Rich Media in Employer Branding

An experimental study on the impact of rich media testimonials on job seekers perceptions about firms’ Employer Brand Values

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ABSTRACT

This thesis investigated how information on a firm’s website presented with rich media employee testimonials differs compared to a poor media description communicating the same content in its ability to positively influence potential job-seekers perceptions about a firm's employer brand values, in particular social value due to its potential in differentiation. A problem was identified being that firms are experiencing difficulties with communicating social value of the firm to potential job seekers. The authors used a mixed-method research design containing explorative expert interviews, an explanatory experiment where potential job-seekers were exposed to two different versions of a firms’ website (one containing rich media employee testimonial, and one containing a written text description of the same content), and a number of focus groups with the aim to further explain the findings from the experiment.

The findings indicate that rich media employee testimonials embedded in a firm's website increase potential job-seekers perceptions about a firm in terms of both social value and identification with the firm. These findings suggest that firms should consider using rich media employee testimonials on their career websites as an alternative to the more commonly used poor media written descriptions.

KEYWORDS: media richness, employer branding, video testimonials, employer brand values, social value, vividness effects
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1. Introduction

1.1 Background

1.1.1 Differentiation in Employer Branding

Berthon et al. (2005:153) are frequently cited in research related to employer branding. They define Employer Branding as “the sum of a company’s efforts to communicate to existing and prospective staff that it is a desirable place to work”. Similar to branding in consumer markets, an essential part of a firm’s employer branding activities is to differentiate themselves in relation to its competitors (Barrow & Mosley, 2005; Moroko & Uncles, 2008). The tangible parts of the Employer Brand, such as salary and benefits are considered easier to copy than intangible brand characteristics and organizational culture (Mosley, 2007). Social Value, which is a highly intangible value, and which regards things such as a “strong team spirit”, “good managers” “a friendly relationship amongst co-workers” and a “respectful environment”, has been argued to be the employer brand value that is the most difficult for other firms to copy, while also being the highest driver for identification with the focal firm (Schlager et al., 2011). However, the findings from Schlager et al. (2011) also indicate that social value is the most difficult value to communicate externally to potential job-seekers due to its intangibility, and since it is mainly experienced internally.

A common tool to use in order to communicate the intangible parts of a firms employer brand is to use video interviews with employees. In the middle of January 2013, Swedish newspaper Metro headlined their career edition with an article about this emerging trend (Metro, 2013). The authors of this thesis performed an initial study of the 50 highest ranked firms on Universum's list of Sweden's most attractive firms. It showed that 14 out of 50 are using employee video testimonials on their websites, while the other 32 are using traditional written text descriptions, and 4 are using written employee testimonials (Universum, 2013). This indicates that employee video testimonials is a common tool in employer branding, however, not as common as the traditional written text descriptions. TUI Nordic, the Nordic section of the worlds biggest travel company TUI Travel PLC, launched a series of interviews with
one employee from each department in February 2013. Jessica Hammerteg, Senior HR Advisor at TUI Nordic, stated the following in regards of their investment in employee video testimonials:

“Video testimonials will be a vital part of our employer branding strategy (...) Candidates nowadays want to know more than just the hard facts and they care less about the brand name (...) We want people to get to know us and to feel connected, that’s why we will use the video testimonials.”

Jessica Hammerteg, Senior HR Advisor TUI Nordic, 2013

1.1.2 Rich or poor media?

Previous research within the fields of advertising, communication and organizational learning have shown the potential of using rich media formats (e.g. audio/video testimonials) to communicate identification with consumer products, to increase attraction to a product (Appiah, 2006), and to transfer trust and knowledge (Wathne, 1996). However, the empirical findings from comparing rich media (such as video testimonials) and poor media (such as written text) are not fully consistent. A rich media format is higher in vividness than a poor media format (Appiah, 2006), but the research on the effects of vividness in communication has shown mixed results (Collins et al., 1988). Vividness is based on sensory breadth, meaning that a media format with high vividness engages a higher number of senses (Steur, 1994). Some studies on vividness have shown that it increases persuasion and attraction (Shedler & Manis, 1986), while other studies have shown the opposite (Frey & Eagly, 1993; Zeff & Aronson, 1999). Recent studies within consumer branding have shown that rich media with high vividness communicates intangible aspects (for example identification and trust) of a brand better than poor media with low vividness (Appiah, 2006). Belch & Belch (2001) state that rich media can “convey a mood or image for a brand” at a higher extent than poor media. The similarities between the intangible aspects of a product/consumer brand (such as for example identification and trust) and the intangible aspects of an Employer Brand (such as social value) indicates that the rich media format may work well in an Employer branding context, especially in order to communicate the intangible aspects such as Social Value, Identification firm and Trust, and thereby also Employer Attraction. However, this has not yet been empirically tested in an employer branding context.
1.2 Purpose

The purpose of this study is to test if rich media employee testimonials embedded in a corporate website have the ability to increase potential job seekers positive perceptions about firms.

By studying the impact of two different communication modalities embedded in a corporate website, and the extent to which they differ in their ability to positively influence potential job-seekers, we hope to fill the existing gap in research regarding the effects of using rich media communication in employer branding.

1.3 Research question

*How will information presented with rich media employee testimonials perform in communicating a firm's employer brand values toward potential job seekers compared to a poor media description communicating the same content?*
2. Theory

This section of the thesis will regard two main aspects. First, the concept of employer branding and the main values that constitute an employer brand will be discussed in order to put the thesis in a theoretical context. Special attention will be paid to social value due to its differentiation potential as well as the difficulties related to communicating it. The second part of the chapter will discuss the concept of rich- versus poor media and vividness. The benefits and potential drawbacks of rich media in relation to communicating values will be highlighted and discussed. Special attention will be given to the potential positive effects that Rich Media has been discussed to have regarding identification with a product or a firm, and regarding the trustworthiness of the communicated brand image. As this thesis discusses employer brand messages in video testimonials, a mix of these two not necessarily related frameworks is necessary as in the context of video testimonials we cannot deny the effects a modality can have on the communicated message. The same goes for ignoring the message being communicated. The section will end in a theoretical summary where four hypotheses will be presented.

2.1 Employer Branding

Employer branding shares many similarities with consumer branding, but the main difference is in the target group, which is current and potential employees to the focal firm instead of potential consumers (Moroko & Uncles, 2008). The reasons for a firm to invest in their employer brand are also different from a consumer brand. A strong employer brand will have two main positive outcomes for the firm. The first one is Employer Attraction and the second one is Employee productivity. Increased Employer Attraction helps the firm to attract, recruit and retain the best employees while Employee Productivity concerns the linkage between Employer Branding and Employer Productivity. (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004) This paper focuses on the first of these two outcomes, Employer Attraction. The principal asset that affects employer attraction is the employer brand associations that the firm incorporate and communicate in their employer branding activities. Backhaus & Tikoo (2004) refer to Aaker (1991) who argues that brand associations are the thoughts and ideas that a brand name evokes in the mind of the focal consumer. Brand associations can reside on a verbal or sensory level, and are to some degree everything that the focal consumer relates to the brand on a conscious or subconscious level (Aaker, 1991). It
can be everything from a memory, an emotional response or even a taste or smell (Supphellen, 2000). The sum of the brand associations is what forms the brand image. A strong and positive employer brand image will help the firm to attract and retain the most skilled employees, and thus, bring value to the firm in the form of added human capital (Schlager et al., 2011). By investing in human capital, a firm can increase its performance (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). It has also been suggested by several authors that resources that are rare, valuable, non-substitutable and difficult to imitate can create a competitive advantage for the firm (Barney, 1991). Human capital holds many of those traits and has shown to be a resource with the capacity to create a competitive advantage (Priem & Butler, 2001).

2.1.1 Social Value

In an effort to define and separate the different parts of an Employer Brand, Backhaus & Tikoo (2004) divided the Employer Brand in two main categories, functional- and non-functional attributes. Functional attributes are things such as salary, leave allowances and benefits. The non-functional attributes are for example the prestige of the firm or the social approval a potential employee perceive they might enjoy if they would work for the firm (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). Schlager et al. (2011) suggested a more refined framework where they divided the functional- and non-functional benefits in five categories, or Employer Brand Values as they refer to them. The first value is economic value, which involves aspects such as “good salary”, a “fair number of holidays” and “reasonable retirement benefits”. The second value is development value, which regards things such as “good training opportunities”, an “empowering culture” and a “good mentoring culture”. The third value is social value, which regards a “strong team spirit”, “competent co-workers”, “good managers” “a friendly relationship amongst co-workers” and a “respectful environment”. The fourth value is diversity value, meaning things such as “interesting job characteristics”. The fifth value is the “reputation value” of the company. This value is shown through for example “well known products, “good reputation of the company among friends” and ”good brand to have on one’s resumé”. (Schlager et al., 2011)

To potential employees, Schlager et al. (2011) suggested that firms should highlight their social value. Schlager et al.’s (2011) study showed that social value owns the strongest positive effect of employee identification with the company. Further, the
study concluded that social value is more attractive towards potential employees than, for instance, the good reputation of a firm or a product.

According to Schlager et al. (2011), social value is a key ingredient in a firm’s employer brand. There are two main reasons for this; first of all, social value has shown to have the greatest influence on identification with the firm out of all five Employer Brand Values (Schlager et al., 2011). Identification with the firm is in turn the highest driver for attraction (Schlager et al., 2011), and according to Van Knippenberg (2000), also a main driver for the employee to be collective-identity oriented and take actions on behalf of the organization's best interest compared to the individual's best interest. Secondly, social value stems from what Backhaus & Tikoo (2004) refer to as non-functional attributes (Schlager et al., 2011). Non-functional attributes are difficult for other firms to copy due to their intangible nature, which makes them suitable for differentiation purposes (Mosley, 2007). Similar to consumer branding, a main task for the employer brand is to differentiate the brand from its competitors (Mosley, 2007). As such, the non-functional nature of the social value suggests that it is not only an important positive driver in terms of identification with the firm, but also in terms of differentiation. The components that construct social value are according to Schlager et al. (2011): respectful environment, friendly atmosphere, good managers, team spirit and a people first attitude. They argue that these five components are well established as drivers for identification with the firm (Schlager et al., 2011; Lavelle et al., 2007).

2.1.2 Communicating social value

Social value is different from some of the other values in terms of communication due to its intangible nature. Tangible brand characteristics are unlike intangible brand characteristics straightforward and easy to interpret by the receiver (Keeling et al., 2013). Economic Value is an example of a tangible benefit, which is easily recognized by the potential employee (Schlager et al., 2010). Regarding intangible characteristics on the other hand, current employees are an important information source in terms of communicating it to potential employees (Keeling et al., 2013; Schlager et al., 2011). The recruitment process is in many cases the first face-to-face contact between the potential employee and the firm, and hence, the first time the potential employee gets an insiders view regarding the intangible employer brand
characteristics. However, potential employees are exposed to the employer brand values in general at a much earlier stage than during the recruitment process, for example from the firm’s website (Barber, 1998 and Rynes, 1991).

The firm’s website is a good tool for communicating many of the employer brand values, and it has shown to have significant impact on forming the initial organizational attitudes among the job seekers (Barber, 1998; Rynes, 1991), but it is difficult to conclude if that also applies to social value. Social value and its potential in external communication is a rather unexplored area. As it contains intangible characteristics, it might indicate that it may be more difficult to communicate in a website context that other more tangible employer brand values. Schlager et al. (2011) concluded that social value is mainly experienced internally, and hence, difficult to communicate to potential job seekers, for example through a company website.

However, Schlager et al. (2011) also showed that current employees can function as a communication bridge for social value between current and potential employees by using word-of-mouth, and research from consumer branding has shown that customers are more likely to trust, have confidence in, and believe in things coming from a regular customer rather than information coming directly from the selling firm (Raphel, 1997; Appiah, 2006).

It has been argued that the role of a current employee in an employer branding context has many similarities to that of a current or former user of a product in a consumer branding context (Moroko & Uncles, 2008). Based on the above, we can assume that a company website with testimonials of current employees should have a positive effect on the perceived social value as experienced by the viewer/potential employee compared to a written branding text. However, studies from consumer branding have also shown that the modality in which the testimonial is communicated has a big impact on how the brand values are perceived, such as if the testimonial is presented in the form of rich or poor media (Appiah, 2006). That leads us to the second part of our theoretical framework.
2.2 Rich and poor media

2.2.1 What is rich and poor media?

Appiah (2006) stated that a “rich” media format is a media format with visual effects that has complex animations or audio and video, while a “poor” media format is something that lacks these attributes, such as for example written text. Media richness theory focuses on a medias ability to carry knowledge and information, thus determining the focal medias “richness” (Kwak, 2012). There are four factors which influence the media richness; (1) *Immediacy of feedback*, which refers to the degree of allowed bidirectional communication. (2) *Language variety*, which refers to the range of meanings that can be produced by the available pool of symbols in the focal language. (3) *Personalization*, which allows the communication of personal feelings and emotions as well as the customization to the current situation of the receiver of the output. (4) *Multiple cues availability*, which refers to the use of multiple information channels, for example through voice inflection and body gestures that are encompassed in synergy with a verbal message. (Kahai & Cooper, 2003) Face-to-face communication is the richest form of media there is (Wathne, 1996). A video testimonial is poorer than face-to-face communication, but richer than written text (Appiah, 2006).

2.2.2 Video testimonials

A popular way to use rich media in consumer branding is to show video testimonials with satisfied customers. These user testimonials usually show a satisfied ordinary customer discussing hers/his experience with the brand and the benefits that comes with it (Belch and Belch, 1998). Appiah (2006) performed a study on the effects of user video testimonials where he compared three different dummy websites selling the same product (an Apple Macintosh G4 laptop). He found that video testimonials increased the viewer's identification with the product, the belief that the viewer was specifically targeted with the ad, and that the viewer rated the website more favorably compared the website that did not have rich media in the form of a consumer video testimonial. The findings by Appiah (2006) are to some extent also supported in earlier research. Kim, Kardes & Herr (1989) studied face-to-face testimonials compared to testimonials in written text and found that favorable testimonials in a vivid face-to-face format formed much stronger favorable brand attitudes compared to
written testimonials. It has also been argued that rich media, such as video, is better used than text to “convey a mood or image for a brand as well as to develop emotional or entertaining appeals that help make a dull product appear more interesting” (Belch and Belch 2001, p. 354), and that rich media produces higher information credibility (Cable & Yu, 2006). An important notion however, is that also the consistency of the brand message throughout all channels is suggested to have an impact on trust (Ambler & Barrow, 1996; Barrow & Mosley, 2005; Schults & Kitchen, 2005), which indicates that a video testimonial in itself may not increase trust unless it is consistent with the rest of the brand message. Two main reasons have been suggested to explain the positive effects of rich media and user video testimonials that some of the research has shown. The first one is that people are more likely to trust, have confidence in, and believe in things coming from a regular customer rather than information coming directly from the selling firm (Raphel, 1997, Appiah, 2006). The other possible reason comes from the non-conclusive research on media vividness.

2.2.3 The vividness effect

Vividness is based on sensory breadth, meaning that a media format with high vividness engages a higher number of senses (Steur, 1994). An audio/video testimonial is high in vividness, while a written text is low in vividness. The previous research on vividness effects has shown mixed results (Collins et al., 1988). Some of the research has shown that information presented in a high vividness format enhances persuasion (Shedler & Manis, 1986). It has been argued that the main reasons behind this is that messages that appeal to multiple perceptual systems are further elaborated by the viewers imagination, and hence, better perceived (Li, Daugherty & Biocca, 2002). Another explanation is that high vividness presented in the context of audio/video enhances the salience of the information due to cues such as physical appearance and tone of voice, which are absent in written text (Chaiken & Eagly, 1983). However, much of the previous research has also pointed in a different direction. The research by Edell & Staelin (1983) and Wright & Rip (1980) showed that vividness had no effect on the viewers attitudes, while other findings indicates that high vividness even lowers persuasion (Frey & Eagly, 1993), and that consumers are better persuaded by the use of poor media with low vividness (Zeff & Aronson, 1999).
The mixed results indicate that the positive effects of vividness can occur, but only under certain circumstances (Kisielius & Sternthal, 1986), and to a great extent depending on the operationalization of the research (Appiah, 2006; Kisielius & Sternthal, 1986). Much of the earlier research was conducted with concrete- versus abstract information as the stimulus (see for example Collins et al. 1988), and in context far away from advertising (Appiah, 2006). Only the more recent studies have been performed with audiovisual testimonials as the vividness stimuli. Appiah (2006) suggested that the more recent studies, where audiovisual testimonials have been used as the vividness stimuli, more accurately represent the way in which vividness in communication is used today. The context of this thesis, where we examine the effects of audiovisual employee testimonials in Employer Branding, is more similar to the more recent studies on vividness where the vividness stimulus have been audio/video versus text only (see for example Appiah, 2006), than the older studies where the vividness stimulus have been for example concrete- versus abstract information (see for example Taylor & Thompson, 1982). Hence, we argue that it is likely that favorable employer brand values will be better perceived when presented in a rich media format with high vividness.

2.3 Hypotheses

**H1: Social Value**

The general expectation in this study is that a company website with vivid rich media employee testimonials should be rated more favorably by potential job seekers compared to an equivalent website with pallid, poor media content without rich media employee testimonials. Further, as employees can serve as a bridge in communicating the social value of a firm (Schlager et al., 2011), and because rich media has shown the ability to “convey a mood or image for a brand” in a more persuasive way than poor media (Belch and Belch 2001: 354), we suggest that rich media should perform better compared to poor media in communicating a firm's social value. This leads us to the first hypothesis:

> **H1:** A company website with employee testimonials presented in a rich media format will positively influence the viewers perception of the firms social value at a
higher extent than information presented in a poor media format with a description of the same content.

**H2: Trust**

Research in consumer branding has shown that viewers are more likely to trust, have confidence in, and believe in messages communicated in rich media formats compared to poor media formats (Appiah, 2006; Raphael, 1997). Further, Cable & Yu (2006) have shown that rich media produces higher information credibility. Based on the above, we present our second hypothesis:

**H2: A company website with employee testimonials presented in a rich media format will be perceived as more trustworthy compared to an equivalent company website with information presented in a poor media format with a description of the same content.**

**H3: Identification with the firm**

Further, the social fit of the potential employee within a firm, and the belief that a firm has similar values as the potential employee has shown to be of great importance (Keeling et al., 2013; Edwards, 2010). According to Appiah (2006), viewers are more likely to identify themselves with a product and a brand if information about the product/brand is communicated through rich media testimonials. This suggests that information about a firm presented with rich media employee testimonials should increase the perceived level of identification with the firm also in an employer branding context. Based on the above, we present our third hypothesis:

**H3: Viewers will identify more strongly with the firm if the firm’s values are presented in a rich media format with employee testimonials on a firm’s website compared to an equivalent company website with information presented in a poor media format with a description of the same content.**

**H4: Employer attraction**

Research from consumer branding has shown that rich media has the ability to transform dull products into something interesting for consumers (Belch & Belch, 2001). Further, rich media can increase favorable brand attitudes (Kim, Kardes & Herr 1989 and Appiah, 2006), as well as increase the likelihood of purchase (Appiah, 2006). **Social value**, in turn, has shown to be a main driver for employee attraction
towards a firm (Schlager et al., 2011). Combining these two, by communicating *social value* in a rich media format, should increase the firm's attractiveness towards potential employees. This leads us to the fourth hypothesis:

**H4:** *A company website with employee testimonials (partially focusing on social value) presented in a rich media format will have a positive impact on the viewer’s willingness to work for the firm compared to an equivalent company website with information presented in a poor media format with a description of the same content.*
3. Method

3.1 Research design

The purpose of this study is to test if rich media employee testimonials embedded in a corporate website has the ability to increase potential job seekers positive perceptions about firms. In order to reach the purpose, the following research question was chosen; "Will information presented with rich media employee testimonials on a firm’s website increase potential job seekers positive perceptions about the firm?" To answer the research question, a combination of research methods was chosen, or as Saunders et al. (2009) refer to it, mixed methods. A benefit with mixed methods is that it can "Draw on the strengths and minimize the weaknesses of both types of research" (Connelly, 2009). Quantitative research, on one hand, can improve the validity of findings and provide a numerical dimension that helps the researcher to simplify human experience (Bryman & Bell, 2007), and by that, explain relationships between variables (Saunders et al., 2009). In this thesis, the quantitative research enabled us to test the relationship between perceived employer brand values and rich media as a communication modality. Qualitative studies on the other hand, can enable the researcher to reach an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon and answer questions such as "why" and "how" (Saunders et al., 2009). In this thesis, the qualitative approach was especially beneficial in order to understand why some of the hypotheses were not supported.

As Employer Branding is a relatively new field of research (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004), we decided that it would be advantageous to use a qualitative and exploratory approach as a first step in the research. The aim of that part of the research was to narrow down on some of the biggest challenges within Employer Branding from a firm's perspective. To achieve that, we performed a set of interviews with individuals with specific knowledge in the field of communication within employer branding. Saunders et al. (2009) have argued that initial interviews can be beneficial to conduct as a source of inspiration, and to form hypotheses, research objectives and questions. The findings from the interviews suggested that firms are challenged with differentiating themselves in their employer brand. During that first step, a literature review was also initiated. Based on the interviews and the literature, we understood
that employee video testimonials was a communication method with the potential to help firms communicate their "soft", and firm-specific employer brand values, and by that, differentiate themselves against their competitors. That led the research into its second step, a quantitative explanatory experiment. In that step, it was tested if there is a positive relationship between the use of employee video testimonials and the perceived social value of a firm. The third and last step of the research was a series of qualitative focus groups with participants from the experiment. The focus group method is often used to explore a theme more in depth (Bryman & Bell, 2007). In this case, the main purpose of the focus groups was to gain a deeper understanding of the results from the experiment. Merriam (1998) has argued that qualitative research is especially beneficial when “there is a lack of theory, or existing theory fails to adequately explain a phenomenon”. Since some of the hypotheses in this thesis were not supported, even though previous studies from similar fields of research would suggest so, we argue that the qualitative third step was necessary, and added value to the research.

As such, we perceive the methodology of this research as a process including three steps. In terms of deductive or inductive, we view ourselves as moving between the two as we progressed in our research process. The first step was the initial interviews from which we gained insights regarding the practical problems with employer branding and video testimonials, thus we were being rather inductive and building theory. With the insights from step one we moved on to step two in which we gathered and built a literature framework which formed our our variables, which we later tested in an experiment. Thus in step two we consider ourselves as being rather deductive as we were testing existing theory. Step three we tried to deepen our understandings regarding the results from the experiment and thus, again, had a inductive approach in which we were building theory. Mixing and moving between the inductive and deductive approach is not uncommon, according to Saunders et al (2009) this rather a normal procedure. especially when using a mixed method approach.
3.2 Expert interviews

3.2.1 Data collection
As is common when conducting semi-structured interviews (Saunders et al., 2009), a list of questions was formed (Appendix A & B). The questions were open-ended, based on initial impressions of employer branding, and mainly focused on what challenges firms are facing in terms of communicating their employer brand values to potential employees. The interviews took place at each respondent's office in order to ensure that the respondent felt comfortable during the interview. Both interviews were carried out in face-to-face meetings. The interviews were both recorded and notes were taken during the interviews focusing on interesting topics at specific timings. The notes also served as a foundation for follow-up questions and analysis (Patton, 1990). Both interviews were translated and transcribed after the interviews. As the interviews were transcribed not long after it took place and as they were recorded, a limited loss of data could be ensured (Patton, 1990).

3.2.2 Sampling
In selecting subjects for the expert interviews, we used a purposive sampling. Saunders et al. (2009) argue that purposive sampling is common when you wish to select cases that are particularly information rich, which aligns with what we wanted to achieve with our expert interviews. The two expert interviews consisted of Linus Holmgren (CEO and working consultant of the employer brand PR Agency TalentTalk), and Jessica Hammerteg (Senior HR advisor at TUI Nordic). The interview subjects were chosen due to their specialized knowledge about communication within employer branding. With the choice of interview subjects, we were able to gain an understanding of the current practical issues that firms are faced with from a consultancy, as well as a firm’s perspective.

3.2.3 Data analysis
During the transcription and in the process afterwards we started to identify recurring patterns in the interviews. In line with Saunders et al. (2009), the data was analyzed as we collected it and a conceptual framework emerged. These were later incorporated into consideration and comparison of existing literature on the focal subjects. As was
stated earlier, the purpose was to gain new insights and an understanding of the focal subject and the main challenges within the field from a firm's perspective.

3.3 Experiment

3.3.1 Data collection

Stimulus material

Previous research within the field of communication through multimedia channels have gone from audio (see for example Unnava et al., 1994) to more recent studies using video testimonials (Appiah, 2006). Our study used employee video testimonials embedded in a corporate website and compared it to written text descriptions embedded in the same corporate website. Our initial study on the 50 highest ranked firms on Universum’s list of Sweden’s most attractive employers indicated that it is rare to use testimonials in a poor media (written text) format. Almost all firms used the traditional written text descriptions or rich media employee testimonials. Only 4 firms out of 50 used poor media employee testimonials. Further, previous research from consumer branding has shown that testimonials in a poor media format generally perform worse than rich media testimonials on both identification with the product/brand, likelihood of purchase, attitude towards website and attitude towards product/brand (Appiah, 2006). Based on the above, we decided to limit the study to two conditions; 1) rich media employee testimonials and; 2) poor media descriptions without testimonials.

The focal firm displayed in the stimulus material is IKEA. This was decided to be suitable as we had access to the appropriate material, such as texts and employee video interviews discussing their social value. However, IKEA is a very well known company. Due to that, we expected that many respondents would have pre-assumptions about them which may bias the results, but as we expect both control groups to be biased in the same way, we argue that the findings are still valid.

The video testimonial was shown in high quality (720p) to avoid the bias that may have stemmed from a low quality recording. Two versions of a dummy webpage were created by a professional web designer for the Swedish furniture company IKEA. Both pages used the template that IKEA had in use for their career site, but one of them featured a video testimonial, and the other one a written text. Both web
pages communicated the same message, namely social value (as described by Schlager et al., 2011). Images of both web pages can be seen below.

Figure 1 – IKEA career webpage with video employee testimonial

![IKEA career webpage with video employee testimonial](image1)

The video in the rich media employee video testimonial condition was captured from the IKEA website and reworked and edited in order to highlight the appropriate
message in terms of social value. In the video, a manager from IKEA's office in southern Europe describes what is expected from a leader at IKEA and what leadership style is desired there. He highlights that a leader at IKEA should be a good listener, a mentor, a coach and a team-member, and that authoritarian leadership does not fit in at the firm. He is then asked to describe what he likes most about his job. He concludes that the things he likes most about his job is the multicultural diversity, and the IKEA culture in which everyone works together in a movement and where everyone is respected, needs are meet and everyone is understood. The video runs for a total of 1 minute and 40 seconds. The text in the poor media/no testimonial condition was also captured from the IKEA website, but reworked based on what was discussed in the video in order to keep consistency and to avoid biases based on different content in the modalities. The topics of the text were chosen based on a transcription of the video. The text was then reworked again by a professional copywriter before the experiment to avoid potential biases based on poor writing.

Procedure
The experiments were carried out at the beginning of five different seminars at the business department at Uppsala University. Each seminar featured between 13 and 22 students. The participants were instructed that the participation was voluntary, and that they could leave the questionnaires blank if they did not want to take part in the study. The stimulus material was shown on a large screen projector after that all participants were seated and handed a questionnaire. Another alternative, aside from the projector screen as the source of the stimulus material would have been to assign respondents to an individual computer, but it was concluded that this would have been out of the boundaries of the study due to budget limitations. The respondents received no further explanations of the experiment than that they would look over the stimulus material which were to be displayed, and then answer the questions in the questionnaires. Both conditions were shown for between 2 and 3 minutes, and then turned off. The experiment was carried out five times with the following distribution of conditions:

1. Text: 13 respondents
2. Video: 15 respondents
3. Text: 14 respondents
4. Video 22 respondents
5. Text 14 respondents

The total number of respondents was 41 for the text and 37 for the video.

*Operationalization and measures*

A 1-7 Likert-scale was used, in which 1 represented "Completely disagree" and 7 "Completely agree" for all questions aside from demographic- and control questions (Bryman and Bell, 2007). The independent variable was the modality of the website (video testimonial or written text) and the dependent variables were: 1) respectful environment; 2) friendly atmosphere; 3) team spirit; 4) competent co-workers; 5) good managers; 6) trustworthiness of communicated message; 7) shared values; 8) social fit; and 9) attractiveness of focal firm. All dependent variables were adopted based on the theoretical framework (see table 1).

**Table 1 – operationalization and measures**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Field of Study</th>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Theoretical origin</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>H1 – Social Value</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respectful environment</td>
<td>1. I believe that this company has an environment in which co-workers respect each other.</td>
<td>Schlager et al. 2011; Lavelle et al, 2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friendly atmosphere</td>
<td>2. I believe that there is a friendly atmosphere amongst the co-workers at this company.</td>
<td>Schlager et al. 2011; Lavelle et al, 2007; Edwards, 2010; Keeling et al, 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team spirit</td>
<td>3. I believe that this company has a strong team spirit.</td>
<td>Schlager et al. 2011; Lavelle et al, 2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competent co-workers</td>
<td>4. I believe that this company has competent co-workers.</td>
<td>Schlager et al. 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good managers</td>
<td>5. I believe that this company has good managers.</td>
<td>Schlager et al. 2011; Lavelle et al, 2007; Keeling et al, 2013; Edward 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>H2 -Trust</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived trustworthiness of employer brand message</td>
<td>6. I believe that the image that is communicated in the text is consistent with the reality of working for this company.</td>
<td>Appiah, 2006; Raphael, 1997; Cable &amp; Yu, 2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>H3 – Identification with the firm</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived social fit with the firm</td>
<td>7. I believe I would fit in socially at this company.</td>
<td>Keeling et al, 2013; Edward, 2010; Appiah, 2006; Belch &amp; Belch, 2001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived value fit with the firm</td>
<td>8. I believe that my personal values are similar to the values of this company.</td>
<td>Backhaus &amp; Tikoo, 2004; Achmidt, Albinger &amp; Freeman, 2000; Appiah, 2006; Belch &amp; Belch, 2001</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### H4 – Employer attraction

| Willingness to work for the firm | 9. I would like to work for this company | Belch & Belch, 2001; Kim, Kardes & Herr 1989; Appiah, 2006; Schlager et al, 2011 |

**Full questionnaires can be viewed in Appendix C and D.**

#### 3.3.2 Sampling

79 Master students at Uppsala University participated in the experiment. One respondent was excluded as the individual was currently working for the firm displayed in the stimulus material. Of the remaining 78 respondents, 34 (44%) knew someone who worked for the firm displayed in the stimulus material. As we did not want to exclude such a large proportion of the sample, further measures were taken to analyze if they were biased. Using an independent t-test, it was established that there were no significant differences in the answers between those who knew someone at the firm and those who did not. 42 of the respondents (54%) were male and 36 female (46%). 37 respondents were exposed to a rich media employee video testimonial condition, and 41 (53%) respondents were exposed to a poor media/no testimonial condition. The average age of the respondents was 25 (SD = 0.4171).

Business students were chosen for two reasons; first of all, we concluded that they are what Saunders et al. (2009) refer to as ‘information rich’ in relation to the subject of the thesis. Students are often specifically targeted in Employer Branding, and many of the participants were even in the process of searching for a job during the time of the experiment. Instead of collecting students at random, we used different seminar groups for the experiment. This in order to get as many participants as possible. Although they were not chosen at random by us, we still argue that it was a random selection since the seminar groups were formed at random by the teachers. Further, there could have been biases since the experiment was carried out with five different seminar groups during different times in the day and at different locations. However, when analyzing the discrepancies through independent t-tests no significant difference in how they answered could be established. As such, we concluded that it was not necessary to exclude any respondents or separate the sample groups.
3.3.3 Data analysis

In order to analyze the quantitative data we used Spss statistics. First things we did after coding and entering the data was to check for outliers of unrealistic answer values to secure that no input errors were made. We also checked for skewness and kurtosis in variables as to see the distribution of data (Saunders et al., 2009). In order to establish the differences between the conditions, independent sample t-test were conducted as the experiment allowed us two separate two distinct groups. A t-test can be used to establish if the means are significantly different between the groups (Saunders et al., 2009). It is important to note that we do assume the gaps between the values as similar to each other in order to perform the analysis. However, this may not be the case, as a respondent might perceive the distance between 6-7 to be different from 4-5. This does not however undermine the results as we can still conclude whether one modality communicates for example social value better than the other. However, we cannot conclude how much better (Saunders et al., 2009).

3.4 Focus groups

3.4.1 Data collection

During the focus groups, one of the authors acted as a moderator, and the other one as an assistant with a primary role of assisting the moderator with notes, while keeping track of time and comments to assure that all relevant areas off the topic were discussed. The distribution of roles was consistent during both of the focus groups in order to minimize the risk of influencing the different focus groups in different ways (Bryman et al., 2005). The questions were formulated in light of the results from the experiment and in concern to the thesis research question. These are presented in the interview guide (Appendix E). The focus groups both took place in university facilities as we concluded that business student were likely to be comfortable in such a setting, and since it eased the logistics regarding gathering the participants. Both focus groups were recorded and transcribed as soon as possible after the execution to minimize any loss of data (Patton, 1990).

3.4.2 Sampling

The participants for the focus group were selected according to self-selection basis, meaning that the researcher lets the individuals identify their desire to take part in the
research (Saunders et al., 2009). After each experiment session, we presented the opportunity to take part in the focus groups to all participants. According to Saunders et al. (2009), a benefit with the self-selection is that the respondents are more likely to share and contribute since they actively made a choice to take part in the research. 10 participants from the experiment choose to also take part in the focus groups. The 10 participants were divided in two groups with 5 respondents in each, which according to Bryman & Bell (2007) is an appropriate number. The first focus group consisted of 3 females and 2 males, 3 from the poor media/no testimonial condition, and 2 from the rich media employee video testimonial condition. The second group consisted of 4 males and 1 female, 4 from the poor media/no testimonial condition, and 1 from the rich media employee video testimonial condition. All respondents were shown both conditions at the beginning of each focus group interview in order to be able to discuss the differences.

3.4.3 Data analysis

As variables had been established for further investigation in the focus groups, these formed the basis for the broader categories of analysis. We continually evaluated if the new data suggested that different themes or patterns were surfacing taking previous data into consideration (Priest, 2009). This enabled us to have an organized form of analyzing the qualitative data. According to Priest (2009), a systematic approach to analyzing qualitative data of this kind lets the researched avoid predetermined beliefs that might bias the result of the analysis.
4. Findings

This section of the paper is divided in two parts. In the first part, the quantitative results from the experiment will be presented. The second part will regard the qualitative focus groups. Both sections are structured according to the hypotheses.

4.1 Results from the experiment

To test the hypotheses, an independent sample t-test analysis was conducted in order to establish the means of the two conditions. With such an analysis we could conclude if the rich media/employee testimonial condition would significantly differ from the written text/no testimonial condition in regards of its ability to influence the viewers attitudes towards the firm. All dependent variables were analyzed in the same way.

Table 2 – Results from experiment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>H1</th>
<th>Mean Video</th>
<th>Mean Text</th>
<th>SD Video</th>
<th>SD Text</th>
<th>Sig. (2-tailed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Respect environment</td>
<td>5.622</td>
<td>5.146</td>
<td>0.7941</td>
<td>0.8533</td>
<td>0.013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friendly atmosphere</td>
<td>5.622</td>
<td>5.585</td>
<td>0.7941</td>
<td>0.6699</td>
<td>0.828</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team Spirit</td>
<td>5.649</td>
<td>5.122</td>
<td>0.978</td>
<td>0.8425</td>
<td>0.013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competent co-workers</td>
<td>5.054</td>
<td>4.415</td>
<td>1.1534</td>
<td>0.9741</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good managers</td>
<td>5.757</td>
<td>5.024</td>
<td>0.9251</td>
<td>1.0837</td>
<td>0.002</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>H2 Perceived trustworthiness of employer brand message</th>
<th>Mean Video</th>
<th>Mean Text</th>
<th>SD Video</th>
<th>SD Text</th>
<th>Sig. (2-tailed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Perceived trustworthiness of employer brand message</td>
<td>4.216</td>
<td>4.195</td>
<td>1.3361</td>
<td>1.3642</td>
<td>0.945</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>H3 Perceived social fit with the firm</th>
<th>Mean Video</th>
<th>Mean Text</th>
<th>SD Video</th>
<th>SD Text</th>
<th>Sig. (2-tailed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Perceived social fit with the firm</td>
<td>5.243</td>
<td>4.61</td>
<td>1.5349</td>
<td>1.1593</td>
<td>0.042</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>H4 Willingness to work for the firm</th>
<th>Mean Video</th>
<th>Mean Text</th>
<th>SD Video</th>
<th>SD Text</th>
<th>Sig. (2-tailed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Willingness to work for the firm</td>
<td>4.784</td>
<td>4.512</td>
<td>1.6522</td>
<td>1.2474</td>
<td>0.412</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.1.1 Social Value

It was hypothesized that ‘A company website with employee testimonials presented in a rich media format will positively influence the viewers perception of the firms social value at a higher extent than information presented in a poor media format with a description of the same content.’ Independent-sample t-tests were conducted to compare the means in answers between the two different modalities on all five components of Social Value (Schlager, 2011). Significant differences were found between the two conditions on four of five components, and the results indicated that a company website with employee testimonials presented in a rich media format has a positive impact on perceived social value. The first component respectful environment
showed a significant difference (sig. 2-tailed=0.013) between rich media testimonials (Mean=5.622, SD=0.7941) and written text (Mean=5.146, SD=0.8533). The second component friendly atmosphere showed no significant difference (sig. 2-tailed=0.828) between rich media testimonials (Mean=5.622, SD=0.7941) and written text (Mean=5.585, SD=0.6699). The third component team spirit showed a significant difference (sig. 2-tailed=0.013) between rich media testimonials (Mean=5.622, SD=0.7941) and written text (Mean=5.146, SD=0.8533). The fourth component competent co-workers showed a significant difference (sig. 2-tailed=0.010) between rich media testimonials (Mean=5.054, SD=1.1534) and written text (Mean=4.415, SD=0.9741). The fifth component good managers showed a significant difference (sig. 2-tailed=0.002) between rich media testimonials (Mean=5.757, SD=0.9251) and written text (Mean=5.024, SD=1.0837). Since four of five components of social value (Schlager, 2011) showed significant differences between the conditions, the results indicate that hypothesis 1 was supported.

4.1.2 Trust

It was hypothesized that ‘A company website with employee testimonials presented in a rich media format will be perceived as more trustworthy compared to an equivalent company website with information presented in a poor media format with a description of the same content.’ The mean for employee testimonials/rich media format was slightly higher (Mean=4.216, SD=1.3361) than for the condition no testimonials/poor media format (Mean=4.195, SD=1.3642), but the difference was not significant (sig. 2-tailed=.945). Hypothesis 2 was not supported.

4.1.3 Identification with the firm

It was hypothesized that ‘Viewers will identify more strongly with the firm if the firm’s values are presented in a rich media format with employee testimonials on a firm’s website compared to an equivalent company website with information presented in a poor media format with a description of the same content.’ This was tested based on the two variables shared values, and social fit. Our findings suggest that the viewers’ perception of both shared values with the focal firm, and social fit with the focal firm is significantly higher after being exposed to a rich media employee testimonial compared to no testimonial/written text. The first variable
*shared values*, showed a significant difference (sig. 2-tailed=0.024) between rich media testimonials (Mean=5.189, SD=1.3912) and written text (Mean=4.537 SD=1.0977). The second variable *social fit* also showed a significant difference (sig. 2-tailed=0.042) between rich media testimonials (Mean=5.243, SD=1.5349) and written text (Mean=4.610 SD=1.1593). Hypothesis 3 was supported.

### 4.1.4 Employer Attraction

It was hypothesized that ‘A company website with employee testimonials (partially focusing on social value) presented in a rich media format will have a positive impact on the viewer’s willingness to work for the firm compared to an equivalent company website with information presented in a poor media format with a description of the same content.’ The means pointed in the predicted direction, with the mean for employee testimonials/rich media format higher (Mean=4.784, SD=1.6522) than for the condition no testimonials/poor media format (Mean=4.512, SD=1.2474), but the variance was too small for the difference to be significant (sig. 2-tailed=.412). Hypothesis 4 was not supported.
4.2 Findings from the focus groups

4.2.1 Social Value

*Friendly atmosphere* was the only component within *social value* where the experiment could not provide significant results. The focus groups were also rather inconclusive regarding if the video modality communicated a friendly atmosphere or not. On one hand, several respondents agreed that the man in the video seemed to be "*a good manager*", and that they would like to work with him, but on the other hand, several respondents also argued that he appeared strict and intemperate rather than friendly. It was discussed that some of his comments made them feel like “if you don’t fit in you’re not welcome” (Student, 26), even though they agreed with the message he communicated. One respondent stated that he “seems very direct and clear on his message, but it sounds quite harsh when he says it, like if that's the only way and nothing else is acceptable” (Student, 24). Another respondent stated that “I like what he stands for, but he seems more strict than friendly” (Student, 22).

Almost all respondents agreed that they perceived the focal firm as less hierarchical than average, and that the video made them reflect on that to higher extent. They also agreed that the video made them reflect more on what was being said compared to the text and that it raised more emotions. Most respondents also agreed that they perceived the man in the video as highly passionate about his work and that they believed that he liked his job. This contributed to their image of the firm in a positive manner. Both the video modality and the text modality highlighted teamwork, but most of the respondents agreed that they believed it more when it came from the video. “The man in the video talks about how they need to move together even though they are spread around the world and have different origins (…) you could really see that he believed in that” (Student, 24).

4.2.2 Trust

Several respondents in the focus groups were critical towards the video modality when trust was being discussed. On one hand, some respondents argued that they trusted the video more since they could see how emotional the man in the video was, and that he really believed in what he was saying. Other expressed that they did not
trust him, “He could even be an actor for all we know” (Student, 25). An aspect that contributed to the lack of trust that some respondents felt was that ”he is only one person, I would have believed it more if different people said it” (Student, 26). Several other respondents agreed to this and concluded that it would add to the authenticity if the video had featured several different employees and not only one. It was also discussed that ”he was not in his natural working environment” (Student, 23), which according to several respondents made it feel more like a staged recording with a script. All respondents agreed that both the modality, the content and the way the content was expressed could influence the feeling of authenticity and trustworthiness.

The focus groups also established that as the focal firm in the text and video material is a large and global firm, most people have expectations and pre-assumptions about it. Some of those expectations and pre-assumptions were not addressed in either of the two modalities. According to the respondents, the focal firm in the experiment is perceived to have more of a “cultish” environment that was not communicated in either the text or the video. As for example the “cultish” environment was not presented, they did not trust the message that was communicated, or at least became more suspicious of what was communicated.

4.2.3 Identification with the firm

The same values were communicated in both modalities during the experiment, but most respondents in the focus groups still claimed that they agreed more with the values communicated in the video modality. Almost all respondents agreed with what was communicated in the video, and had strong memories from it, while they at the same time had a hard time to remember what was communicated in the text modality. They remembered having a good impression about the text, but not what it was about. ”I have more vivid memories of the video” (Student, 23). One participant offered a possible explanation “(...) as it is a real person, it makes it easier to connect and remember the message” (Student, 23). Another respondent said that ”You can tell that he (the man in the video) really cares about that (working together/team spirit)” (Student, 21), and another respondent stated that ”He was really clear on how important the values are” (Student, 24). It was apparent that the respondents felt that the non-verbal cues in the video modality, such as body language and tone of voice of the person that communicated the values left a big impression. The video modality
seemed to have left a bigger impression in general, even though the content in it was the same (or very similar) as the text modality. However, there was discongruence in how they identified with the person in the video. Even though most respondents claimed that the video made them feel like they would fit in with the firm, they did not identify to the same extent with the person in the video. It was discussed that they might have identified even more both with the focal firm and with the person in the video if he would have been for example a student or if he would have been at a lower position within the firm.

4.2.4 Employer Attraction

Several respondents argued that they already had a very positive view of the firm as an employer long before they saw the text or the video. One of them expressed it this way; "I've wanted to work there for a long time (…) I don't know what they can do to make me want it even more" (Student, 23). It was discussed whether the message in the modalities was enough to make a decision about if they wanted to work for the firm or not. “If I did not know about IKEA, then this (the text/video) would not have been enough to know if I want to work for there.” (Student, 23). There was a general consensus among the focus groups that information communicated in the video or text is not enough to make a decision on whether they wanted to work for the focal firm. Some of the respondents were even disappointed that their perceptions of IKEA were not communicated in the video. It did not align with their picture of the firm to a full extent. Several respondents agreed that the video should have contained more about the possibilities at the firm, how you can climb the ladder within the firm and how you can work anywhere in the world. This should have been included in order to be perceived as more attractive according to the respondents. Further, the focus groups had higher expectations in terms of creativity and “fun” elements of the video.

Some participants in the focus groups preferred the text as it was more “easy to approach” (Student, 26) and because it was “(…) describing the firm in a more general way” (Student, 26). Due to that, some of the respondents felt more intrigued by the text. Further, the text was considered as more neutral in terms of aggressiveness. Even though the text and the video communicated the same thing, many respondents still felt that the video was more direct due to the way in which the man in the video strongly emphasized his message. Several respondents expressed
that the video left more room for imagination since the video was so direct and clear on its message. One participant explained that “the text lets you imagine how it would be to work for the company, while the video was more upfront in regards to how it is.” (Student, 23).
5. Discussion

5.1 Social value

The quantitative findings indicate that potential job seekers perceive social value of the focal firm as being higher after being exposed to a rich media employee testimonial compared to a poor description. Previous research has shown that social value is mainly experienced internally and difficult to communicate externally, but it has also been suggested that current employees can communicate it to potential job seekers by word-of-mouth (Schlager et al., 2011). Our findings suggest that this is also the case through the usage of rich media employee testimonials, and not only via face-to-face word-of-mouth. This notion is to some extent also supported in research from consumer branding. It has been shown that rich media can convey and communicate moods and images (Belch & Belch, 2001), similar to the intangible social value of a firm, at a higher extent than poor media.

All five components of Social Value were tested, and significant positive relationships were found on 4 of 5 of them. The only component that did not show a significant positive relationship with rich media testimonials was friendly atmosphere. A possible explanation to this can be found in the results from the qualitative focus groups. It was discussed if the person in the video was perceived as friendly or not, and almost all respondents agreed that they perceived him as strict and intemperate rather than friendly. He expressed things such as “if you can’t adapt to that (to the non-hierarchical structure and non-authoritarian leadership), there is no way you will fit in here”. It was discussed in the focus groups that even though he expressed opinions that most of the respondents shared, he expressed it in a way that they felt was a bit too harsh. Kahai & Cooper (2003) concluded that the multiple cues that can be communicated through rich media, such as tone of voice and body language, affect the viewer to a high extent. According to Kim, Kardes and Herr (1989) this affects the viewer’s perception of the product/brand. Our findings indicate that this also applies to the conditions presented in our experiment. While it had a positive impact on for example the good managers variable since he used his body language and tone of voice to highlight that leaders at the firm must be good listeners and non-authoritarian, it may have had a negative impact on the variable friendly atmosphere.
since he expressed it in a way that was perceived as too direct and intemperate according to the focus groups. To summarize, the findings suggest that social value is well communicated through rich media employee testimonials, but also that both modality, content and non-verbal cues such as body language, tone of voice and personality of the person in the video testimonial affects the viewers perception in both a positive and a negative way.

5.2 Trust

Previous research from consumer branding have concluded that people are more likely to trust, have confidence in, and believe in information coming from a regular customer rather than the selling firm (Raphel, 1997, Appiah, 2006), and that rich media produces higher information credibility (Cable & Yu, 2006). We hypothesized that this would also be the case in an Employer branding context. However, our quantitative findings suggest that this may not be the case, at least not under the circumstances presented in our experiment. The employer branding equivalent of a regular customer is a regular employee of the focal firm. However, as stated by several respondents during the focus groups, the person in the video testimonial in the experiment was in fact a manager at a high position. Several respondents argued that they felt that he did not represent the true nature of the firm since he was too high up on the hierarchical ladder, and since he was not pictured in his own working environment. Another possible explanation of the non-supported hypothesis also came from the focus groups. Several respondents stated that only one source makes it less credible. They argued that they would have believed the message more if multiple employees instead of just one presented it.

The experiment was limited to one testimonial due to procedural limitations. Our pre-study on the highest ranked employer branding firms in Sweden showed that most firms that currently uses rich media testimonials have more than one, often between five and ten video testimonials with different employees (Universum, 2013). According to the respondents in the focus groups, the message in the stimulus material was not fully consistent with their pre-assumptions about the firm since it did not discuss all the values that they expected. As discussed by Barrow & Mosley (2005) and Schultz & Kitchen (2004), brand inconsistency has a negative effect on
Based on the above, we argue that the results may have been biased by the limitation of only one testimonial. This indicates that it is too soon to conclude if there is a relationship between trust and rich media employee testimonials or not. It may still be the case that rich media testimonials have a positive influence on job seekers perceived trust if the circumstances during the experiment would allow multiple testimonials with different employees from different positions in a firm, instead of just one testimonial.

5.3 Identification with firm

The quantitative findings from this study suggest that potential job seekers that are exposed to rich media employee testimonials identify more strongly with the focal firm, both in terms of shared values and in terms of social fit. This aligns well with the previous studies from consumer branding. Appiah (2006) found that consumers identify stronger with a product and a brand after being exposed to rich media customer testimonials compared to written texts without testimonials. The focus group reached a consensus that the video modality performed better in communicating the firm's values. Concerning the social fit, some elements of the rich media testimonial modality of the experiment were not ideal in terms of raising identification based on the respondent selection. Walker et al. (2009) showed that tangible traits such as gender and race of the person in a video testimonial have a big influence on the viewer's identification with the focal firm. Our experiment featured an American, middle-aged high-level manager. This may have affected the respondents in a negative way in terms of identification since they were all students, most of them Swedish and much younger than the person in the video. Despite that, the results showed that identification with the firm was significantly stronger for the respondents that were exposed to the rich media testimonial modality. There was a clear consensus in all focus groups that they would have identified even more if the person in the video had been more similar to them. It was suggested that a younger employee, who has not yet climbed as high as the person in the video, who was European instead of American would have made the students in the experiment to identify even stronger. Students are an important target group for employer branding, but it’s not the only one. A younger person who is more similar to the students in our experiment may have made their identification even higher, but it may at the same
time have lowered identification among other target groups. Our research cannot conclude what sort of person a firm should use in order to raise identification in all their target groups, and neither was that our aim, but it is clear based on our qualitative findings that firms need to take the choice of persons in the video testimonials into consideration. Either way, it is clear that rich media employee testimonials have the potential to influence the viewer's identification with the focal firm in a positive way.

5.4 Employer Attraction

It was hypothesized that ‘A company website with employee testimonials (partially focusing on social value) presented in a rich media format will have a positive impact on the viewer’s willingness to work for the firm compared to an equivalent company website with information presented in a poor media format with a description of the same content.’ However, although the means of the two different modalities pointed in the expected direction, the difference was not significant. One of the possible explanations for that can be found in the previous research by Schlager et al. (2011). They stated that although Social Value is the highest driver for identification with the firm, and that identification in turn drives attraction, there are also other values that need to be taken into account in order to attract potential employees. The stimulus material in the experiment in this study mainly communicated social value, and left out most of the other values. It was also clear that the already positive view of the firm that many of the respondents in the focus groups had, could not have been made higher based on only communicating social value. Several of the respondents in the focus groups expressed that they would like to work for the firm regardless of having seen the video or not.

Another interesting finding from the focus groups is that several respondents expressed that the text-only version of the website allowed for more imagination. They argued that the man in the video was so clear on what he wanted to express that it did not leave room for imagination. Other respondents claimed that the video still allowed for more imagination since the video gave them more traits to build their imagination on. They stated that the multiple cues gave them a more vivid starting point, which they could then expand in their imagination. This is in line with the
findings from Li, Daugherty and Biocca (2002), who argue that increased vividness increases imagination due to the increased sensory breadth. It is difficult to draw any conclusions from this without further research, but it indicates that a rich media testimonial in itself is not enough to raise either imagination, persuasion or attraction among potential job seekers. The content and the way it is expressed with cues such as body language and tone of voice, and not only the modality in itself, has a big influence on the individual viewers perception of the attractiveness of the firm.

It was also discussed during the focus groups how the pre-assumptions of the focal firm affected the respondents. The firm we used for the experiment (IKEA) is very well known. It was suggested in the focus groups that the respondents’ reactions to the video testimonial might have been affected negatively due to their pre-assumptions about the focal firm. Their pre-assumptions raised expectations on what the video should contain and what topics should have been discussed in it. Information presented in a rich media format triggers more emotions than information presented in a poor media format due to its high vividness and the sensory breadth that comes with it (Li et al., 2002; Chaiken & Eagly, 1983). Building on that, we argue that the disappointments regarding the values that were not discussed in either the video or the text may have led to a more emotional reaction towards the video modality. Previous research has shown that rich media in itself raises more emotion than poor media due to its increased sensory breadth (Li et al., 2002). In this context, that may have led the respondents to feel stronger about their disappointments toward the video modality than the text, even though the values that they felt were missing, were in fact missing in both modalities. The respondents also expressed that the text modality of the website felt more “general”, which may have led the respondents to include their own pre-assumptions about the firm. The video modality on the other hand may have to some extent excluded their positive pre-assumptions about the values that were not discussed since it was perceived as more direct due to the way in which the man in the video used non-verbal cues to emphasize his message. This notion is to some extent supported by the fact that the respondents remembered more from the video version than from the text. On the other hand, also the firm that was used in the experiment by Appiah (2006) was well known. He used Apple, but he did not at all discuss the effects of the pre-assumptions about the product and the brand. This will have to be studied further before any conclusions can be drawn.
6. Conclusion and future research

This study aimed to test if rich media employee testimonials embedded in a corporate website have the ability to increase potential job seekers positive perceptions about firms. The research question stated: How will information presented with rich media employee testimonials perform in communicating a firm’s employer brand values toward potential job seekers compared to a poor media description communicating the same content? Based on our findings, we conclude that rich media employee testimonials have the capacity to increase favorable employer brand attitudes among potential job seekers at a higher extent than poor media descriptions communicating the same content.

*Social Value*, which is considered a main part of an employer brand, and a main driver for both identification and employer attraction, is significantly better perceived when communicated through a rich media employee testimonial compared to a poor media description. Previous research has shown that social value is well communicated and perceived through face-to-face word-of-mouth between current- and potential employees, but this study indicates that this also applies when the social value of a firm is communicated from a current- to a potential employee through a rich media testimonial embedded in a firm’s website.

Our findings also suggest that *identification with the firm* is perceived significantly higher when information about the firm is communicated with rich media employer testimonials embedded in the firms website compared to a poor media description communicating the same content. This aligns well with the previous studies from consumer branding.

These findings are of great value for firms attempting to differentiate their employer brand by enhancing the perceived *social value* and the *identification with the firm* among potential job seekers. Based on the above, we suggest that firms should consider using rich media employee testimonials on their career websites as an alternative to the more commonly used poor media written descriptions.

Our quantitative findings suggest that there are no differences in terms of *perceived trustworthiness* of employer brand message, or *perceived attractiveness of the firm* based on modality. The qualitative findings however, suggest that the respondents were affected not only by the modality, but also to a high degree by the content and
the non-verbal cues, and by their own pre-assumptions of the firm. This indicates that the relationships between; 1) *the trustworthiness of an employer message*; 2) *the perceived attractiveness of a firm*, and rich media employee testimonials are more complex than what was expected. It is still possible that rich media employee testimonials has the capacity to increase the *trustworthiness of an employer message* and the *perceived attractiveness of the firm*, but in order to draw any conclusions regarding that, further studies will have to take more factors than the modality into account.

Based on the above, we suggest that future research should be conducted with multiple testimonials featuring employees at different levels of the firm, while also embedding more employer brand values aside from *social value* in the content of both the rich- and poor media modalities. Multiple testimonials with different employees may more accurately reflect how firms use rich media testimonials on their company websites, while also minimizing the potential biases that stem from the perceived inconsistency in brand message that some respondents experienced in this study due to the values that were not communicated in either of the modalities. The potential moderating effects caused by different levels of *need for cognition* among different individuals (see Cacioppo and Petty, 1982) should also be taken into account in order to further understand how rich media employee testimonials affect the viewers attraction towards the firm. Future research should also be conducted on both well-known and unknown firms in order to gain a deeper understanding of the effects of potential job seekers pre-assumptions about the firm.
References


**Other references**


Universum (2012) “Sweden’s ideal employer 2012”:
http://www.universumglobal.com/IDEAL-Employer-Rankings/Professional-Surveys/Sweden
Retreived 2013-02-15

**Empirical**

Linus Holmgren, CEO of TalentTalk, 2013. Interviewed 2013-02-28
Jessica Hammerteg, Senior HR Advisor TUI Nordic, 2013. Interviewed 2013-02-26
Appendix

A – Interview guide - Linus Holmgren (CEO of TalentTalk)

Employer branding

- What is employer branding according to you?
- Why should companies pay attention to employer branding?
- What is it that companies want help with usually?
- How do you work to establish what is to be communicated in the employer brand?

Trends employer branding

- Is there any specific trends developing in employer branding? Why?
- What are the big challenges that firms are facing today in terms of employer branding?
- Are there any new challenges developing in the area of employer branding?
- Do you see a trend developing in what firms tend to communicate in employer branding?
- Are there any big differences between industries regarding what to communicate?
- Are there large differences between target groups? How?

Channels for communicating the employer brand

- What are the most common media channels for employer branding
- In what purpose do you use different media channels?
- What is usually communicated in the different media channels?
- Are there any new developments in different media channels that affect the employer brand?
B – Interview guide - Jessica Hammerteg, Senior HR Advisor at TUI Nordic

Employer branding
-What is employer branding according to you?
- What is a good employer brand?
-How do you work with the employer brand of TUI Nordic
- How do you construct the message you want to communicate?

Trends employer branding
-How has the employer brand of TUI Nordic developed over the last 10 years?
- What changes to your employer brand do you think is necessary at the moment?
- What challenges are you facing in terms of employer branding?
- What kind of values is TUI Nordic trying to communicate? Why?
- How do you try to differentiate from competitors?
- Do see any challenges in terms of employer branding affecting the whole industry?

Channels for communicating the employer brand
-What media channels do you use for communicating your employer brand?
-Why do you choose a specific media channel?
-What kind of messages do you delegate between the media channels?
- What kind of challenges arise from different media channels?
C - Questionnaire Video condition

In the following section a set of statements regarding your interpretation of the video you just watched is stated. Please tick the box which represents your view most accurately.

1. I believe that this company has an environment in which co-workers respect each other.

   | 7 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
   |-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
   | Completely disagree | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Completely agree |

2. I believe that there is a friendly atmosphere amongst the co-workers at this company.

   | 7 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
   |-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
   | Completely disagree | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Completely agree |

3. I believe that this company has a strong team spirit.

   | 7 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
   |-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
   | Completely disagree | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Completely agree |

4. I believe that this company has competent co-workers.

   | 7 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
   |-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
   | Completely disagree | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Completely agree |

5. I believe that this company has good managers.

   | 7 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
   |-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
   | Completely disagree | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Completely agree |

6. I believe that the image that is communicated in the video is consistent with the reality of working for this company.

   | 7 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
   |-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
   | Completely disagree | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Completely agree |

7. I believe I would fit in socially at this company.

   | 7 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
   |-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
   | Completely disagree | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Completely agree |

8. I believe that my personal values are similar to the values of this company.

   | 7 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
   |-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
   | Completely disagree | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Completely agree |

9. I would like to work for this company.

   | 7 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
   |-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
   | Completely disagree | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Completely agree |

45
## D - Questionnaire Text condition

In the following section a set of statements regarding your interpretation of the text you just read is stated. Please tick the box which represents your view most accurately.

1. I believe that this company has an environment in which co-workers respect each other.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Completely disagree</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
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7. I believe I would fit in socially at this company.

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</table>
E - Interview guide Focus groups

1. Show both modalities (5 min)
2. Discussion (50 min)

SOCIAL VALUE (5-10 min)
- How is the atmosphere presented in the video? Text?
- How do you perceive the atmosphere at the focal firm? between coworkers?

TRUST (10-15 min)
- Do you believe the message communicated in the video to be true? Why?
- Earlier research has shown that we normally trust a video testimonial more than a text, but that was not the case now. Why do you think this is the case?
- Is it to positive?
- Is this like a “commercial” from IKEA?
- Did it feel authentic?
- Would it have made a difference with another person in the film (Danell is american, twice as old as we are etc)?
- What do you think would have made you trust the message more?

ATTRACTION (10-15 min)
- Earlier research has suggested that when people get to know someone from a firm (even if its only through a video), they are more likely to want to work for the firm. That was not the case now. Why do you think?
- Would it have made a difference if you had never heard of IKEA before?
- Was there anything that influenced you negatively in the film? Something he said or the way he said it? Compared to the text?
- Would you like to have the person in the film as your manager?

IDENTIFICATION (5-10 min)
- Is there something in the video that made you feel that you fit in at IKEA?
- something in the text?
- Did the text/video change your view on IKEA’s values in any way? How?

Results (5-10 min)
- Our results suggest that people were positively influenced by the film (more than the text), why do you think that is the case?
- Do you think it was the format in itself (that you get to know a person with an actual personality etc..), or that it was the things he said?