.e. the production, distribution and consumption. The semiotic and linguistic choices of the text is also taken into consideration, where it is questioned why the specific signs are chosen. It is also studied how societal preconceived ideas, cultural values and structures are constitutional of the text. The interpretation of the text is subjective in one way, but it is also limited to the cultural codes and frameworks, which the text uses to aim for a preferred interpretation. (Winther-Jørgensen & Phillips, 2000)

The third dimension, *sociocultural practice*, refers to the different domains that are associated and connected to social life. Sociocultural practices refer both to discursive and non-discursive elements. Fairclough presents an example of this, where the language in a classroom can be defined as the discourse while structure of the classroom, i.e the placement of furniture, where the teacher stands, are defined as non-discursive. (Fairclough, 2001). By studying the sociocultural practices, the textual structures and categories are placed in a greater coherence, which reaches beyond the frameworks identified in the initial text analysis. A social and cultural change in the structure of the society becomes visible through the changes in the order of discourse within the discursive practice.

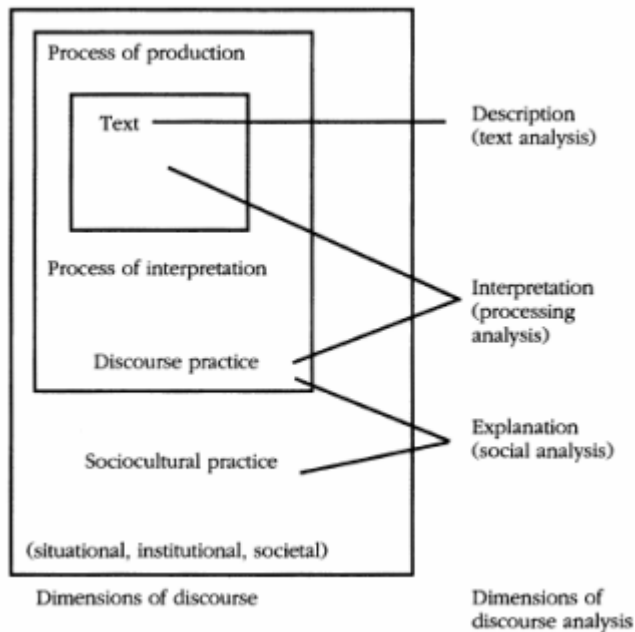


Figure 2 (Waller, 2006: 12)

Fairclough’s three dimensional model of CDA provides an important perspective to the existing research on public sector branding through the possibility of discovering ideological dimensions within communication and employer branding activities of SAF as a public sector organization.

#### ***4.5 Reception Analysis***

During the 1970’s, the Birmingham School and its interdisciplinary field of cultural studies became an important contribution to media and communication research. A theory developed from the Birmingham School of Cultural Studies is reception theory (Gripsrud, 2011). CDA studies often fall short in a holistic ideal and tend to leap directly from micro-textual to macro-social analysis, leaving a gap in the intermediate level of discourse practice. This is where reception theory can strengthen the analysis by emphasizing on the process of encoding and decoding. (Schröder, Drotner, Kline & Murray, 2003). The sociologist Stuart Hall made an important contribution of research to the field of cultural studies with his reception research. He argued for a semiotic understanding and analysis of mediated communication, where he introduced the concept of encoding and decoding in an article from 1973 *Encoding and Decoding in Television Discourse*. Hall argues that all mediated communication is encoded by the producer from social and cultural structures, making the message a carrier of values and norms. The mediated communication is decoded by the audience, where the decoding process

can result in either preferred/dominant reading, negotiated reading or oppositional reading. Preferred reading refers to the intended reading by those who encode it, negotiated reading meaning that the reader accepts and rejects parts of the message while oppositional reading is when the reader rejects the entire message (Hall, 1973; Gripsrud, 2011).

Hall's theory of encoding and decoding process challenged the contemporary mainstream approach of communication as a linear process, with a sender and a (passive) receiver of a message, by introducing communication as a circuit process. The circuit is constituted by the practices of production, circulation, distribution, consumption and reproduction (Pillai, 1992). From Hall's theory of encoding and decoding process with different positions of readings, Morley and Brunsdon made an important discovery and contributed to the reception theory. Morley and Brunsdon's study, *The Nationwide Television Studies*, provided insights of the impact of an individual's social position and (sub) cultural frameworks on the reading. (Morley & Brunsdon, 1999).

This study uses Hall's framework of reception analysis for analyzing the data from group interviews. During the interviews, the twelve interviewees were shown four video commercials of two campaigns, with following questions. The framework is mainly used for analyzing the interviewees decoding processes and their position of readings, mainly related to employer attraction.



# 5. Empirical Material

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As previously described, this is a mixed methods study containing a text analysis and group interviews with a following reception analysis. In the previous chapter, the frameworks for the methodologies was presented and in this chapter a description of the empirical material is provided, divided into three subchapters. The first is a description of the selection of case organization and case material is provided. Followed by a subchapter with information of the data collection and the conditions. Finally, the plan for data analysis of the group interviews is provided.

## 5.1 Selection of Case Organization

In order to reach a deeper understanding of the phenomenon, the study is conducted as a case study of two campaigns from the same organization, but during two different political landscapes and different policies on muster and conscript. A limited number of cases enables a deeper and more detailed knowledge (Heide & Simonsson, 2014). The chosen case is two SAF campaigns, which both have employer branding utterances, and there are two videos of each campaign. The first one from 2011 is *Welcome to our reality* (Försvarsmakten, 2011A; Försvarsmakten, 2011B) and 2019 *For the future's defence* (Försvarsmakten, 2019A; Försvarsmakten, 2019B). Both campaigns have Swedish names but are translated by the author of this thesis. SAF was chosen as it is a public sector organization that has faced severe policy changes affecting staffing, during the last decade, during two different governments and during shift of NPM trends. First the transition from muster and conscript to only be based on volunteer participation during a liberal government and later the reinforcement of muster and conscript during a socialistic government. The campaign of 2011 was chosen as it is the first campaign after the policy change, and 2019 was chosen as it is the first general campaign after the reinforcement of muster and conscript, while the previous campaigns has either been a continuation of a previous campaign or focused on recruitment of women. (Försvarsmakten D, N.Y) The analyzed campaign materials are two video commercials from the 2011 campaign “Welcome to our reality” (authors translation) and two video commercials from the 2019 campaign “For the defense of the future” (authors translation).

## 5.2 Data Collection

### *5.2.1 Data Collection of Campaign Material*

The campaign material, i.e. the four video commercials, are available through SAF's website and on Youtube.com, in addition to this, the videos have been downloaded from Youtube and are stored on a personal online cloud service. In addition to the videos, the campaign plans of each campaign have been requested from the SAF, and are stored together with the videos.

### *5.2.2 Data Collection of Interviews*

The author collected data through qualitative group interviews. Due to the ongoing covid-19 pandemic and national regulations of meetings, the interviews were conducted through video conference call, and are not conducted face-to-face. According to Schatzman and Strauss (1973), by doing focus group interviews the interaction between the interviewer and respondent is minimized, which ensures that the reflections, i.e. data, are mainly from the interviewees, and are not driven by the interviewer and the preconceived research (Schatzman & Strauss 1973). Group interviews stimulate the interviews without interfering from the researcher, by the group dynamic. Meaning, that when one interviewee starts talking, other interviewees follow into a discussion providing the researcher with a large source of data (Gilljam et. al. 2003). As this is a reception analysis, for validity, i.e. measuring what was intended to study; it is of utmost importance with minimal interfering by the researcher so that the interviewee's interpretation of the material is not colored by the researcher's previous knowledge.

There are two styles of focus group interviews where the researcher either is passive and non-directive or active and directive. The former approach, the researcher only asks enough questions to keep the discussion going and is specifically suitable when the interview is conducted in a rather informal or natural setting (Frey & Fontana, 1991). As the conditions for meeting face to face are restricted due to the national regulations, and the consequence of the sampling methods that not all interviewees know each other, the natural setting is not as easy to achieve. However, as stated before it is of importance when doing a reception analysis that the interview is interviewee driven at its most. Due to these circumstances, the questionnaire has two parts; one where the audiences decoding process is in focus and one part with more general questions about the interpretation of the campaigns. The first part, has the same set of

questions for each campaign where the researcher takes on a passive and non-directive approach with none of very few follow up questions. The second part, the researcher has a more active part than the former with more follow up questions.

Before conducting the group interviews, the researcher tested the questionnaire through a test group interview in order to detect implications on beforehand. The participants during the test interview were not participants in any other interviews and the results are not used.

### ***5.2.3 Sampling***

As Morley and Brunson discovered, for reception analysis social position and (sub) cultural frameworks had an impact on the audience's position of reading (Morley & Brunson, 1999). Therefore, the researcher strived to sample subjects with different social backgrounds and used a strategic sampling method to reach a diversity of social background amongst the interviewees. Strategic sampling meaning that a set of variables are set up and the participants chosen after that (Gilljam, et. al., 2003). The variables set up were focused on employment, 1) work in either public sector, private sector or within SAF, 2) a variety of ages in which the chosen campaigns have been relevant the year interval chosen was 24-34, 3) a variety amongst gender. In addition to strategic sampling, the data was collected through a convenience sampling method, meaning that the researcher has relied on available subjects in the researcher's vicinity. (Berg, 2009).

Three interview groups were created, with four participants in each and the groups were categorized after sector of employment: working within the public sector, SAF or within the private sector. The first group, Public Sector, contained four participants in the age of 28-34, two women and two men. The second group, SAF contained four men in the age of 33-34. The third group contained four participants in the age of 24-30, one woman and three men. All the interviewees have language skills in Swedish and English, as it is a requirement to understand the videos of the campaigns.

### ***5.2.4 Description of Interview Data***

After a test group interview, three group interviews were conducted during the period of April 21st and 23rd and were conducted through zoom and recorded. The interviews were conducted in Swedish, the main reason for that was to ensure a comfortable interview environment

for the interviewees, where language would not be a limitation for them to express themselves. Since the commercials are mainly in Swedish, the interviewees had to be able to understand Swedish well. The interviews were transcribed afterwards but not translated to English. However, all quotes used in the analysis are translated to English by the author of this thesis, this may implicate the reliability of the study, i.e. the degree of accidental circumstances (Kirk & Miller, 1986), in this case accidental mistranslation of the findings. In order to ensure that the quotes and translations being correctly presented, the study was sent to the respondents where they were asked to confirm their statements and that the translation and reporting of them were satisfying. The respondents raised no objections. The transcripts are 42 pages and are stored on an online cloud service.

## 5.5 Data Analysis Plan

After transcribing the interviews, a meaning condensation sheet was created to analyze the interviews. The meaning condensation sheet was inspired by Kvale and Brinkmann (2009), which includes two columns; natural unit and central theme. The analysis is both concept driven and data driven, meaning that the central themes were chosen from the theoretical framework beforehand and through a pre semiotic analysis and a CDA of the case making it a concept driven analysis. During the coding of the interviews, some new central themes were discovered, making it a data driven analysis as well (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). As a result, 210 units were identified and coded with themes, some units had multiple themes. The meaning condensation sheet is stored together with the transcripts in an online cloud service.

The initial themes were: Collectivism, Individualism, Socialism, Liberalism, Users Choice, Citizen's responsibility, Incitement for work: a job, Incitement for work: higher purpose, popular culture.

The additional themes: Gender, Reputation, Private/Public Sector, Globalism

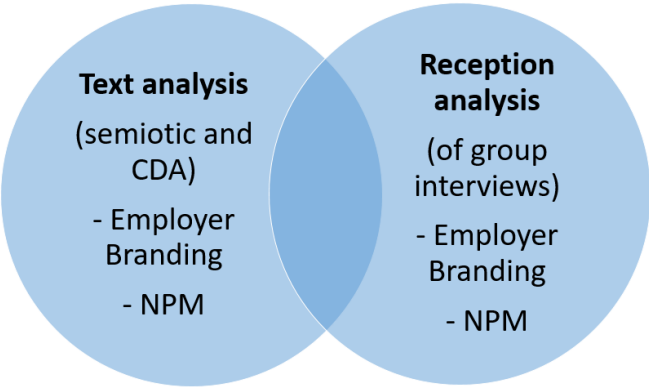
1	Natural Unit	Globaliz	Reputati	Sociali	Liberalis	Worl	Gend	Higher purpos	Popular cultu	Users choic	Individualist	Collectivism	Citizen resp	Private/publ
34	de flesta svenskarna tänker väl ändå att så här (x	x												
35	min spontana reaktioner som magkänslan om ja	x												
36	Jag skulle säga att denna är mer alltså. Jag sku	x				x								
37	den andra är mer socialdemokratisk			x										
38	så känns det ganska givet att jag tycker nog de		x		x									
39	en jag, jag tycker typ så här snarare nästan att c			x										
40	Skulle säga att den första är mer liberal				x									
41	jag kan väl ändå tycka på något sätt att den förs				x				x		x			
42	Jag tycker dom två första är mer handla är mer l				x					x				
43	jag känner att det liberala, liksom valet i, även o				x				x					x

*Picture of a part of the meaning condensations sheet for this study*

# 6. Analysis

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This research is based upon mixed methods, where a text analysis aims to answer the first research question and to identify central themes of NPM and Employer Branding of the case material in order to design a questionnaire and a meaning condensation sheet for the second method, reception analysis of group interviews. The reception analysis, which aims to answer the second research question, provides an audience interpretation, which is analyzed through NPM and Employer Branding perspectives. Hence, the analysis brings together two methodologies with two theoretical frameworks in order to gain a deeper understanding.



*Venn diagram to visualize the analysis*

## 6.1 Text analysis

The text analysis contains two major frameworks, semiotics and CDA. First, a semiotic analysis of the two campaigns is provided followed by a CDA. Further, two sections are provided with a summarization of; Identified NPM themes and Identified Employer Branding themes sum this up. These sections answer the first research question: What themes of Employer Branding from an NPM perspective can a combination of semiotic analysis and CDA provide? The themes are used in order to design the questionnaire and the initial themes for the meaning condensation scheme to the data analysis of the following reception analysis.

### *6.1.1 Semiotic Analysis*

#### **2011: Welcome to our reality**

The environment of both videos evokes a feeling of war through the visual semiotic resources of weapons, bombs, military uniforms etcetera. However with the American accent and since the spoken language is English (in a Swedish context), the commercials evoke a feeling of a trailer for a war/action movie and not a reflection of reality. Therefore it evokes a feeling of being excited rather than anxious and afraid. The first part of both of the videos, the events are quite action filled, stressed and dramatic with bombs dropping everywhere, people jumping out of airplanes or helicopters, ready for combat with their weapons. In the first parts of both of the videos the events seem to be the focus, mainly since the narrator is difficult to hear due to all the other noises of music, bombs and helicopters. A difference between 2011A and 2011B is the amount of people, in 2011A there are more people in action and they evoke a feeling of an army. In 2011B it is mainly one person, but instead of an army, the thoughts are drawn to James Bond. However, in both of the videos, the people are distanced and there is no recognition between me as an audience and the people in the video. In the first part of the videos, it appears as SAF alludes to the employer association, hence associations of the military profession and thereby visualize the myth.

During the second parts of both of the videos, the action filled and dramatic setting is changed into a much calmer setting. In 2011A people are still running but at a slower pace as if they are training. In 2011B it is only two people in the second part, one who is brushing snow away from a grenade but with a supervisor standing over him as if he is practicing. In the second part of both videos the events are more in the background and more focus is on what is being said, i.e. “However, we can offer you our reality, an education that leads to a job where you can make a difference. For real”. This appears to be the branding of the employer image, meaning that they are highlighting the functional and symbolic benefits of SAF as an employer brand. By this they visualize the employer associations and distance themselves from it by emphasizing their benefits to the prospective employee, i.e. soldier.

The semiotic resources of the cold and winter landscape in a Swedish military context provides a semiotic potential in which the Cold War, i.e. the last war that threatened Sweden (Försvarsmakten B, N.Y), gives meaning to the semiotic resource. Such semiotic resources are identified as well in 2011B where there is a reference to being cold, “a voice so chillingly dramatic that will make you want to put on a coat”.

In 2011A the video depicts several people being a part of a military, both in the fictional part (the first) and during the second part when the military uniformed people are running in the snow. But it does not evoke a feeling of community or group affiliation, it rather evokes a feeling of me not being a part of them. Which is strengthened by the narrator who says that the fictional parts cannot be offered to me. In the second part, me as an audience is invited to become a part of them and that I will gain things, such as a job and a feeling of doing a difference for real. In 2011B, the video only depicts one person in the fictional part, and as in 2011A the narrator tells me that I am not a part of this and neither can I be offered this. The second part, the same feeling of me not being a part of them but I can become if I want to, and the strongest reason for why I should is not because I will be a part of something but that I will gain things. Thus, a feeling of individualism is evoked by the videos while also welcoming the audience to become a “member”. Chhabra and Sharma (2014) described how the social identity theory suggest that the feeling of membership with a brand increases the positive self-concept in which the individual’s purchases the brand, in this case the individual applies for a job as they seek membership with the brand which increases the sense of heightened self-image the membership offers. These commercials alludes to invite the audience in the second parts with prominent employer brand image focus while also distancing themselves from the employer associations shown in the first part and welcomes the audience to be a member of an “our”, their group. The prominent message is therefore that SAF is an employer, which the stakeholders, i.e. the prospective soldiers, gain an individual benefit from. It is clear that this is an employer branding campaign.

### **To the future’s defense**

Both videos are interpreted as military and soldiers due to the semiotic resources of military uniforms, weapons, combat paint and activities. In 2019A it is hard to understand if it is training or if it is a sharp event due to the setting where they are mainly seated in a boat and then disembark with raised weapons. In 2019B however, it is more clear that it is a military training due to the semiotic resources, e.g. a net of rope to climb, tunnels to run in without being an obstacle around it etcetera. The term military service includes both training and active duty during war and will hereinafter be used to describe all military elements in both of the videos. In 2019A the civilian elements of the video connotes a Swedish high school graduation (studenten) with the semiotic resources of white dresses and suits, the white student hats and the running out of the school cheering, which in the social contexts represents being finished with

high school. In 2019B the civilian elements of the video connotes childhood through the semiotic resources of playing at a playground, chasing friends, jumping in a pool of water and getting help from an adult to climb up a playhouse.

Both of the videos allude to the events of life, playing at a playground or graduating from high school, the parallel military elements in the videos draw upon similarities with graduation and playing, which creates a feeling that military service is an event of life. The settings are different, but as the music is the same and since the activities such as putting on combat paint or makeup before graduation the life events are connected. The civilian elements of both videos evokes feelings of joy and peacefulness, which is reinforced by the joyful and soothing piano music. As the joyful and soothing music also plays during the military elements of the videos, the feeling of joy and peacefulness lingers.

Alongside the connotations of life events, group affiliation and community is also connoted from the videos. In 2019A, as the group of civilian people are sitting nervous together, putting on makeup together, holding each other's hands, putting on their student hats and running out cheering together a feeling of group affiliation and community is evoked. This feeling lingers on the military elements as well as the people in military uniforms are putting on combat paint together, sitting nervous together, putting on their helmets together and disembarking together. In 2019B the video is focused a bit more on certain people, such as the young girl playing and the woman in military uniform who is training. However, there are certain interactions between the people in 2019B, such as the outreached hands between the children while one is climbing up a playhouse, and between two militaries and the hands on each other's shoulders. This evokes a strong feeling of collaboration and teamwork. Thus, a feeling of collectivism is evoked by the videos.





The alluding to military service being a part of life together with the text at the end, ” Everything that has not yet happened, is our task to defend” there is not so much focus on directly communicating the symbolic or functional benefits for the individual. Leading to a first conclusion that it is not an employer branding activity. However, there is a prominent message that SAF is an important organization, and as they focus on the people i.e. the staff/soldiers, it alludes to a message that SAF is an important employer, but from a societal perspective.

### *6.1.2 Critical Discourse Analysis*

#### **Welcome to our reality**

In the first part of 2011A and 2011B an intertextuality is identified in which the text is linked to the discourse of action movies, i.e. popular culture. However, the collocation of the visual elements of action movies and the recurrence of the words “We can’t offer you/.../” the videos are perceived as intentionally distanced from the discourse of action movies, and thereby the employer associations. The intentional distancing from the discourse of action movies increases when the both videos significantly change to a calmer setting and a situation which looks like military training. Through the videos there is a high modality, in which the utterances are with high affinity, as they say “we cannot offer you” or “an education which leads to a job where you can make a difference for real”. By positioning the modality with high affinity, the truth is constituted as where applying for military service is not about action-filled activities, but an education and a job. By avoiding mentioning military terms, such as military service, military training or GMU (basic military training program), the chosen words job and education links to other practices that are common for the primary stakeholder (i.e.

those who are in the age of 18-25). Such as a choice of a university education or a choice of which job to apply for. In other words, what is not said provides perhaps more insight of the text than what is said.

The message of the campaign, *Welcome to our reality*, is to convince the audience, i.e. prospective soldiers, that applying to SAF is not to apply to be in a war zone, but to apply to a fast track for getting a job. In order to analyze this, two societal contexts need to be taken into consideration, contemporary unemployment in Sweden and the recently fallen Swedish soldiers in Afghanistan. First, in 2010-2011, Sweden faced the highest unemployment rate amongst youths (age of 16-24) since 1997, in 2011 the unemployment rate amongst youths without a university degree was at 19 percent (Oscarsson & Saco, 2013). Second, since 1970, nine Swedish soldiers have been killed in an act of war abroad. Two soldiers in 1970, one in 1978 and one in 1991. During the 00's the fallen soldiers escalated when two Swedish soldiers were killed in Afghanistan in 2005, followed by three more in 2010. (Försvarsmakten C, N.Y). This means that five out of nine soldiers who had been killed during a 40 year period, were killed within six years from when the campaign started. The aim of the campaign might therefore be an attempt to distance SAF from wars, i.e. the media headlines of Swedish soldiers being killed the year before, in order to establish a perception of the organization as an education for a job in a time with high unemployment rates.

The sociocultural practice dimension also enables to understand the 2011 campaign through the contemporary political landscape in Sweden during 2011 where the NPM megatrends of privatizations, downsizing of staffing within public sector organizations and the focus of users choice becomes visible in this campaign.

### **To the future's defense**

Each video has objects that create a meaning of separate discourses for example graduation, childhood and military service. It is through the combination of individual texts, for example the child's laugh in combination with playing at a playground or the white student hat while running out from a school building that the discourse of childhood and graduation is identified. Similar to this is the separate objects of military uniforms, disembarking and weapons that links the video to the discourse of the military. However, the playful childhood and the graduation (especially when seen closely together in the same campaign) the discourse of life events appears. Through the co-occurrence and collocations of the objects that identifies with

the discourse of life events together with the objects that refers to the discourse of military, the military discourse becomes constituted as a part of the discourse of life events. And once again, what is not said becomes interesting in this text as well. As there are no encouragements in either of the videos to apply to military service or positioning of SAF as a potential employer, military service becomes constituted as a part of life and not as something that you are encouraged to apply for. Because it is as natural in the Swedish context as it is to play at a playground as a child and to graduate from high school with the white hat.

The videos have no or very little verbal communication, the videos contain mainly visual activities with music as audio. In the end of both videos there is a written statement with high affinity: “Everything that has not yet happened, is our task to defend”. By linking the text to both the discourse of life events and military service as a part of it, the “our” in the written statement seems to allude to not only SAF, but to all of us as a part of a collective. As the primary target group is those in the age to do military service, and has therefore already experienced the events of childhood and recently or soon to experience graduation, the “our” seems to allude to those who should be a part of “defending” so that those younger than them can experience the same life events.

### ***6.1.3 Identified New Public Management Themes***

Through a semiotic analysis and CDA of the two campaigns, some NPM themes are identified. In the campaign from 2011 the Swedish Armed Forces position them much more as an employer than what they do in the 2019 campaign. There is a more individualistic approach in 2011 where the video addresses the audience in terms like “we can offer *you* our reality, an education that leads to a job where you can make a difference. For real” (author’s translation). The focus is on what an individual gets out from doing an active choice, reveals a shift towards the Supermarket State which is driven by users choice.

In the 2019 campaign, there is a more collectivistic approach where the focus mainly on the activities which represent life events, and not on individuals. But more importantly, the video doesn’t allude to an individual as within the 2011 videos, instead the only addressing to the audience is by the word “our” and to the future events for others (such as future children and their childhood or younger children's future graduation). There is no encouragement to make a choice of anything either, there is only a statement with high affinity where there is no choice,

only “our task” which tones down the users choice which is in focus of the Supermarket State model and emphasizes the citizen’s responsibility.

The identified NPM themes are: Collectivism, Individualism, Socialism, Liberalism, Users Choice, Citizen’s responsibility, popular culture

#### ***6.1.4 Identified Employer Branding Themes***

In the 2011 campaign, the Swedish Armed Forces positioned themselves more as an employer than what can be identified in the 2019 campaign. In the 2011 campaign they explicitly talk of an education that will lead to a job and there is a written text that exhorts to apply to them. In the 2011 campaign there is also a focus on showing what the Swedish Armed Forces will not offer you as an employee, which tells something about the need to distance them from the representation of military work within popular culture. I.e. distancing themselves from the employer associations and myth of military service, and emphasizing on the benefits they want their employer brand image to be identified with. In addition to this, as mentioned earlier, during that time three soldiers had the year before died during military service and two more in 2005, this could also indicate a need for distancing from the media coverage and perhaps framing of military service as dangerous. During the time of 2011 there was also a high unemployment rate amongst youths, which could have an impact on the prominent message of them being an employer.

However, in the 2019 campaign there are no explicit message that SAF is an employer. There is more alluding to them being an important organization for the society, and the future. However, as previously stated they focus on showing the people of SAF, i.e. the staff that makes an implicit message of them being an employer – since they have employees. Here is the employer brand image a focus on a benefit for the society hence also the citizens. As a summary of the interpreted employer brand image of SAF from these two campaigns, 2011 emphasizes on the functional benefit of having a job as prior, and then secondly your job till have a purpose. While the 2019 campaigns alludes the symbolic benefit of being employed at SAF means that you will have a higher purpose and the functional benefit of a job is second.

The identified employer branding themes are: Incitement for work: a job, Incitement for work: higher purpose, popular culture

## 2. Reception Analysis

Through Hall's framework of encoding and decoding with positioning's of reading by audiences, a reception analysis is conducted through an Employer Branding perspective and NPM theory. First, an analysis of the empirical material with a NPM perspective is conducted as it brings a pre knowledge for the later analysis with an Employer Branding perspective. The aim is to answer the second research question of this thesis; *how can a reception analysis provide insights about how audiences perceive the themes on Employer Branding from an NPM perspective?* The conditions for this analysis is the previous text analysis and the sampling of participants. The three focus groups contain of four participants each. They are divided by their current sector of employment, public sector, SAF and private sector.

### 2.1 New Public Management

In this section the empirical findings from the group interviews are discussed in relation to NPM theory to study how branding activities from an public sector organization can indicate stronger or weaker NPM trends.

#### **The Supermarket State model and New Institutional Economics**

Within NPM theory, the field of new institutional economics is central and it refers to the movement of user choice, transparency and incentive structures (Karlsson, 2017). In addition to this, two models of governance are identified as significant within NPM theory, one of the models is the Supermarket State model which emphasizes on efficiency and good quality of public sector services, where individualism dominates and the citizens are viewed as individual consumers, users or clients (Hood, 1998). The 2011 campaign was amongst the respondents perceived to have a more individualistic approach and was focused on users choice. The lack of utterances such as "we" or "the people" was claimed by Public Sector 1 to be the main reason to why the 2011 campaign leaned towards the individualistic approach. While amongst other interviewees the videos emphasizing on the word "you" was the main reason for why it appeared to have a more individualistic approach.

"It is probably the individual's choice, because it focuses on what the individual wants to get out of working with us rather than what the purpose is" - SAF 4

“I think they are more focused on the individual because they clearly say ‘where you make a difference’. Where you get the opportunity to make a difference, you get a chance at an education where you make a difference. So I think they are more focused on the individual” - Public Sector 3

Even though the spoken text is emphasizing on you making a difference if you join SAF, which could be interpreted as doing something for the society and community, the readings of the participants appear to be oppositional and interpreting it as mainly individualistic as doing something for yourself. The interpretation of the 2011 campaign as an individualistic approach might have been enhanced by the intertextuality to the US as the participants frequently reflected upon the US being an individualistic country, despite strong patriotism.

“/.../ the United States is an incredibly individualistic country but focuses very much on serving its country” - Private Sector 4

“...this American ‘do you want to’ makes me feel a lot of individualism and they still speak to you as an individual.” - Private Sector 2

The interviewees also reflected upon the call to action of applying to SAF and the positioning of them offering a job opportunity in which SAF can offer a possibility for the individual to make a difference and a self-realization.

“...it is the individual who chooses to work in the Armed Forces and then the Armed Forces can offer training that makes it possible to make a difference.” - SAF 1

“That you want to attract with a job at least, which in some way should give someone self-realization, although it is unclear what that self-realization would be then” - SAF 3

Hence, the idea of making a difference for the community is perceived amongst the participants as an individualistic approach as it aims to self-realization. You are not making a life decision, i.e. muster and working within the military for others even though you would make a difference, but the force is mainly individualistic that you will feel good with yourself by

making a difference. Hence, the argument of “where you can make a difference, for real” indicates the movement of user’s choice with a focus on incentive structures.

“Because it is a choice to apply, it says apply today. So it's not about like recruiting or doing your duty but the one they post it as a choice in the end. I mean they don't end it with 'do your duty for Sweden'.” Private Sector 4

The participants also perceived mainly liberalistic attributes in the 2011 campaign, without knowing the year of the campaign. The liberal attributes are perceived to be carried through the individualistic approach.

“...the first alludes more to the perhaps more liberal or bourgeois side where one clearly focuses on the individual, where it is really the individual who must make a choice where the individual is given an opportunity to make a difference.” - SAF 1

“...it feels quite obvious that the first two are a little more in the liberal direction and the other two in the socialist direction.” - Private Sector 1

There was also a reflection regarding liberal attributes and gender where Private Sector 2, a woman, argued that a common perception is that men tend to be more liberal and individualistic than women who tend to be more collectivistic.

“/.../women are said to be more collectivist and more caring, and men are said to be more liberal /.../ the commercial that was a little more manly, so I would never have been attracted to applying for SAF in the previous two films.” - Private Sector 2

### **The Sovereign State model**

The other central model within NPM theory is The Sovereign State model that emphasizes on the role of the citizen as a part of the collective and the Sovereign State model has been advocated by socialistic parties (Christensen & Lægheid, 2003). A governance model based on the Sovereign State model indicates low NPM trends. Even though the majority of the interviewees perceived the 2011 campaign to be more individualistic, user’s choice driven and appealed to liberal ideological attributes, some interviewees within the private sector group had

alternative readings. There were some reflections about the 2011 campaign with a collectivistic perspective.

“That you almost deconstruct the individual identity and take it into this collective by saying that ‘You will not be this individual who is an action hero but you will become a part of our reality, you will become a part of us’.” - Private Sector 4

“It is if you have a job that is boring when you make a difference, you do it for everyone, not for yourself /.../ that it must be that you think for everyone's best not for the individual's best.” - Private Sector 3

Besides these reflections on the 2011 campaign as being collectivistic, the participants mainly perceived the collectivistic approach within the 2019 campaign with a higher focus on citizen's responsibility and leaning towards a socialistic ideology.

“The first was much more directed towards the individual and that you get a job and the second was more towards society, the collective.” - Private Sector 1

“As a country to be a part of defending and as well as being a part of the collective.” - SAF 4

“The other two are more about this type of societal benefit in a different way as well. They talk about the choices they make for the collective society.” - Private Sector 4

“In the second then, it is more this talk about our task that it is perhaps more aimed at a collective and with a socialist or social democratic motive where you want to allude to those attributes” - SAF 1

Many of the interviewees mentioned the text “Everything that has not yet happened, is our task to defend” with an emphasis on the word “our”, and what the word alludes to was a reason for why it appeared to be more of an collectivistic approach in the 2019 campaign.

“...you can also interpret it there with our responsibility that it is society's responsibility as well.” - Public Sector 3



“I am thinking of their message in text where it actually says ‘what has not happened is our task to defend’. And it is precisely there that it is not clear what the term ‘our’ means, if it is only Swedish Armed Forces or if it is society as a whole that is responsible for the defending.” - SAF 1

The word “our” is also highlighted in the 2011 campaign, Welcome to our reality, however the sentence is not perceived amongst the interviewees to be as ambiguous as in the 2019 campaign. A reason for this might be that the visual elements highlight a collective more than the visual elements are perceived to do in the 2011 campaign.

“I think it is more the citizens' responsibility because they allude to the fact that they want this level of comparison, that just like running out of a boat, disembarking, that drives up to an archipelago island, it is just like running out of the student stairs. That one can be nervous and sweaty in the face of both of those things. But there should be a degree of comparison of both events for the whole society.” - Public Sector 3

“...this student who runs out can also be the soldier and then this child who grows up can also be a part of defending the country.” - SAF 4

During the interviews the participants were asked to categorize the two campaigns within in the two statements “To muster is a part of life” and “SAF is an employer”. All participants answered the same; the 2011 campaign was categorized within the “SAF is an employer” statement while the 2019 campaign was categorized within the “To muster is a part of life”. While some arguments for the 2011 campaign having a citizen’s responsibility perspective, mainly due to the phrase “Where you can make a difference, for real” together with a majority of arguments for the 2011 campaign to be users choice driven, all participants agreed on that the 2019 campaign alluded mainly to citizen’s responsibility.

“And the other two were more like society and maybe a little more it is our duty” - Public Sector 4

“It is the citizen mainly then /.../ you must, as I said, do your duty for the country and the kingdom” - SAF 2

## ***2.2 Conclusion: NPM Trends in SAF Campaigns of 2011 and 2019***

The first NPM megatrend, 1) attempts to slow down government growth by reversing the overt public spending and staffing (Hood, 1991), can perhaps not be studied on a general level through this research. However, in this particular case where a campaign of 2011 when muster and conscript was canceled and SAF faced a situation where they had to focus on Employer Branding in order to secure candidates for military service, a trace of the first NPM trend can be identified, as the employees were no longer provided by law. As stated in the introduction, during the government declaration of the newly appointed liberal Prime Minister Fredrik Reinfeldt', it was argued that a free economy draws its power from people's free choice and volunteers cooperation (Riksdagens protokoll 2006/07:6). However, whether the focus on user's choice had an impact on slowing down the government growth regarding reversing the overt public spending and staffing would need another research. However, the traces of the Supermarket State model through the focus of user's choice, liberalism, and individualism dominates the 2011 campaign. In the 2019 campaign, the focus is shifted towards the collective over individual, the citizen's responsibility over the user's choice and the participants argue that the 2019 campaign has more attributes of a socialistic perspective, indicating fading NPM trends in the 2019 campaign.

The second megatrend of NPM is the shift toward privatization, i.e. marketization of public services. In this case, the shift toward privatization is perhaps not as clear as within for example schools or healthcare services which have faced obvious trends of privatizations. However, some attributes of privatizations are identified during the interviews and regarding the 2011 campaign, the Private Sector 2 argues:

“I feel that the first is more business oriented, like selling out Swedish Armed Forces to a communications agency so they make a marketing film and just wow, now we'll get people attracted.” And “...the public sector markets itself as a private company” - Private Sector 2

In the discussions, there is an intertextuality identified towards the recruitment strategies of polytechnics, i.e. schools that offer higher education focused on applied learning but are not

organized by the government such as the Swedish universities. The intertextuality to polytechnics brings an interesting perspective, as they are business oriented and are a good example of a shift toward privatization within the education industry of Sweden.

“I have seen the same types of words when talking about polytechnics” - Private Sector 4

Another NPM trend that is identified is the fourth megatrend, the development of a more international agenda. In all three of the group interviews, the interviewees reflected on globalization in the 2011 campaign, which is partly in English and the participants felt that the setting was unfamiliar to Sweden.

“The first which was very expensive/lavish in its feeling? Very, if I may be categorical, un-Swedish I would say that the first one was” - Public Sector 1

There were some reflections on political ideologies regarding enhanced nationalism and patriotism in the 2019 campaign, which could indicate a withdrawal from the NPM trend of international agenda reflected in the 2019 campaign.

“Between 2011 and 2019 then when this came out so /.../ we have had a society of political development in Sweden where parties that are the Sweden Democrats have taken quite big steps forward. /.../ but it feels like these other two focus more on this slightly more traditionalist and this nation-state. I wonder if it can have a function of how political society has changed during this time period?” - Private Sector 4

### ***2.3 Employer Branding***

Employer branding is described as a strategy to attract prospective employees, keep existing employees and to create engagement amongst the employees of the organization (Barrow & Mosley, 2005). This research uses the framework (figure 1) by Backhaus and Tikoo (2004), which describes two outcomes of employer branding; employer attraction and employee productivity. This research is focused on employer attraction of prospective employees, i.e. soldiers and the empirical material is studied through the following scheme:

Employer Brand Associations -> Employer Image -> Employer Attraction

## **Employer Brand Associations**

“I really think the first two are really more about erasing prejudice.” - Public Sector 3 about the 2011 campaign.

Brand association is conceptualized as the thoughts and ideas that the brand name evokes, either on a verbal or a sensory level, i.e. the memory of which the brand name evokes (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Romaniuk & Nenycz-Thiel, 2013). Employer brand associations determine the employer brand image (Biswas & Suar, 2016). The quote of Public Sector 3 regarding the 2011 campaign that it is about erasing prejudice tells something about the negative associations of the employer brand. This is prominent in the interviews, the connotations to Hollywood productions and popular culture, which shapes the memory of military work and therefore also SAF as an employer brand. The interviewees discussed it as a strategic choice by SAF to distance themselves from the representation of military service within popular culture.

“...the military being so tough and so cool and that it's not so tough and so action like as you see it kind of in American movies” - Private Sector 2

“...kind of wanted to clear their reputation a bit that they wanted to show that they are not this Hollywood action thing that might have been showed” - SAF 1

In addition to the perception of the aim to distance SAF from the popular cultural representation of military service which has been influenced by the US army, it is perceived to be an attempt to distance SAF from the US and the US army as well.

“I have also seen how the American government markets to muster in the army and there they make this type of films that you basically make a joke about in the Swedish advertising that this is really like action hero concept that they actually sell as well as to get people to join the army” - Private Sector 4

The hegemonic representation of military service relates to the US army and the view of the military in the US. The distancing from the hegemonic representation of the military is an

indication of an attempt from SAF to change the associations of SAF as an employer within the military industry. The challenge of the hegemonic representation of military, enforced by popular culture and the US, is therefore an attempt of changing the brand associations of SAF in a Swedish context. In the interviews, it is also discussed how the 2011 campaign might also be a reaction of the media coverage of the Swedish soldiers who lost their lives in Afghanistan in 2005 and 2010, hence an attempt to change the brand associations created from Swedish media.

“I remember this media reporting about this that happened in 2010. And I also remember the pictures that appeared, like in Aftonbladet and others in some barren landscape in Afghanistan. I do not know if it was Afghanistan, but in the Middle East. And it was these big headlines and it was almost like these soldiers who had fallen were a little canonized. /.../ a lot of Media focus on this American view of war that has existed since around 2001. /.../ they are trying to take control of the narrative about SAF and SAF as an organization. Because it's like just the year before it had circulated these pictures /.../. It was very warlike. So that it was like their way of reframing and taking back the media image to what they want.” - Private Sector 4

As a way of changing the thoughts and ideas evoked by the brand name, SAF, they aim to distance themselves from the associations that the military in general evokes. However, one of the interviewees in SAF group had a negotiated reading of the 2011 campaign where it was interpreted as a mixed message, both distancing themselves through making fun of the Hollywood representation of military work, but also fueling it.

“We are not that cool. Or are we?!?” - SAF 3

Meaning that the aim might be to distance SAF from the hegemonic view of the military industry, but still fueling it as the associations evokes a sense of excitement and thrilling, In the 2019 campaign, the interviewee's did not interpret it as a response strategy to existing negative associations of military work, and therefore also SAF. It was more perceived as an attempt to legitimate SAF as an organization.

“It is about the public anchoring, that this student who runs out can also be the soldier and then or this child who grows up can also be part of defending the country, but it is an attempt I think to try to public anchor SAF a bit.” – SAF 4

Additionally, there were many reflections amongst the interviewees about the 2019 campaign being an attempt to show that SAF is a prospective employer for everyone, not only for men. In the 2019 videos, there are both men and women however, some of the interviewees perceived it as a particular emphasize on women. That the gender perspective is prominent for a couple of the interviewees, even though it appears to be 50/50 in the videos, reveals something about the associations of SAF amongst the interviewees. If the associations of SAF being an employer for both men and women, the presence of women would perhaps not be as startling, as what it appear to be now. The campaign of 2019 was chosen as it was the first, non-gender oriented campaign of SAF since the reinforcement of muster and conscript.

“But also a broadened recruitment based on what we are used to thinking about SAF as men in their 30s, this is much more women.” Public Sector 1

### **Employer Image**

The organization’s desired image is what directs the communications strategies (Larsson, 2014). Brand image is conceptualized as the perception of a brand amongst the stakeholders (Cornelissen, 2020) and employer brand image can be described as the functional and symbolic benefits the brand is perceived by prospective employees to offer (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). As mentioned earlier, when the interviewees were asked which campaign they would categorize within the statement “SAF is an employer” they all answered the 2011 campaign, and they answered the 2019 campaign to the statement “to muster is a part of life”. This indicates that SAF was perceived mainly as an employer in the 2011 campaign. Additionally, in relation to the concepts of citizen’s responsibility and user’s choice, work and higher purpose was a recurrent discussion. As the 2011 campaign was perceived to be more individualistic, highlighting users’ choice and it alluded to liberalism, the concepts of work, and employer was prominent as a key message.

“...the first was also maybe a little more, in addition to focusing on the individual, they alluded to a little more ‘here you have the opportunity to get a job’.” - Public Sector 4

“In the first, it feels more like they want to enter the Swedish labor market and say ‘this is what we offer’.” - Public Sector 3

Besides positioning themselves as an employer and a part of the Swedish labor market, SAF is perceived in the 2011 campaign to try to create a brand image by distancing themselves from the hegemonic view of the military from popular culture and the US.

“If you think of all the movies that exist from the USA, and I think mainly the US because they make a lot of war movies that we see, then I absolutely think that this is really if you think of damage control. We will not send you into death. We have actually prepared, we will keep track, we are serious.” - Public Sector 1

The interviewees perceived in the 2011 campaign that the desired employer brand image is to firstly show that they are in fact an employer and secondly, show that they are an important, secure and serious employer where the employees get a meaningful job.

“/.../ maybe they wanted to erase these myths and rumors about what it means to be military, and that's why they say ´we do not do this and we do not do this but you get an opportunity to make a difference in the end.” - SAF 2

However, what the 2011 campaign referred to by ´making a difference´ and having a meaningful job, was unclear for the interviewees however, the key message of SAF as an employer was prominent. In the 2019 campaign however, the interviewees mainly perceived it as a positioning to show that SAF is an important organization for the society, and also an important employer.

“I agree that the latter to market itself as an important employer.” – Public Sector 2

However, the participants interpreted it also as a way of communicating the importance of the society's defence, hence the citizen's duty to SAF. Thereby, the 2011 campaign was more focused on showing them as an employer on the labor market towards the individual while the 2019 campaign was perceived more as a way to legitimize SAF as a public sector organization towards the collective and society. The perceived communicated benefits of SAF from the 2011 campaign was therefore more individual benefits, i.e. the functional benefit of that you as an individual will have a job and the symbolic benefit being that you will be able to make a difference, some kind of self-realization. The 2019 campaign communicated rather a

societal benefit, the functional being that there is a defence securing the future and the symbolic being the higher purpose of the job.

### **Employer Attraction**

Employer attraction is described as the aim of the employer branding activities (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004), which generates the applications of prospective employees. In this study, the employer attraction is researched through the reception analysis of the three group interviews. It is studied whether the respondents do oppositional, negotiated or preferred reading of the campaigns.

The group of public sector employees had a more tendency for preferred reading of the 2019 campaign, where they expressly said that they liked it better and could consider working there, while the 2011 campaign was perceived as ridiculous and not interesting at all. The 2019 campaign was also more appealing to the group of SAF employees than the 2011 campaign was. Hence, both groups of public sector and SAF had an oppositional reading to the 2011 campaign and a preferred reading of the 2019 campaign.

“especially the movie with the connections to society and since they are in the battleship there are still elements of actual activity and actual soldiers who do some actual activity, I think it is really good in comparison with many, many others campaign that have been” - SAF 4

In contrast to this, the private sector group had not as an oppositional reading of the 2011 campaign as the public sector and SAF groups had and the 2019 campaign was not as appealing to the private sector group either. Meaning that the private sector group had more negotiated reading of both campaigns, of which two of the interviewees doing oppositional readings of the 2019 campaign.

Private Sector 3: “the moment I saw the commercial I thought it was a bit disgusting in the way that it went much more on the scare factor about the uncertain future where something bad can happen. Because it shows pictures of happy, innocent, children playing. And so ‘we protect you from the future’ are words that show that without SAF, these children will not be able to play. /.../ It gets a little cheap I think.”

Private Sector 4: “I actually got that feeling too, it was my first thought that this is an apocalypse and all I have from this apocalyptic feeling is like we are waiting for something terrible to happen.”



Private Sector Interview 3: “This is how a trailer tends to be of an apocalyptic movie, everyone is playing, and bang all the trees are dead and like people start running”.

Another perspective brought by the participants was gender interpretations. Amongst the participants in the private sector group and the public sector group, the campaign of 2019 was perceived to be more gender inclusive than the 2011 which felt more as it would be appealing to men.

“I would spontaneously say that the first two feel quite old, haha. They feel quite 2006-2008 and are very pre #metoo.“ - Public Sector 1

“So my spontaneous thought was that this, if you can compare with the other, that it was so much more focused on girls and to get girls to apply for SAF” - Private Sector 2

However, this was questioned by one of the other participants who argued that the 2011 campaign was also gender focused, but perhaps more regarding stereotypical men joining the army.

“Isn't it also a bit like almost as a recruitment strategy also these films in a way, because then when they do it like this ‘welcome to our reality we are /.../ a bit boring there, then maybe also somewhere sifts away these testosterone guys who think they're gonna be rambo, but when those people see this commercial they think ‘what can't I become an action hero?’.” - Private Sector 4

### 3. Conclusive discussion

Through the study, NPM and Employer Branding have been studied quite separately in order to gain an in-depth analysis of the both theoretical frameworks in relation to the case and the empirical material. There are some prominent conclusions, for example that the Supermarket State model leaves traces in the branding activities during a liberal government. Hence, the NPM trends are identified as stronger within the 2011 campaign by the individualistic approach, where the message is interpreted as user's choice driven. In contrast to this, the 2019 campaign leans to the Sovereign State model where the collective approach dominates and there is a tendency of citizen's responsibility and the message is interpreted as citizen's duty towards both SAF but also the society over all. When applying Employer Branding theory it

became clear that during the time with strong NPM trends, employer branding was more prominent as a strategy, by emphasizing that SAF in fact is an employer that you can choose. However, does this create a correlation between weaker NPM trends and lack of employer branding in favor of strict branding? The question here is perhaps answered by the fact that the 2011 campaign was an expressly staffing recruitment campaign while the 2019 campaign was a general campaign. The need of employer branding activities during strong NPM trends and the lack of need of the same during weaker NPM trends and socialistic government due to reinforcement of muster and conscript reveals the initial question.

Whether or not the 2019 campaign was intended as a employer branding campaign, analyzing the material through Employer Branding theory through s semiotic, CDA and reception analysis some themes are prominent. Instead of communicating the individual benefits of SAF as an employer, the focus is on communicating the societal benefits of SAF organization and employees. As the collectivistic approach was also prominent when analyzing the empirical material through a NPM perspective, which indicated weaker NPM trends, an interesting conclusion is brought on the matter on employer branding activities within the public sector. Weaker NPM trends indicates more focus on the societal benefits and the higher purpose within employer branding activities in the public sector, while stronger NPM trends indicates more focus on the individual's benefit. Thus, the second research question is answered: How can a reception analysis provide insights about how audiences perceive the themes on Employer Branding from an NPM perspective? By this, the initial curiosity that sparked this research, whether the stakeholder is analyzed and communicated with depending on contemporary politics, is also answered and it appears as to be accurate in this case study.

### ***3.1 Suggestions for further research***

In the reception analysis, it was prominent that there were some major differences amongst the positioning's of readings amongst the interview groups. The ones who were working in the public sector, including SAF, they had a more oppositional reading towards the first campaign which indicated stronger NPM trends and had a more individualistic approach. While having a preferred reading towards the 2019 campaign with weaker NPM trends and a collectivistic approach. On the contrary, the private sector group had a more negotiated reading towards both of the campaigns. This indicates that employer branding activities might be implicated whether the prospective employees

are working within private or public sector. This could be of interest to research further, as an attempt to increase the interest for the public sector as an employer amongst private sector employees.

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# Appendices

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## Appendix 1 - Questionnaire

### A. Introduction

1. Read consent form and explain, ask for permission to record the interview.
2. Introduce the researcher/interviewer
3. Introduce research objectives:
  - A) to understand public sector campaigns from a NPM perspective
  - B) to understand Employer Branding activity of Swedish Armed Forces with a NPM perspective
4. Inform about confidentiality

### C. Main research questions - 2011

*Show the two commercials from 2011*

5. What is the core message of these videos?
  - *(Vad är huvudbudskapet i dessa videos?)*
6. Is there an individualistic or a collectivist approach in the videos?
  - *(Är det en individualistisk eller kollektivistisk approach i videorna?)*
7. Are the videos focusing on users' choice or citizen's responsibility?
  - *(Fokuserar videorna på individens val eller medborgarens ansvar?)*
8. How does the Swedish Armed Forces brand themselves as an employer in these videos?
  - *(Hur marknadsför sig Försvarsmakten som en arbetsgivare i dessa videos?)*

### D. Main research questions - 2019

*Show the two commercials from 2019*

9. What is the core message of these videos?
  - *(Vad är huvudbudskapet i dessa videos?)*

10. Is there an individualistic or a collectivist approach in the videos?

- *(Är det en individualistisk eller kollektivistisk approach i videorna?)*

11. Are the videos focusing on users' choice or citizen's responsibility?

- *(Fokuserar videorna på individens val eller medborgarens ansvar?)*

12. How does the Swedish Armed Forces brand themselves as an employer in these videos?

- *(Hur marknadsför sig Försvarmakten som en arbetsgivare i dessa videos?)*

### **E. Main research questions - comparison of 2011 and 2019**

13. What is the main difference between the campaigns?

- *(Vad är den största skillnaden mellan dessa kampanjer?)*

14. Which campaign do you think has more attributes from a liberal politic vs. a socialistic politic?

- *(Vilken kampanj tycker du har mer attribut från en liberal politik vs. socialistisk politik?)*

15. Which campaign appears to be more focused on showing the Swedish Armed Forces as an employer?

- *(Vilken av kampanjerna är mer fokuserad på att visa Försvarmakten som en arbetsgivare?)*

### **D. Closure**

16. Is there anything you would like to add that you think is important, that we have not covered yet?

- *(Finns det något som du vill tillägga som du tycker är viktigt, men som vi inte har pratat om än?)*

17. Thank you so much for all your help and participation in this interview.

18. In the consent form you can find our contact details, if you're interested in the results of our study or would like to redraw your participation.

## **Appendix 2 Informed Consent Form**

This consent form is part of the process required for ethical treatment of participants in research. It gives you the basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. If you would like more detail about the research process or procedures, please ask.

### ***Invitation to Participate***

This research is conducted by Fanndis Hermannsdottir for master thesis within the master's programme in Strategic Communication at Lund University, spring 2021. The research is a qualitative case study of two branding campaigns of the Swedish Armed Forces.

### ***Research Purpose***

This thesis aims to study the employer branding activities of the Swedish Armed Forces in relation to the theory of New Public Management trends.

### ***Research Method***

The study is conducted through three semi structured focus group interviews, with four interviewees in each. The questions are focused on your perception of branding activities and are open ended questions.

### ***Benefit***

By participating, you will contribute to an understanding about employer branding activities in relation to NPM trends.

### ***Confidentiality - Anonymity - Security***

The other participants in your focus group will know your name, however in the research your name will be coded and you will not be able to be identified.

### ***Voluntary participation***

You are being asked to make a voluntary decision whether or not to participate in this study. If there is any part of the information that is not clear, please feel free to ask for clarifications. If you decide not to participate, or if you later decide to discontinue your participation, your decision will not affect your present or future relations with the researchers or Lund Universi-

ty. Upon request, a copy of the information, data, and results will be made available to you. You will always be free to discontinue participation at any time, and all data collected up to that time as a result of your partial participation will be destroyed without being used in the study.

### ***What Your Consent Means***

Your verbal consent to this Consent Form indicates that you have understood to your satisfaction the information regarding participation in this research project and agree to participate as a participant. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time, without any consequences. Your continued participation should be informed as your initial consent, so you should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation. If you decide to participate, please answer yes when your name is called.

### **Contact Information**

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