UNIVERSITY OF TURKU

ABSTRACT

Abstract

Previous academic research uses the concept of Talent War to describe the situation in the labour market and employer branding activities targeted to university students and future professionals. A shortage of talents is a global problem and especially experts in demanding work require activities in the field of employer branding. As different people require different activities, it is necessary to find out how the recipients of these activities perceive their ideal employer brands.

Academic research uses employer brand concepts in different ways, and this is a challenge for the rather new research field. This exploratory research studies ideal employer brand perceptions among university students from Finland, Sweden, and United Kingdom. The research´s aim is to find out how identity, divided in personality and social identity in this research, influences these perceptions. The data of 5090 respondents were included in the study that applied a relatively new research method called mixed method research to find out these perceptions.

The research results indicate that identity has significant influence on how university students perceive their ideal employer brands. It is visible that students are interested in expressing their identity to others and employer brand image offers a tool for this purpose. Similar personality characteristics, which students possess themselves, are found in students´ ideal employer brands. Social identities, indicated in this research as nationality, had significant differences regarding perceptions. Students perceive symbolic attributes considerably more compared to instrumental attributes regarding their ideal employer brands, and symbolic attributes related to innovativeness is the most perceived one.

Business managers, working in employer branding, should take into account applicants´ natural need for self-expression. Similarly, this research´s managerial implications include that significant differences exists in ideal employer brand perceptions based on identity, the role of symbolic meanings in ideal employer brand perceptions is important, and there is a connection between employer brand and company´s product and services.

Key words	Employer brand, Employer Brand Image, Social identity theory, Instrumental-Symbolic Framework

TURUN YLIOPISTO

TIIVISTELMÄ

Tiivistelmä

Aiempi tutkimus käyttää termiä 'osaajasota' kuvatessaan työmarkkinoiden tilannetta, sekä työnantajabrändäystoimia korkeakouluopiskelijoille ja tulevaisuuden ammattilaisille. Tällä hetkellä vallitsee globaali pula osaajista. Erityisesti haastavissa tehtävissä toimivien asiantuntijoiden houkuttelu työpaikkoihin vaatii erilaisia toimenpiteitä työnantajabrändäyksen toimialalla. Erilaisten ihmisten houkuttelu hakemaan työpaikkoihin vaatii erilaisia toimia, joten on tarpeen selvittää, miten näiden toimien kohteet hahmottavat ideaalityönantajabrändinsä.

Akateeminen tutkimus käyttää työnantajabrändäykseen liittyviä termejä eri tavoin. Tämä on haaste suhteellisen uudelle tutkimusalalle. Tämä eksploratiivinen tutkimus tutkii ideaalityönantajabrändien hahmotuksia korkeakouluopiskelijoiden keskuudessa, kohdemaina Suomi, Ruotsi ja Yhdistynyt kuningaskunta. Tutkimuksen tarkoituksena on selvittää miten identiteetti, jaettuna tässä tutkimuksessa persoonallisuuteen ja sosiaaliseen identiteettiin, vaikuttaa näihin hahmotuksiin. Tässä tutkimuksessa hyödynnetään 5090 vastaajan dataa. Tutkimus käyttää suhteellisen uutta tutkimusmetodologiaa nimeltä monimenetelmätutkimus selvittääkseen näitä hahmotuksia.

Tutkimustulokset osoittavat, että identiteetillä on merkittävä vaikutus siihen, miten korkeakouluopiskelijat hahmottavat ideaalityönantajabrändejänsä. Opiskelijat ovat kiinnostuneita ilmaisemaan identiteettiään muille, ja työnantajaimago tarjoaa työkalun tähän tarkoitukseen. Opiskelijoiden ideaaleissa työnantajabrändeissä on havaittavissa samanlaisia persoonallisuuspiirteitä, kuin he omaavat itse. Sosiaalisten identiteettien, indikoituna tässä tutkimuksessa kansallisuutena, välillä on merkittäviä eroja hahmotuksiin liittyen. Opiskelijat hahmottavat ideaalityönantajabrändeihinsä liittyviä symbolisia aspekteja paljon enemmän verrattuna instrumentaalisiin puoliin. Symboliset aspektit, jotka liittyvät innovatiivisuuteen ovat kaikkein hahmotetuimpia.

Yritysjohtajien, jotka työskentelevät työnantajabrändäyksen parissa, tulisi ottaa huomioon hakijoiden luontainen tarve itsensä ilmaisemiseen. Tämän tutkimuksen liikkeenjohdon suosituksiin lukeutuvat lisäksi huomattavat erot ideaalityönantajabrändien hahmotuksissa identiteettiin perustuen, symbolisten merkitysten rooli ideaalityönantajabrändien hahmotuksissa on tärkeä ja työnantajabrändin ja yrityksen tuotteiden ja palveluiden välillä vallitsee on yhteys.

Avainsanat	Työnantajabrändi, Työnantajaimago, Sosiaali-identiteettiteoria, Instrumentaalinen-Symbolinen kehys

EMPLOYER BRAND PERCEPTIONS

The role of applicant´s identity

Master's Thesis
in Marketing

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Pori

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction to the topic

According to organizations all around the world, we are facing a global talent shortage. The issue concerns dozens of countries and tens of thousands of organizations. Similarly, in previous decades the interest among researchers has increased towards employer branding. Literature review of 187 articles (Theurer, Tumasjan, Welpe, and Lievens 2018) indicates that the research on employer branding field is rather new and it uses same concepts with different names. Crucial concepts, like employer image or employer brand equity are used and defined in different ways. This leads to inconsistency in academic research considering the topic.

The target group of this research is university students. As Bonaiuto, De Dominics, Illia, Rodríguez-Cánovas, and Lizziani (2013) present, it is crucial for employers to attract future talents. Their research describes the ongoing situation as a talent war, as they discuss employees´ aspirations to attract future leaders. Different talents are attracted with different attributes, so it is necessary to define the target group carefully. Previous empirical evidence seems to indicate that universal guidelines for employer branding might be impossible. Brusch, I., Brusch, M., and Kozlowski (2018) refer as well to the War for Talents when discussing about attracting students. According to them, recent developments considering demographic, social and economic factors have created a shortage in resource of young professionals. Especially experts in demanding work require activities in the field of employer branding.

This thesis is done for a market research and employer brand company called Universum, where the author is employed. Existing employer branding research on students concentrates, for example, in different main field of studies. What kind of differences exist, for example, between technology and business students. Universum´s own research concentrates mainly on the same topic using main field of studies when categorizing talents. Previous academic research has had a very similar approach to the topic using main field of studies as categories. Seems as well, that quantitative studies measuring which attributes work when attracting employees, have been a popular way to conduct studies regarding employer branding.

1.1.1 Universum Communications Sweden AB

According to Universum´s (2020a) website Universum Communications Sweden AB is the most acknowledged Employer Branding expert in the world. The Swedish company nowadays belongs to the Stepstone Group and Axel Springer corporation. Universum does data-driven employer branding and is physically present in over 20 countries. The company was created in 1988 in order to improve communication between students and their future employers. National press in Sweden interested in the results of the first survey and employers started to require more knowledge of their future employees. Universum was founded based on this concept. Currently Universum collaborates with more than 2000 universities, alumni organizations, and professional organizations in more than 50 countries to gather insights regarding students´ and professionals´ preferences. The aim is to offer knowledge and advise employers how to attract talents who fit in their organization considering their culture and purpose. Universum supports the most famous employers in the world in employer branding with 30 years of experience. (Universum 2020a.) Universum is as well part of European Society for Opinion and Market Research. The ESOMAR membership indicates that the company follows market research industry´s ethical standards regarding market research methodology. (Universum 2020b.)

1.1.2 Employer Brand

According to Mosley (2014, 3–4) defining employer brand is difficult as there are several definitions. However, the existing definitions can be categorized into three categories. The first category covers those definitions that recognize employer brand as a promise. Meaning that the employer brand is seen as a group of promises including intangible experiences etc. The second category offers definitions of image and reputation. For example, being described as a "great place to work" fits into this category. The third category consists of definitions which describe employer brand as feelings and thoughts which are related to the employer. These might be true or false, positive or negative, and derived from experience or be a result of communication. As Mosley (2014, 4) describes it: "In other words, brands, like reputations, are ultimately defined by people´s perceptions." Mosley (2014) believes that the third option offers a realistic view of the employer brand. Defining it as associations and perceptions, it is possible to measure the employer brand´s value and status. Understanding employer brand in this way offers the explanation for the fact that employer brand is modified by people´s experiences and what they hear from

others. Employer´s purposeful communication is not the only thing having an influence on it.

According to Mosley (2014, 4) the explanation that defines employer brand as all of the feelings and thoughts attached to the brand, relates to an important concept in the field of employer branding, which is Employee Value Proposition (EVP). Mosley (2014, 4) uses a concept of Employee Proposition derived from Customer Value Proposition. As employer brand consists of the associations that the employer is related with, EVP consists of the associations that the employer desires to be associated with. This is directly related to the value the employer wants to be attached with.

1.1.3 Human identity

According to Ashmore and Jussim (1997, 5–8), person´s identity is a difficult concept as it has been used in different ways. The definition seems to vary depending on the researcher´s interests. Human identity consists of many variables. However, identity can be divided to subjective "I" and objective "Me". The first is the individual level including self-motives and self-states. The second is the social level including self-definition through social groups or demographic aspects. The social level tries to explain, what is a person.

According to Holland (1997, 5) identity relates to person´s aims, interests, and skills. Different personalities flourish in different kind of environments. If a personality type is in the wrong environment, incongruence occurs. Especially from marketing point of view when discussing of brands and younger consumers, it is useful to divide the consumers´ identity into personal and social. The reason is that the process of choosing a brand is different depending on do we refer to the internal (personal) process or to the social (group) process. In both cases, the brand is a means for a person to express identity, which consists of personal identity and social identity. (Badaoui, Lebrun, Su, and Bouchet 2018) Social identity is the specific part of one´s self-concept, which is created from the knowledge of belonging to a social group. Nationality, language, and gender are some examples, which defines the social identity of people. These form unique social groups in a quite natural way. (Costa-Font and Cowell 2015.)

1.2   Purpose of the study

This study offers insight regarding university students´ perceptions of ideal employer brands in an exploratory way. The aim is to study these perceptions based on students´ identity, dividing the identity to personality and social identity. The study will answer on what different attributes employer brand images have in the eyes of university students, and how their identity influences on this. As this is an exploratory study, the aim is to offer more specific topics for future research.

The contribution of this thesis, to employer branding discussion and to marketing, is which attributes, instrumental or symbolic, are seen and perceived more in attractive employer brands. The aim is to find out how identity influence on this. The existing empirical data from previous research is related to attraction, but employer brand image perceptions have not been studied much.

This phenomenon in a similar context have not been studied in relations to human identity before. Potential applicants and their perception offer new insights to the topic. Therefore, exploratory research is in order to explain the phenomenon further. The purpose of this piece of research is to create a new model, together with insights regarding the issue, to explain identity´s influence on how university students perceive their ideal employer brands. The topic under research is important for academic research due to the fact, that it has not been studied before. The influence of identity to the perceptions regarding ideal employer brands is rather unknown phenomenon. This research offers a new approach to employer branding research. Besides this, the study is relevant for business as it offers insights regarding managerial implications. These relate to the attributes´ communication from the employer side. Insights already exist, in regarding which attributes are attractive but it is relevant to find out, how identity influences on this. Talents are attracted with different attributes (Bonaiuto et al. 2013), and previous research exist where students are categorized by main field of study. However, the roles of personality and social identity have not been investigated. For managers, working in employer branding field, it is interesting to find out how identity influences on the attraction process.

1.3   Research limitations

The thesis is an exploratory study to the phenomenon and will focus on only to external employer brand image. Current employees and their perception are not necessary to study

as the focus is on university students. Therefore, this study is limited to university students. Employers´ focus should be in attracting future talents (Bonaiuto et al. 2013), and experts in demanding work (Brusch et al. 2018). This indicates that university students are an interesting target group. Different talents are interested in different attributes and universal guidelines for employer branding may be impossible to create (Bonaiuto et al. 2013), so this research focus is on Europe, and more specifically in Finland, UK, and Sweden.

The employer brands used in this research are Boston Consulting Group, Google, L´Oreal Group, and Pfizer. This limits the research to certain industries and to certain audience. The research includes university students who have chosen these employers as their ideal employers.

1.4 Research strategy

The strategy of this research is abductive. This indicates that meanings, social actors, and interpretation of social life is necessary to follow the research strategy (BengKok 2012). According to BengKok (2012) abductive research strategy follows interpretivism and constructionism. The aim of abductive research strategy is to construct theories, that relate to people´s everyday lives, and people´s meanings related to social actors.

The research is done by using rather new method called mixed method approach (Creswell 2003, 3). Mixed methods research offers the solution when it is necessary to look beyond the quantitative and qualitative approaches as it can combine these both methods. The method is believed to be first used in 1959 to study psychological traits. (Creswell 2003, 4–15.)

Research questions:

How do university students´ identities influence their perception of an ideal employer brand image?

1) What attributes in ideal employer brands are perceived by university students?

2) How are ideal employer brands perceived in related with students´ own personality?

3) How are ideal employer brands perceived in related with students´ own social identity?

1.5   Structure of the study

This research continues by discussing further what is an employer brand. This section covers brand image and employer brand image. After a discussion regarding these concepts, previous research is introduced regarding employer brands.

After this, career personalities are introduced in the form of Holland´s (1997) RIASEC-model. Every career personality from the model is introduced, even though in the end this research uses four out of the six personalities. Then the chapter is followed by theoretical background for this research. This chapter includes Aaker´s (1997) brand personalities, instrumental-symbolic framework, its adapted version to employer brand context, signalling theory, and a theoretical framework for this research derived from these theories.

Next the methodology of this research is explained. This includes research approach, data introduction, insight how the data is analyzed, and finally reliability and validity of this research. This is followed by the analysis part, where every sub-question of the research question is analyzed. In the end of the analysis chapter, research question is answered with the help of the previous analysis and the theoretical framework. The final chapter provides the conclusions including contribution to the theoretical discussion, managerial implications, and limitations together with suggestions for further research. References and appendices can be found at the end of the research.

2 EMPLOYER BRAND

This section will offer a closer look at the concept of employer brand and concepts related to it. As employer brand is rather new topic in academic research (Theurer et al. 2018), background from the traditional branding literature is included to offer context to the topic. Previous research from the field is presented as well.

2.1 What is an employer brand?

Branding is hundreds of years old method to distinguish different products and services by the provider. The word "brand" has its roots in the old Scandinavian language, in the word *brandr*, which meant to burn something. This refers to the process of burning the owner´s mark on animals indicating ownership. American Marketing Association describes brand as a "name, term, sign, symbol, or design, or a combination of them, intended to identify the goods and services of one seller or a group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competition." However, a brand can be something more than that. It can be something, which has created a name for itself, which is well-known, and people recognize it. (Keller and Vanitha 2020, 32.)

Ambler and Barrow (1996, 187) defined employer brand as following: "We define "Employer Brand" as "the package of functional, economic, and psychological benefits provided by employment, and identified with the employing company". According to them, employee´s and organization´s relationship is based on the benefits, which one provides to the other. Those benefits that the employer brand offers to the employee are similar to the benefits product brands offer to consumers. Functional benefits are helpful functions that employees can use, for example, in development. Economic benefits are based on monetary compensations, like rewards. Those can be materialistic as well. Psychologic benefits are related to emotions and can offer meaning, direction, and sense of belongingness. Employer brand, much like product brands, have a personality and can be positioned in a similar way than product brand. Hoppe (2018) reminds similarly that it is crucial to notice that employer brand, similarly to corporate brand, is often connected to different kind of benefits. These benefits include as well practical benefits as psychological and symbolic benefits. Organization´s employer brand and corporate brand are highly connected to each other.

To understand employer branding it is necessary to separate two concepts: employer brand and employer branding. The first refers to the brand where people recognize the employer. It works as a trademark. (Theurer et al. 2018.) Theurer et al. (2018, 156) describes employer branding as "the means to build or modify brand equity".

Knox and Freeman (2006) describe brand as a multidimensional concept, which is used to attach values to products or services, which are then recognized by a consumer. In a similar way, in employer branding context, brands may be seen as company´s attempt to increase the value of recruitment services as they embrace company´s attributes and values during the process of hiring a new employee. In this view, potential applicants are considered as consumers. On the other hand, those associations and image which are related to the company or organization as an employer, form the employer brand image. This is crucial to separate from corporate image, which describes the organization´s image to a wider audience than just potential applicants.

In employer brand research a potential applicant may be seen as a consumer (Know and Freeman 2006; Rampl and Kenning 2014). This thesis will follow a similar approach and consider university students as consumers.

2.2   Brand Image

Stern, Zinkhan, and Jaju (2001) describe image as something that includes symbolic meaning to our purchase decision. Image might represent some other meaning or meanings, which are not necessarily visible. When it comes down to basic human nature, these meanings are attached to the purchase process and include the symbolic value to it. The concept of image is used in different ways by researchers. However, Stern et al. (2001, 203) defines it as the following way: "Image is generally conceived of as the outcome of a transaction whereby signals emitted by a marketing unit are received by a receptor and organized into a mental perception of the sending unit." According to Stern et al. (2001) brand images can be categorized in five different categories regarding how it is defined. These categories are generic definition, symbolic definition, meaning and message definition, personification definition, and cognitive/psychological definition. In the personification definition brands are seen as having human characteristics, and its personality is attached to the self-concept or personality of a consumer.

Keller (1993, 3) perceives brand image as consumer´s perceptions from a brand. Those perceptions are created from associations, which are in consumer´s mind and

memory as information nodes related to a brand. In this way, brand image contains the brand´s meaning to a consumer.

2.3 Employer brand image

Nolan, Gohlke, Gilmore, and Rosiello (2013, 300–301) explain that "An employer brand image refers to, the package of functional, economic and psychological benefits provided by employment, and identified with the employing company." Employer brand image relates to one´s beliefs regarding working for an organization. Employer brand image has similar features comparing to products´ and services´ brand images in the way that both have symbolic and instrumental attributes.

Employer brand and employer brand image has been defined almost using exactly the same words in previous empirical research (Ambler and Barrow 1996; Nolan et al. 2013). It seems that Nolan et al. (2013) have used Ambler and Barrows´ (1996) concept employer brand and turned it to employer brand image. Employer branding research uses crucial concepts in different ways (Theurer et al. 2018). However, this study will use the employer brand image concept because this is a marketing research, and the focus is on external images of employer brands. As images are mental perceptions received from the sender and brand images can be attached to consumer´s personality and self-concept (Stern et al. 2001), employer brand image is the most suitable concept for this study. Collins and Stevens (2002, 1122), for example, explain employer brand image as beliefs and perceived attributes which applicants attach to potential employers. This then helps them in the decision process whether to apply to a workplace offered by this employer or not. The process considering the image´s influence and structure is similar than product brand images´ have.

2.4 Previous research

Sung and Kim (2010) studied human characteristics in product brands in consumer behaviour context. These symbolic meanings in brands are also known as brand personality. They studied the influence of five brand personality characteristics, which are sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication, and ruggedness on the dependent variables, which were brand affect and brand trust. The study used Aaker´s (1997) methods on brand

personalities. Sung and Kim (2010) had a sample of 135 college students, which represented genders quite evenly. The students rated different personality qualities, which measured the personality dimensions. After that they rated the brand regarding brand affect, brand loyalty, and brand trust, which were measured by different claims considering the brand. The results indicate that some brand personality dimensions have greater influence on brand trust and some to brand affect. Sincerity, for example, had a greater influence on brand trust. Sincerity had an impact on brand affect as well, but it seems that brand´s sincerity correlates positively with brand trust. Competence´s influence was similar, considering brand trust and affect. Excitement and sophistication influenced on brand affect more than on brand trust. There were some differences in these, depending on the product category. Ruggedness influenced on brand trust, but not much on brand affect. It is possible that ruggedness does not have a positive emotional impact on brands. It may be that consumers do not attach significantly emotional bonds to brands, which are perceived as rugged. The study provided empirical evidence that brand´s personality aspects can increase brand trust and provoke emotions related to brands, which can increase brand loyalty.

Rampl and Kenning (2014) studied brand personality approach in employer brand attractiveness with students. They focused on especially two aspects, which were affect and trust. Their sample consisted of 310 students with average age of 24. In the study, student population was justified with the reason that they often are the target of recruitment activities. Employer brands were chosen from the field of consultancy. The study found empirical evidence that brand personalities do have an effect on potential applicants. For example, sincerity related to both trust and affect. It may create a secure feeling for a potential applicant. Ruggedness and excitement on the other hand were more related to brand affect compared to trust. Ruggedness was found to impact negatively on brand affect. Reason might be, that masculine employer brands might be seen as competitive and tough environment. Ruggedness may be something that is attractive in consumer brands, but in employer brands does not have a similar impact. Sophistication´s effect on brand trust was minor, but it still might be that employer brand, which is seen as prestige may increase its attractiveness for potential applicants. Employer brand personality competence did not have a significant impact to brand trust or affect. However, consultancy companies in generally are seen as proficient organizations, so this might be the reason that it did not have an impact in this study. In conclusion, employer brand´s personality aspects might have similar impact than consumer brands considering the attractiveness of

the brand and that some brand personalities are related to brand´s trust and affect, which together explain 71% of employer brand´s attractiveness´ variance.

Lievens, Van Hoye, and Anseel (2007) studied the identity of an organization together with employer image in Belgian Army with a sample of 258 applicants and 179 existing employees. They adapted the instrumental-symbolic model to the study, in order to find out the early attraction of those who are outsiders to the organization. They measured symbolic attributes with the help of a scale, which is an adaptation from Aaker´s (1997) brand personalities. Lievens et al. (2007) found that the perceived image of the army was more positive among outsiders than current employees. The brand personalities were positively related to attraction except ruggedness. Ruggedness had negative correlation to applicants´ attraction. Instrumental attributes like, for example, security and pay had positive correlation to attraction as well. The identification of current employees with the employer was forecasted more accurately from applicants´ perceptions compared to their own perceptions regarding symbolic and instrumental dimensions.

Lievens and Highhouse (2003) studied the initial attraction towards an organization and used the instrumental-symbolic framework from marketing to explain the attraction. Their sample consisted of 275 students and 124 employees from the bank industry. They found that especially competence and innovativeness were important factors in organization attractiveness. This result applied to both groups, including students and current employees. The study confirmed instrumental factors´ importance in employer´s image and brought new insights in the image, highlighting the importance of symbolic meanings in the equation of initial attractiveness towards a company. The study explained the importance of personality traits with the human need of expressing their own personality, self-concept, and social identity.

Knox and Freeman (2006) studied employer brand image in the context of service industry. Their sample consisted of 862 final year university students and 593 recruiters who worked part-time. They measured functional job-related attributes in their study. They found as well that the employer brand image was different in eyes of the students and recruiters, when measured in functional attributes. In their study, the perceived internal and external brand image did not match to each other. The recruiters´ assumptions of how the students perceive their employer brand image were more positive than it actually was among students.

In a recent study, made in Turkey, Özcan and Elçi (2020) studied how current employees´ perceptions regarding corporate social responsibility (CSR) influences on

perceptions from the employer brand, brand image, and the reputation of the company. They used a survey and gathered respondents from small to medium sized companies. Their final sample consisted of 559 respondents. In their sample, approximately three quarters were men and rest women. Sample included people from multiple different organizations and departments. With statistical analysis, their results indicate that activities focused on CSR have a clear positive impact on perceptions regarding employer brand and brand image among current employees. Employees´ perceptions regarding CSR influences on the attitudes towards employer brand and, therefore improving CSR might increase the changes to attract quality work force.

Schlager, Bodderas, Maas and Luc Cachelin (2011) studied the connection of the attitudes of employees and service brand. Attitudes of employees were described in the form of perceived employer brand. Their study included a sample size of 2189 employees from a Swiss insurance company with international operations. The data was collected with online survey. Gender distribution was quite even, as 55% were males and age distribution varied from 20 to 60 years old. However, majority (45%) of the sample were between 36 and 49 years old. The dimensions measured from employer brand were "development value, social value, reputation value, economic value, and diversity value". Economic value was measured with indicators including monetary benefit and job security for instance. Development value included indicators like, for example, room for creativity and good mentoring culture. Social value was measured with environment concerning factors like, for example, strong team spirit and respectful environment. Diversity measurement related to tasks and challenges considering tasks. Reputation value were measured with indicators regarding products´ innovativeness, quality, and company´s brand reputation for instance. The results indicated a connection between perceived employer brand and service branding. They also tested the identification with the corporation of selection as a dependent variable to be able to analyse the possible expectations of employees. They found that economic value and development value did not appear as a positive driver with employees´ identification with an employer of their selection. However, social value, reputation value, and diversity value had a positive impact. Among them social value had the strongest impact. As Schlager et al. (2011, 504) states: "a strong EB results   in employee satisfaction and identification with the company; satisfied and identified employees influence customers' experiences positively and are therefore conducive to the creation of the service brand; and the long-term creation of a consistent service brand is assured by also considering potential employees."

Previous research indicates that different brand personalities influence consumer behaviour. It seems that some brand personalities have a greater impact on brand trust and some to brand affect. (Sung and Kim 2010) Ruggedness impact on brand affect seems to be quite small in consumer brand context (Sung and Kim 2010) or even negative in employer brand context (Rampl and Kenning 2014). Ruggedness impact on applicants´ attraction has been found negative as well in employer brand context (Lievens et al. 2007). However, sincerity appears to have quite positive impact in both cases (Sung and Kim 2010 & Rampl and Kenning 2014). It seems that employees´ perceived image from employer might be more negative than in the eyes of outsiders. Instrumental aspects, including monetary compensation, have had a positive influence on attraction in previous research. (Lievens et al. 2007.) Previous research points out that symbolic aspects have an important role in initial attraction towards an employer. Competence and innovativeness have been important aspects among students in explaining organization attractiveness. (Lievens and Highhouse 2003.) Previous research has discovered that the perceived internal and external brand might not match in the eyes of students and recruiters. Recruiters have imagined the perceived employer brand to be more positive among students than it actually was. (Knox and Freeman 2006.) It seems that CSR impacts greatly on employer brand and brand image (Özcan and Elçi 2020) and a strong employer brand helps a company increase employee satisfaction and employees´ identification with the company (Schlager et al. 2011).

3   CAREER PERSONALITY

As a measurement for applicant´s personality, the research uses Holland´s (1997) RIASEC model. Considering the employer brand context, using personality types, which are related to career, is justified. According to Deng, Armstrong, and Rounds (2007) the RIASEC model has gained significant empirical support.

3.1   RIASEC Model
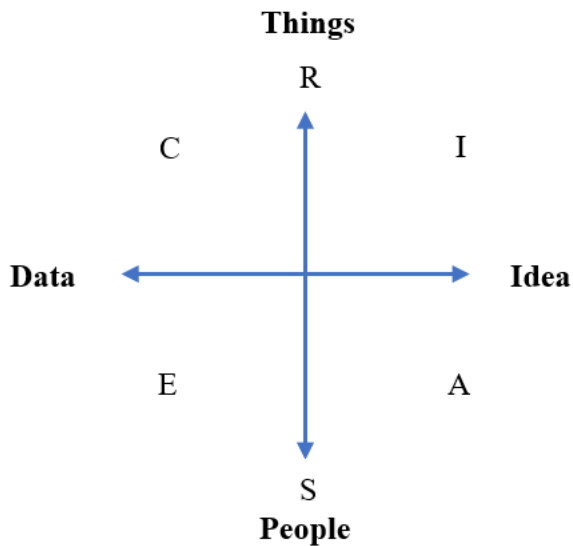
Figure 1. Holland´s RIASEC model (modified from Deng et al. 2007).

As we can see from the Figure 1, Holland´s RIASEC model includes six different career types, each described as a letter in the figure, and four dimensions. The differences among the types are presented in distances in the figure. This means that similar types are close to each other as opposite types are placed against each other. RIASEC comes from Realistic, Investigative, Artistic, Social, Enterprising, and Conventional. (Deng et al. 2007.) According to Holland (1997, 17– 21) many factors, like for example, biological heritage, social relations, and environment, influence on one´s vocational choices. Personality is developed from self-concept, perceptions of one-self, and, also of the environment, values, and how environmental influences change a person. Everyone is not equally sensitive

to these changes. The career types consider human experience, and how certain experience already from childhood leads to different behaviour.

3.2   Career types

The Realistic type´s path leads to technical challenges and systematic behaviour. Experiences earlier in life urges the willingness to do systematic work later on in life like, for example, problem solving related to mechanics or engineering. Social situations are something that the Realistic type would prefer to avoid. Realistic type has traditional values and appreciates institutional restraints. Independence and freedom are something that Realistic type appreciates, but change might create problems. This practical career type sees themselves as technical and practical person as well, and might be afraid of some career paths, which include too much social aspects. Robust, inflexible, and materialistic are adjectives, which describe this career type properly. (Holland 1997, 21–22.)

The Investigative person on the other hand cherish their investigational behaviour by observational habits. Different social and cultural phenomena are interesting to this career type and this kind of character usually possess mathematical skills as well. Biology or medical technology might be interesting career paths for this kind of character. This career type values logic and intellectual behaviour and possess liberal values. Science, analysing data, and challenging problems intrigues this career type, as social life, feelings, and relationships are not as important. Analytical, independent, critical, and reserved are suitable adjectives for this career type, which is the opposite type for an Enterprising type. (Holland 1997, 22–23.)

Holland (1997, 23–24) describes the Artistic career type as unsystematic and ambitious person, who is interested in music, writing, drama, and languages, for example. This career type tries to avoid ordinary workplaces and is more fascinated about expressing self and being imaginative. This career type is open to ideas and feelings. Artistic career type might not be the most responsible one, but usually is very open-hearted and possess musical or artistic skills. They see problems and potential problem solving in artistic context. Artistic types are described as complicated, emotional, idealistic, impulsive, and open.

The Social career type interests lies on social activities where manipulating others to gain something might be their goal, as this career type has human relations skills. Manipulation is not considered only in negative aspect in this context, as this so-called social

manipulation might refer, for example, to the career path of a teacher. What this career type possess in social skills, they usually lack in technical abilities. Social situations are something, which this career type enjoys. Social and ethical activities and problems interests this career type. This career type likes to help others, and that is included in its self-beliefs as well. Patience is not one of this career type´s virtues, but solving social problems is. Mutual interaction is important to this career type, and agreeable, helpful, kind, empathic, responsible, and understanding are some aspects to describe this character. (Holland 1997, 24–25.)

Holland (1997, 25–26) explains the Enterprising career type as being manipulative in order to achieve organizational or economic goals. This career type has behaviour factors, which lead to leadership skills, like being persuasive and interpersonal. On the other hand, scientific competences are not strong aspects in this career type. This character has traditional values, which include economic and political gain, for example, and manager or sales person are interesting roles for this type. In Enterprising type self-beliefs include aggressive, popular, and sociable. Problems are seen in enterprising context by this career type, so problem solving happens through social influence and controlling of others. Optimistic, energetic, ambitious, and extrovert are some adjectives to describe this career type.

The sixth career type, Conventional type, is described by Holland (1997, 26–28) as being interested in data. This career type likes to keep records and use data processing to gain economic or organizational goals. This career type lacks skills in artistic dimension, but might see the future career in banking or bookkeeping. Achievements in business world are important to this type and by hard work gaining comfortable lifestyle. At the same time, some kind of institutional structures suit for this career type. This character believes more in being ambitious and polite than imaginative and forgiving. Conventional type enjoys problem solving as long as those are practical problems. This career type is seen as efficient, careful, inflexible, thorough, and persistent.

4   THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

This section will offer insights regarding brand personalities, instrumental-symbolic framework, and signalling theory. In the end of the chapter, a combination of the theories is presented in the form of a theoretical framework for this research.

4.1   Brand personalities and the instrumental-symbolic framework

4.1.1   Brand personalities

Aaker (1997) brought the theoretical framework of "Big Five" personality dimensions to consumer behaviour. The basic contribution of this framework is to explain how people express themselves through brands by using human personality dimensions and construct brand personality dimensions. It is possible to see symbolic meanings in brands, as humans have a habit of attach human personalities into brands. Consumers can see a brand as famous people, for example, which in turn they would like to relate to. The advertising industry has its impact on the phenomenon, as ads often relate brands to personality traits. It is important to keep in mind, that human personalities and brand personalities are not entirely similar. There are a lot of different factors that modify human personality like, for example, demographical and psychological factors. Whereas minor indirect or direct affiliation between a person and brand may have an impact on the way that they perceive the brand. Besides personality qualities, demographic factors are included in brand personality. For example, age, gender, and social status are qualities that are attached to a brand.

Aaker´s (1997, 351) five dimensions for brand personalities are:

1) "Sincerity

2) Excitement

3) Competence

4) Sophistication

5) Ruggedness"

All five dimensions are not directly related to its human counterpart personality. Sincerity is related to agreeableness, as they both include approval and warmth. Excitement relates to human personality called extroversion as both have social qualities and are energetic. Competence relates to conscientiousness through security and trustworthiness.

On the other hand, the last two, sophistication and ruggedness, are not included in the "Big Five" of human personalities. However, these two might represent something that people desire. Even if they lack these qualities. There are brands, which indicate belonging to a higher social group, for example. This might make the usage of these brands more desirable. (Aaker 1997.)

Connecting personality concepts with brands has been criticized, but in employer brand context their use is relevant. Using them in brand context is not entirely straightforward but when it comes to employer brand, a theoretical framework, which offers insight on how people use organizations to construct their self-concept and social identity, brand´s personality aspects are relevant. Symbolic meanings in brands explain their attractiveness as an employer and separates the brands from their rivalries. (Rampl and Kenning 2014.)

It is possible that the employer has a central role, when one´s self-identity and self-concept is constructed. This applies to employees of the company. Social identity theory explains the phenomenon through the human desire to adapt to social context and express one´s values. In this phenomenon, we may see the fundamental reason, which explains the attraction of brand personalities. Brand personality of a possible employer may be seen as an intermediary, which in turn potential employees may see as a way to express their values and social belonging. (Rampl and Kenning 2014.)

4.1.2 Instrumental-symbolic framework

Lievens and Highhouse (2003) discuss instrumental and symbolic attributes, which are related to a brand. They see this structure as being the basis of a brand image. Consumers relate instrumental attributes to the brand, which are product or service related. Symbolic attributes on the other hand are for self-expression. These are related to people´s natural urge to express themselves including their identity, self-image, and personality. Brand image consists of perceptions regarding these attributes. Symbolic meanings related to a brand are subjective and intangible. Lievens and Highhouse (2003) for example found that innovativeness and competence are meanings, which add value to the employer brand. Compared to attributes which describe the work itself, these are something that have been seen as constructing the brand equity. Innovativeness and competence are aspects, which some applicants may want to communicate about themselves, describing their self-concept, personality, and social identity.
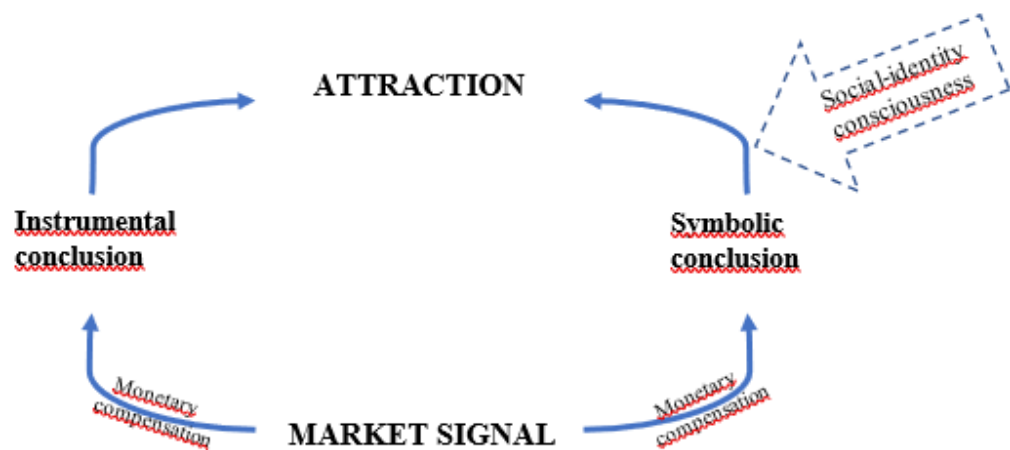
Figure 2. How labor market signals turn into attraction (modified from Highhouse, Thornbury and Little 2007).

From Figure 2, it is visible that market signal, which could be, for example, good monetary compensation related to an organization, may have instrumental or symbolic conclusions. Instrumental conclusion can be, for example, that sufficient payment that allow certain living standard. On the other hand, symbolic conclusions relate to qualities and meanings, like the organization can be seen as dominant or aggressive. Instrumental and symbolic conclusions both lead to attraction. There are obviously several factors that influence on these conclusion processes, and one of them is social-identity consciousness which relates to symbolic conclusions and, for example, applicant´s attraction towards an organization. (Highhouse et al. 2007, 136.)

According to Lievens and Highhouse (2003), social identity theory implies that company´s image is a measurement of how others see the employees of that company. The image of the company is used as a measurement by current employees to see how outsiders are evaluating them. Due to this, if a person is able to become a part of an organization and its social group, he or she earns social approval and peer acceptance from peer group. This happens if the company image is valued by the applicant and others. If the situation is opposite, and the company image is not valued, the approval is not earned. This is why the connection with employer´s image and person´s identity is so crucial in the process of pursuing a new workplace. As person applies and receives a new workplace, this is a public expression of the person´s skills, values, and qualities. If the person´s identity and employer´s image are connected, it benefits the process of entering to a new organization.

This is the reason why people who are trying to find a new workplace analyse and evaluate employer´s image. They use criteria like innovativeness, which possess symbolic meaning. It is necessary that the criteria they use are important to themselves and accepted as well as respected among their peers. Social identity theory is not the main theory in employer branding, but indirectly linked to it and contributes to how individuals process brand structures (Theurer et al. 2018).

Lievens and Highhouse (2003) apply both the instrumental-symbolic framework and Aaker´s (1997) brand personalities to categorize employer brand personalities into the following dimensions: sincerity, innovativeness, competence, prestige, and robustness (Lievens and Highhouse 2003). Lievens and Highhouse (2003) describe that the instrumental-symbolic framework implies that when applicants are looking for organizations for themselves, a part of the prime attraction towards a company might be explained with instrumental attributes. As rational human beings, applicants aim to maximize their benefits and minimize costs in process of finding a new workplace. This is done by focusing on the instrumental attributes like, for example, monetary compensation. Another assumption of the framework is that symbolic attributes influence on the attraction towards an organisation. For example, prestige or innovativeness could be something that the applicant relates to the organization. Symbolic benefits relate to self-esteem and social approval (Hoppe, 2018). There are several factors that influence on the applicants´ mind in this process, like advertising and general information. (Lievens and Highhouse 2003.)

Table 1. Original Instrumental-Symbolic framework in marketing (modified from Lievens and Highhouse 2003).

Instrumental	Symbolic
- Utilitarian/ functional attributes - Product-related attributes - Objective / tangible - Maximizing benefits, minimizing costs - Utility the primary reason for attraction - Example: Consumer buys an iPhone, because it has a good camera	- Self-expressive attributes - Non-product related attributes, user images - Subjective / intangible (how people perceive a product) - Human desire to maintain self-identity, improve self-image, express themselves (beliefs, personality, etc.) - Self-expression the primary reason for attraction - Example: Consumer buys an iPhone, because it looks trendy

According to Lievens and Highhouse (2003, 77) "the foundation of the brand image construct seems to be that consumers associate both instrumental functions and symbolic meanings with a brand."
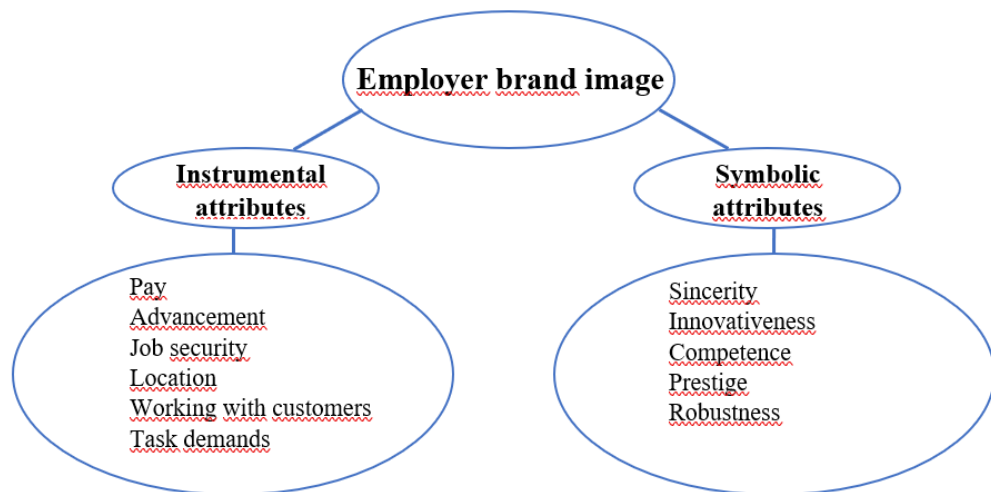
Figure 3. Employer brand image (modified from Lievens and Highhouse 2003).

Instrumental factors are something which are related to the job itself. As rational consumers, applicants maximize their utility, meaning they try to maximize the benefits and minimize the costs. Examples of these are monetary compensation, flexible hours, and good location. Instrumental factors explain a part of the first attraction of a jobseeker towards an employer. As instrumental factors do not explain the whole initial attraction, intangible and subjective factors like, for example, innovativeness or prestige that might explain the initial attraction together with instrumental factors. Different traits of personality attract in an employer, and the attraction is stronger if these traits in an employer are similar to the the applicant´s. (Lievens and Highhouse 2003.)

Considering instrumental and symbolic meanings, symbolic qualities are the ones which are related to social identity. Those who are trying to find a workplace, do not only seek tangible features, like security or working conditions, but are seeking meanings to support their self-expression. Potential jobseekers come across the signals which they receive from the marketplace. The source might be advertisements or corporate ranking, for example. Applicants create instrumental conclusions when the signal implicates, for example, job security. On the other hand, they create symbolic conclusions when the signal concerns issues like social interests or high-ranking reputation. Signals which are

related to symbolic meanings allow the applicant to analyse how the company supports the natural self-expression they desire. (Highhouse, Thornbury, and Little 2007.)

According to Highhouse et al. (2007), social identity theory implies that one´s self-concept includes personal identity, which covers own assumptions of skills and personal characteristics, and social identity, which covers affiliations to organizations, religions and politics, for example. People desire to identify themselves to organizations because they are eager to improve their self-esteem. As this process is to a high extent about social approval, the audience has an important role. The desire effect lasts to the level that a relevant audience´s interests are still a part of the process. Also, identifying oneself to the organization is not interesting, if the organization cannot contribute anymore to the person´s self-esteem.

4.1.3 Signalling theory

Davies, Rojas-Méndez, Whelan, Mete, and Loo, (2018) use signalling theory to solve the problems included in combining human personalities to brand personalities. Signalling theory is more suitable approach, considering the fact that it takes into account that companies do not communicate everything related to their brand to the listening audience. They communicate a message which has been carefully modified and includes the content that companies want to communicate. Companies are aware of which of their attributes of their brand works in the marketplace and they communicate those as signals to the audience. The audience, whether they are consumers or employees, use these signals to create or sustain their self-image. This self-image is then being promoted to others. Lievens and Slaughter (2016) mention that the restricted knowledge and information from a company, signals, cover different image aspects from a company. Like, for example, financial figures, corporate social responsibility, professional recruiters, and the mentioning in a list of the best employers. These have an impact on the image of the employer in the eyes of an applicant who uses the information.

Carlini, Grace, France, and Lo Iacano (2019) explain that signalling theory applies to individuals, but similarly it applies to businesses and governments. It tells us that information have effect on the decision-making process. Signalling theory describes how a company creates and targets signals, which consist of positive attributes about the company towards the audience. Signal observability means the scope that people who are not a part of that company can detect these signals. Signalling theory´s main contribution lies on the process of communication between two parties. On the other hand, signal cost

describes the cost of distributing that positive information about a company. As communication creates costs, some companies try to avoid these costs, and may use misinformation known as false signalling. Signalling theory´s fundamental idea is related to how decreasing the information gap and asymmetry between two parties taking part to the communication process. Signalling theory related to employer branding is highly interested in companies´ signals towards people outside that specific company. It also applies in other way around. In a similar way, individual applicant´s signals information related to their skills when applying for a workplace.

4.2   Theoretical framework
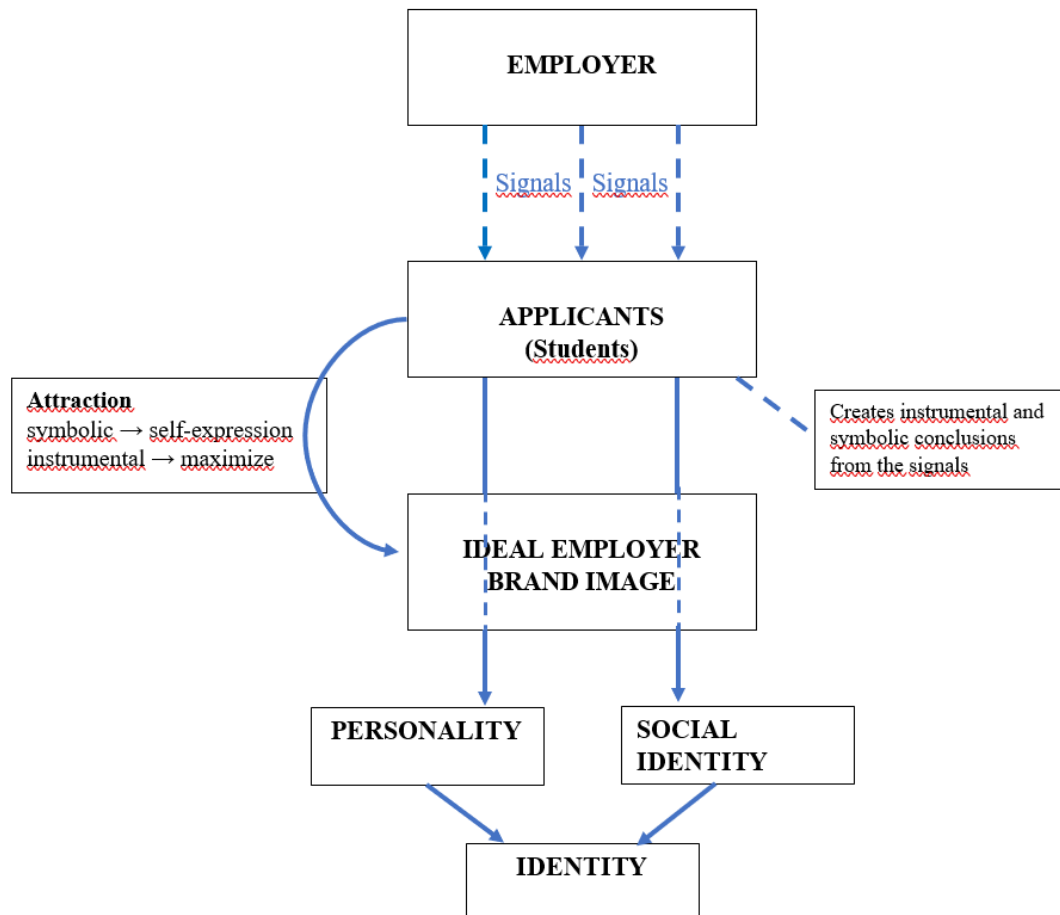
Figure 4. Applicant´s interaction with ideal employer brand image

In the labour market, employers send messages or signals to target their audience. They communicate a signal, which includes the message constructed from certain attributes of

their employer brand that they want to communicate to their audience. (Davies et al. 2018.) After receiving these signals applicants, in this study students, they create instrumental and symbolic conclusions from the signals, which both lead to attraction. (Highhouse et al. 2007.) Symbolic attributes influence to self-expression considering, for example, personality and social-identity as instrumental attributes are those, which the rational consumer wishes to maximize. (Lievens and Highhouse 2003.) The difficult concept called identity can be seen as constructed from these subjective and objective variables (Jussim 1997, 58), which are personality and social identity in this research. The following process contributes to a high extent on human´s natural desire to improve their self-esteem and gain social approval by identifying themselves to organizations. (Highhouse et al. 2007.)

Both attributes including symbolic ones and instrumental ones influence on attraction towards an employer brand image (Highhouse 2003). It is necessary to include both aspects in the research in order to answer the research question: How does university students´ identity influence on how they perceive an ideal employer brand image. Keeping in mind that the foundation of brand image is that consumers attach symbolic meanings and instrumental attributes to it (Highhouse 2003), it is impossible to ignore the meaning of instrumental factors when considering employer brand image perceptions. Even if symbolic attributes are the ones, that explain mainly self-expression (Highhouse et al. 2007), they contribute to the research question if the findings indicate that, for example, some identities favour different kind of brand attributes more than the others. For this experiment, it is necessary to apply the instrumental-symbolic theoretical framework and study the findings from this point of view. In addition to this, it is important to keep in mind that some things, which Highhouse (2003) describes as instrumental attribute, like good pay, might lead to symbolic conclusions. One example of these is good life conditions (Highhouse 2007 et al.) In this way it might be possible that instrumental attributes influence to self-expression as well, if the person wishes to communicate the symbolic conclusion to their peer group to improve their own self-esteem.

5   METHODOLOGY

This chapter of the study covers research approach, data, and description of data analysis. The chapter includes methodology, data origin, information regarding survey respondents, and explanation regarding how mixed methods approach is applied in this research. Data analysis part includes defining RIASEC-model personalities from survey answers. In the end of this chapter, reliability and validity of the research is discussed.

5.1   Research approach

Research starts from the social reality in which the theory of the research is based. The concept to describe this is called ontology. Ontology basically describes the way we understand how social reality is established. (Grix 2002.) My own view lies in the ontological perspective that Grix (2002) describes as constructivism. It represents the idea that social phenomenon is something which is under constant change by individual´s effect. Social phenomenon is created through social interaction. Creswell (2003, 11–12) discusses of a way to claim knowledge called pragmatism. Pragmatism has many forms. Requirements for information and knowledge may come from events, actions, and results in pragmatism. Following pragmatism, the most important issue is the problem itself, and it is necessary to solve it by using any methods required. So, the researcher is free to choose the best method that allows to answer to the researcher question. As Creswell (2003, 12) states "Pragmatists agree that research always occurs in social, historical, political, and other contexts. In this way, mixed methods studies may include a postmodern turn, and a theoretical lens that is reflexive of social justice and political aims." The essence of pragmatism lies in the fact that it is not tied to one system of reality or philosophy. For a researcher, this means that it is possible to choose freely the methods, procedures, and techniques. These are determined by the goals, which are need and purpose. According to Kaushik and Walsh (2019), the most significant contribution of pragmatist epistemology is the view that knowledge is always based on human experiences. Human perception of the world is under constant influence by social experiences.

Creswell (2003, 12–21) describes the pragmatism view as not seeing the world as one absolute unity. Pragmatists are trying to solve the "What" and the "How" questions. This leads to mixed methods approach, where researcher tries to find the best way to collect and analyze data. The process is not restricted to just singular way, like for

example quantitative or qualitative. The mixed method approach includes both, quantitative and qualitative, data. It can include, for example, broad survey and add information to it by gathering qualitative data, including open-ended content. Mixed methods research is quite new in social sciences, but it contributes to analyzing both, numeric data and data including words (Creswell 2003, 209–210).

5.2 Data

5.2.1 Universum´s survey data

According to an interview with Universum´s Global Head of Data Collection Daniel Eckert (2021), Universum has an online survey which runs in multiple countries and on every continent. The survey is similar in different countries with local variations like, for example, market specific questions. The countries included in the survey vary depending on the year. However, important markets and especially major economies are included in the survey annually. Including or excluding markets are dependent on Universum´s clients´ needs. The survey period depends on the market, but it is usually between September and May in annual basis. Target group might vary a bit, since, for example, in the USA the survey excludes master´s students whereas in other markets those are included. In France, the targeting focuses on elite private schools but for instance in Germany and Sweden all universities are included. So, there are small differences between markets. The survey is targeted for students but in some markets Universum has the professional survey as well, which is meant for already graduated target group. (Eckert 2021.) Since the student and professional survey follow the same structure and the respondent chooses in the beginning of the survey in some markets whether they are a student or a professional, it is visible in Appendix 1 which questions are for students and which for professionals. The letter S before the question indicates that the question is for students and letter P means it is for professionals. If both letters appear before the question, the question is presented for both target groups.

This study will use only the student data and include the following countries: Finland, United Kingdom, and Sweden. Regarding UK, the data is gathered from every country, including England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland. However, most of the data comes from England. The student data is appropriate to answer the research question: How do university students´ identity influence on how they perceive an ideal employer

brand image. Countries on the other hand were chosen based on the researcher´s language skills. Interpretating word data from an unknown language is something that the resources of this study does not allow to do.

5.2.2 Survey respondents
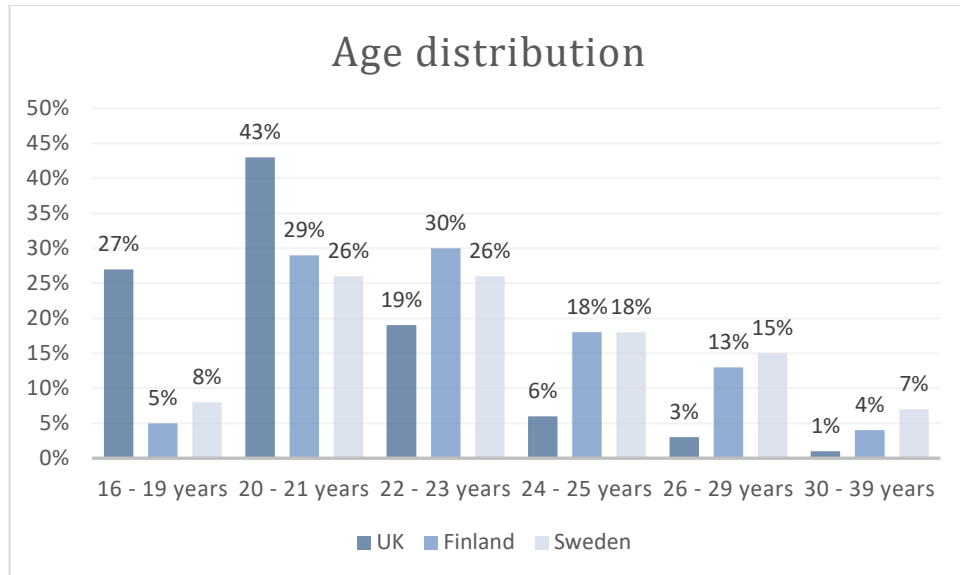
Figure 5. Survey respondents´ age distribution

From Figure 5, it is noticeable that UK students represent a younger respondents group in the data than Finland or Sweden. Most of UK respondents, 70 percent, are 21 years old or younger. Especially the group of 16 years old to 19 years old are significantly larger than in Finland or Sweden. Sweden has the oldest respondents as well 7 percent being over 30 years old.
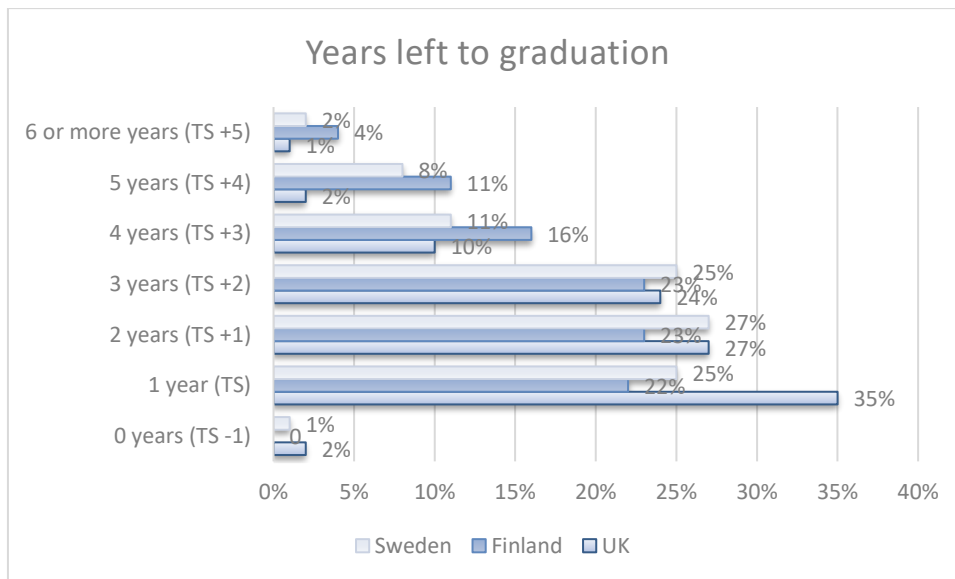
Figure 6. Survey respondents´ years left to graduation for

In the Figure 6, TS indicates the survey year. This survey data is TS2020, so TS +1 means that the respondent is graduating 2021. The survey started already in Fall 2019, so some respondents might be graduating 2019 December, for example. This is visible in TS -1 in the Figure 6. However, the research does not include a lot of respondents who have graduated 2019 (Figure 6). Figure 6 shows that UK respondents are much closer to their graduation approximately than respondents from Finland or Sweden, at the same time being younger than students from Finland and Sweden (Figure 5). This is explained by the differences between the countries university systems among other factors, like for example mandatory military service in Finland and tuition fees in UK. However, from these figures it is visible that the age distribution and years leaft to gradutation varies depending on the country. This might influence to the findings.

It is necessary to notice that these respondent amounts in Figure 5 and Figure 6 represent the whole amount of respondents to Universum´s 2020 survey from these countries. UK respondents amount for the survey was 40528 university students. Sweden´s amount was 24208 and Finland´s was 14109. Only a portion from these respondents have chosen Boston Consulting Group, Google, L´Oreal Group, and/or Pfizer as their ideal employer. These are the ideal employer brands, which are used in this research. Respondents are able to choose maximum of five employers as ideal employers in the survey. From UK 9607 respondents have chosen one or more of these employers as their ideal employer. The same amount for Finland is 1865 respondents and for Sweden 5012 respondents. A part of these respondents have answered to the open text field regarding

their ideal employer or employers. The total amount of responses used in this research is 5090. The final analysis´ data amount is smaller from UK and Finland due to the reason that international students are removed from that analysis. Similarly, only a small part of these respondents represent the personalities which are included in the analysis.

5.2.3   Data collection

The survey is distributed in multiple channels where students are present. Distribution channels are, for example, direct email send outs, social media advertising, professional survey panels which have their own data base of respondents, and partner relations. Partner relations mean that Universum´s partners distribute the survey in their own communication channels on Universum´s behalf in exchange of their own results or payment. Paid partners are, for example, job boards and discount platforms. Other partners consist of universities, unions, interest groups, and student organizations for instance. Between 60 and 70 percent of respondents are received through social media advertising, but the idea is to be present wherever the students are. Students receive monetary and non-monetary incentives from taking the survey. Non-monetary include, for example, feedback from curriculum vitae, information regarding career profile and salary expectations compared to peers, advises regarding suitable employers, and customized career advises. Monetary incentives include competition for gift cards, vouchers, and donations. The incentives consist of a mixture of these and changes during the time and depends on the market. (Eckert 2021.)

In Universum, for example, in global employer rankings which include 12 biggest economies, Universum weights the countries based on their Gross domestic product. In order to represent specific markets, the targets are defined based on the population. This depends whether on the aim is to represent all students or a sub-set. (Eckert 2021.)

Students have answered in different questions including numeric data and open-text fields (Appendix 1). This thesis will apply the text data from student respondents, together with other responses, from the question: What's the first word that comes to your mind when thinking of these companies/organisations as employers. The question is presented from the employer brand(s) perspective, that the respondent has chosen as an ideal(s) employer. Different employer brands´ data is used to answer the research questions. Only those languages will be used, which the researcher understands, so translations and misinterpretations will not impact the results. It is necessary to use the open text data in order to find out respondents´ perceptions in an exploratory way. Universum´s survey has

questions regarding attributes attached to employers (Appendix 1), but these have limited answer options and finding out perceptions from these responses would limit the exploratory principle of the research.

Employer brands which were chosen to this research are:

-Boston Consulting Group

-Google

-L'Oréal Group

-Pfizer

These employer brands were chosen keeping in mind that they would be attractive to different main field of studies, different genders, and they are operating in the chosen countries, and are in Universum´s employer list for the countries chosen. These employer brands have been chosen by many respondents as ideals, so there was enough of text data to analyse. This was necessary particularly for the second sub-question: How are ideal employer brands perceived in related with students´ own personality. The amount of data is reduced significantly by adapting strict terms for the respondents in order them to represent specific career personalities.

5.3   Data analysis

In mixed methods, the data analysis usually occurs within the quantitative and the qualitative approach and often between those two approaches. It can be performed, for example, by quantifying the qualitative data. This means that codes and themes are created in a qualitative way. Then the amounts are counted regarding how these appear in the text data. (Creswell 2003, 220–221.) Data will be analysed by creating themes from the text answers from the survey based on the research question and theory. These words may be seen as quantitative data as well due to the fact that the data does not consists of long text data, for example, interviews. On the other hand, there might be sentences, which might need more interpretation. However, the approach of quantifying these bits of text according to their themes applies to this research. Instrumental-Symbolic framework is used to create these themes. Answering to the first sub-question, what aspects in ideal employer brands are perceived by university students, it is necessary to categorize all the data based on functional and symbolic meanings. Second sub-question, how are ideal employer

brands perceived in related with students´ own personality, is solved by applying the RIASEC model to the respondents´ answers. Universum´s survey questions will be used in order to categorize respondents in different personality types. The third sub-question, how are ideal employer brands perceived in related with students´ own social identity, is answered by using social group, in this study nationality, as an indicator of social identity.

5.3.1 Content Analysis

A qualitative approach to content analysis called social constructivist analyses focuses on how reality is created in language and written text. The approach tries, for example, to conceptualize emotions. (Krippendorff 2013, 22.) In qualitative content analysis the researcher is aware of the multiple possibilities to interpret the textual data, which might be influenced, for example, the researcher´s ideology or other individualistic characteristics. (Krippendorff 2013, 89.)

This research follows the idea of pragmatism, regarding that the problem drives the research (Creswell 2003, 11). Considering that in this research it is possible to use already existing data from responses to open text field, which is not necessary to code anymore, as it won´t offer any additional benefits, the first part of the analysis will start from assigning bits of text under already existing themes. These themes are created from the theoretical knowledge. After this, the remaining bits of text will be coded. In thematic content analysis, the categories may be derived from theoretical part (Klenke 2016, 103). Similarly, codes can be derived from the theory (Eskola and Suoranta 1998). In the first part of the analysis, however, the content is categorized under existing themes. These could be possible to first describe as codes and then turn them into themes. It was known to the researcher before starting the analysis that these are the themes that are necessary to present in the analysis in order to contribute to the theoretical discussion. Because of this, it was done in this way using themes derived from the theory. The coding process for themes in thematic content analysis is meant to aim to reduction of data (Klenke 2016, 103). However, in this research the reduction of data is not necessary, because it is relevant to include all the individual answers in the analysis part. In the beginning of thematic analysis, researcher should make a strong decision regarding what is interesting in the data (Tuomi and Sarajärvi 2018). As all of the data is possible to include into the analysis and considering the relevance of it, nothing should be left out to study in an exploratory way the perceptions of the survey respondents. According to Klenke (2016, 102) "A theme is a pattern found in the information that a minimum describes and organizes the

possible observations or at a maximum interprets the aspects of the phenomenon. A theme may be identified at the manifest level (directly observable in the information) or at the latent level (categorizing issues underlying the phenomenon.)" In the data, which is used for this research, themes are seen as latent level, as bits of text will be categorized under the phenomenon.

Before actually identifying the themes from the data, it is possible to group the data based on, for example, gender or age. After this, the actual work of finding the themes begins. (Tuomi and Sarajärvi 2018.) In this research, the data is grouped based on career personalities and nationalities. All data is used in the first part of the analysis. The final phase of the analysis will use the same data as the first part, including only those respondents who have replied that their nationality is UK or Finnish. This is done to exclude international students, so the data represents nationalities accordingly.

After the data was categorized under the themes, which emerged from the Instrumental-Symbolic framework applied to employer brand context (Figure 3), the rest of the data was coded in order to structure the content in a systematic way, which is the aim of coding (Eskola and Suoranta 1998). In this way the rest of the data could be analysed. Thematic analysis can be done based on theory or based on the content (Tuomi and Sarajärvi 2018). In this research, it was first done based on theory and then on the content. In order to follow the exploratory approach of the research, it is necessary to find out whether new themes or relevant content existed outside of the Instrumental-Symbolic framework applied to employer brand context (Figure 3). Codes are notes written inside of the text, which offer knowledge about the meaning of the interpretation. Codes are further described with definitions. In coding, the content analysis tries to find what is visible from the data. It is important to keep in mind that this is a construction process from researcher´s point of view including researcher´s subjective view regarding the phenomenon under investigation. (Eskola and Suoranta 1998.) The codes used with their definitions can be found in appendices (Appendice 2). After this coding, the remaining data was assigned to a theme called "Other". In an open-ended question there are all kind of answers that did not fit into the emerged themes. At this point the researcher had a strong believe that the themes which emerged, are enough to answer to the research question. It is necessary to recognize the limits of one´s research and something can be left to the next research as well (Tuomi and Sarajärvi 2018). The focus should be limited enough for one research. However, at the same time everything that are possible to bring into the knowledge of others regarding the phenomenon under investigation, should be described.

(Tuomi and Sarajärvi 2018.) Following the idea of gathering the knowledge regarding the phenomenon, the "Other" theme was used to describe how much of the data fits outside of the themes, which emerged. This is an interesting part of the analysis and offers results for further studies.

Content analysis is defined as an objective, systematic, and quantitative method of analysing message characteristics (Neuendorf 2002, 1). Krippendorff (2013, 22) on the other hand questions the discussion of whether content analysis is qualitative or quantitative. In the end, every form of text reading is qualitative by nature. This applies even if text´s characteristics are turned into numbers so it can be properly analysed.

After the text data is categorized under different themes, these themes will form units so it is possible to analyse them in a quantitative way. Content analysis identifies units according to different distinctions. It is important that the units are wholes that can be seen as independent elements. (Krippendorff 2013, 98.) Units are message components (Neuendorf, 2002, 71). One option to define these units is to use categorial distinctions. The idea of it is to define units based on categories. This is done by finding something in common between these categories. The categorial distinctions may be found with the assistant of a theory that has been adopted for the analysis. (Krippendorff 2013, 106.)

Content analysis is often used to analyse content data like novels, commercials, political speeches, etc. It is a research tool for any kind of human interaction basically. (Neuendorf 2002, 1.) In this research, it is used to analyse the open field responses in a survey, which are in textual form. It needs to be adapted according to the content and data, so it is possible to answer to the research question in the best possible manner, which is the aim in pragmatistic research approach (Creswell 2003, 11–12).

Using variables in quantitative analysis, it is necessary to take theory and past research into account when creating these variables (Neuendorf 2002, 97). Variables in this exploratory research will include the chosen career personalities, which are Realistic, Investigative, Social, and Enterprising, and nationalities, which are Finnish and UK in this comparison. These are used as variables from personality and social identity.

The phases of the analysis part are the following:
1) Thematic content analysis based on theory.
2) Coding the rest of the data and formatting themes from those codes.
3) Themes changed into units, which allows quantitative content analysis.
4) Analyse the frequencies of these units.

5.3.2   Defining RIASEC-model personalities from Universum´s online survey

Questions are chosen from Universum´s online survey, which describe RIASEC-model´s career personalities. This research will apply as a variable for personality, Holland´s (1997) career types which are Realistic, Investigative, Social and Enterprising. There are three reasons, why only four profiles were chosen. These are the limitations of this research as a master´s degree. Overall, the assumption is that these are best suited for answering the research question: How are ideal employer brands perceived in related with students´ own personality. The final reason is that connecting more of RIASEC model´s career personalities to Universum´s survey is too vague. These four profiles can be identified from the survey answers. The following table will further expand the connection of these four profiles and Universum´s online survey questions.

Table 2. Defining RIASEC-types

Survey Question	Realistic	Investigative	Social	Enterprising
47) Which of these aspects are most important to you? (People & Culture)	Recognising performance (meritocracy)	Interaction with international clients and colleagues / A creative and dynamic work environment	A friendly work environment / Commitment to diversity and inclusion	Recognising performance (meritocracy) /Leaders who will support my development
48) Which of these aspects are most important to you? (Employer Reputation & Image)	Attractive/exciting products and services / Embracing new technologies	Innovation / Embracing new technologies	Corporate Social Responsibility / Ethical Standards	Fast-growing/entrepreneurial
49) Which of these aspects are most important to you? (Job Characteristics)	Flexible working conditions /Challenging work	Challenging work / Opportunities for international travel/relocation	Team-oriented work / High level of responsibility	High performance focus / Customer focus / Professional training and development
50) Which of these aspects are most important to you? (Remuneration & Advancement Opportunities)	Competitive base salary / Competitive benefits	Support for gender equality	Support for gender equality	Leadership opportunities / Clear path for advancement / High future earnings
59) Which of these skills do you consider yourself strongest in?	Problem-solving	Problem-solving	Team work / Communication	Communication / Positive attitude

The Realistic personality was chosen to favour meritocracy, attractive products and services, embracing new technologies, flexible working conditions, challenging work, competitive base salary, and competitive benefits. These are Realistic´s answers to the question: Which of these aspects are most important to you. (Table 2) From available skills,

problem-solving was chosen. These relate to Realistic personality description as being materialistic (Holland 1997, 21–22) that explain meritocracy, competitive benefits, competitive base salary and preference for freedom (Holland 1997, 21–22), which explains flexible working conditions. The technical and practical problem-solving description (Holland 1997, 21–22) indicates that problem solving, challenging work, embracing new technologies, and attractive new products or services are something that are important for this personality.

The Investigative personality is described as being interested in different social and cultural phenomena. (Holland 1997, 22–23) Because of this description, interaction with international clients and colleagues and opportunities for international travel/relocation were chosen as answers when asking about most important aspects (Table 2). As investigational behaviour (Holland 1997, 22–23) and ideas intrigue this personality (Deng et al. 2007), innovation and embracing new technologies were chosen for defining this personality (Table 2). The Investigative personality prefers challenging problems and liberal values (Holland 1997, 22–23), so due this challenging work, supporting gender equality and problem-solving as a skill were chosen as answer options to define this personality (Table 2). Because of this personality´s investigative nature and observational habits (Holland 1997, 22–23), a creative and dynamic work environment was chosen to represent the Investigative personality.

The Social personality wishes to spend time with people and enjoys social activities (Holland 1997, 24–25; Deng et al. 2007). This is why it is defined from the survey answers as choosing team-oriented work in important aspects, team work and communication in skills, and friendly working environment (Table 2). Social and ethical activities, helpful, kind, empathic, and responsible are aspects to describe this personality (Holland 1997, 24–25). That is why answer options Corporate Social Responsibility, supporting gender equality, commitment to diversity and inclusion, ethical standards, and high level of responsibility are chosen to define this personality (Table 2).

The Enterprising personality aims to gain economic and political gain and achieve organizational or economic goals by being ambitious and manipulative extroverts (Holland 1997, 25–26). Due this description, meritocracy, high performance focus, professional training and development, clear path for advancement, and high future earnings were chosen together with communication skills (Table 2). This personality might suit for managers as these behaviour factors may lead to leadership skills (Holland 1997, 25–26). This is why the leadership opportunities were chosen as an important aspect for this

personality (Table 2). As this ambitious personality sees problems in enterprising context and tries to solve them by controlling others (Holland 1997, 25–26), fast growing, entrepreneurial, and customer focus were chosen as defining factors as well (Table 2) to describe this personality. As the Enterprising personality is described as optimistic and interested in achieving organizational or economic goals (Holland 1997, 25–26), positive attitude as a skill and leaders who support development were chosen to describe this personality.

It is important to notice, that the respondent may choose a maximum of three alternatives when choosing answer options to the questions presented in Table 2. The describing questions and answers were chosen in the way that those would describe Holland´s (1997) personalities´ in a best possible way. Different answer options were emphasized, so differences between personalities would be visible in order to answer the question: How are ideal employer brands perceived in related with students´ own personality.

5.3.3 Operationalization of concepts

Operationalization is the process, where measures are created (Neuendorf 2002, 118). Measures should follow reliability, validity, accuracy, and precision. This means that the operationalization needs to be repeatable. It needs to measure the correct issue under investigation, and it needs to be free of bias. Measurement should be as precise as is reasonable. (Neuendorf 2002, 112–113.) Following these instructions, operationalization is done as simply as it is possible for the purpose of this research. Because of the thematic qualitative nature of these themes, reliability and accuracy cannot be guaranteed. Subjective bias is something, that needs to be accepted during the process of assigning a theme to every bits of text.

Nationalities are not necessary to turn into numerical data, since the data received from Universum already includes the information which country it is from. The same applies to personalities. The researcher is able to extract from Universum´s data tool answers based on every personality separately by sorting the original survey data based on respondents´ answers as indicated in Table 2.

The bits of text will be categorized into instrumental and symbolic themes, which will be assigned to represent a specific number in order to do the quantitative analysis. The "Other" theme will be included as well. Instrumental theme is one the themes, and symbolic attributes will be directly categorized according to sincerity, innovativeness, competence, prestige, and robustness themes following the instrumental-symbolic model

(Figure 3). The "Other" group is formed from the text bits that do not include any of these themes. This group will be analysed further, whether there are any themes visible in this group. This is done by coding the other theme for further analysis. In order to fit in to the symbolic themes, the text bits need to represent something symbolic and fit into the descriptions presented later on. This fitting is based on researcher´s decision and judgement. Some examples will be presented from the themes mentioned below.

Numericizing each theme:
-Instrumental attributes → 1
-Symbolic (sincerity) → 2
-Symbolic (innovativeness) → 3
-Symbolic (competence) → 4
-Symbolic (prestige) → 5
-Symbolic (robustness) → 6
-Other group → 7

Symbolic attributes are something, which should be intangible. Instrumental attributes are related to the work itself. Following Lievens and Highhouse (2003), instrumental attributes are related, for example, to salary, advancement, job security, task demands, location, or working with customers. However, instrumental theme is not limited to these. Other bits of text, which describe or relate directly to work itself, are assigned to the instrumental theme. Product related attributes belong to the instrumental side in the original instrumental-symbolic framework (Lievens and Highhouse 2003). However, this research follows the Lievens and Highhouse (2003) framework in the categorization (Table 2) which is meant for employer brand context. Product and service-related bits of text are assigned into the "Other" theme, in order to better answer to the research question. It is more interesting to use only work-related attributes in the instrumental theme to separate these from the product and service-related attributes. The aim is to analyse how often these work-related instrumental attributes, which rational consumer tries to maximize (Lievens and Highhouse 2003), are the first emerging top of mind association from an ideal employer brand and how identity influences on these.

Symbolic themes will follow Cambridge Dictionary definitions considering the concepts of sincerity, competence, prestige, and robustness. Innovativeness was not found from Cambridge Dictionary, so another dictionary definition will be applied to this term.

The aim is that the thematic analysis would be as clear as possible and the subjective bias of the researcher is limited. The dictionary definitions guide systematic approach to the analysis, which is a part of content analysis (Neuendorf 2002, 1). This analysis follows rather strict guidelines, so it is possible to actually notice differences between themes. At the same time this part of the analysis is subjective interpretation from textual data. The researcher followed own interpretation regarding which bits of texts belong to which themes. The dictionary definitions are following:

-Sincerity: " honesty" (Cambridge Dictionary 2021a)
-Innovativeness: "the skill and imagination to create new things" (Merriam-Webster n.d.)
-Competence: "the ability to do something well" (Cambridge Dictionary 2021b)
-Prestige: "respect and admiration given to someone or something, usually because of a reputation for high quality, success, or social influence" (Cambridge Dictionary 2021c)
-Robustness: "the quality of being strong, and healthy or unlikely to break or fail" (Cambridge Dictionary 2021d)

Table 3. Examples of thematic groups

Instrumental	Symbolic (Sincerity)	Symbolic (Innovative-ness)	Symbolic (Competen-ce)	Symbolic (Prestige)	Symbolic (Robust-ness)
Customer based, Customer focused, Customer Satisfaction, Demanding, Relax working environment, Work life balance and salary, Bra förmåner, Bra lön, Bra möjlighet för utveckling, Goda utvecklingsmöjligheter	Dependable, Fair, Integrity, Original	Creative, Creativity, Dynamic, Innovation, Innovative, Inspiring, Innovation och kreativitet, Uppmuntran för kreativitet, Utveckling, Dynaaminen	High performance, Competitive, Högpresterande, Kompetence, Professionellt	Elegance, Elite, Prestige, Prestigious consulting opportunity for doctors, The best company ever, Top Company, World Famous, Bäst på marknaden, Arvostettu, Elegantti	Big, Stable, Enormt, Gigant, Stora, Stort företag, Jättiläinen, Valtava

After these themes were found, the rest of the text bits were coded. These formed themes called Product/Service, Industry, Other personality traits, and Other. Bits of text which relate to products and services, that the company offers, were assigned to the "Product/Service" theme. All the text bits which refer to the industry, where the company operates, were assigned to the "Industry" theme. The rest of the personality traits, which did not fit into the symbolic themes, were categorized in the "Other personality traits theme". Finally, the remaining text bits were assigned to "Other" theme.

The data is in an excel form where every bits of text will receive the correct number that represents its theme. After this, the following analysis was done with Excel and SPSS data analysis tool. As frequency output is the most common quantitative output available (Neuendorf 2002, 131), it was used in this case to describe the output. Complicated multiple variable analyses were not included in the analysis part, as the qualitative part of the study took a significant amount of time. Because of the format of the data, it would have been necessary to repeat the thematic analysis in order to perform further quantitative analysis.

5.4   Reliability and validity of the research

Reliability indicates if the research can be repeated with the same results. When human does the coding, there might be variations between different coders. (Neuendorf 2002, 141.) In this research there was only one coder, so there are no differences in this sense. However, the coding process is subjective interpretation, and a different researcher might come up with different output. The interpretation is narrowed by using definitions from the dictionary for the main themes. Still a person with different background, different language skills, and different opinions would probably interpret the text data differently. This is however a part of the nature of qualitative research as abductive research claims and observations should be under discussion (Tavory and Timmermans 2014, 107). As the first part of this research´s analysis is qualitative by nature, this cannot and should not be avoided.

Validity of the research can be divided into internal validity and external validity. The first one refers to procedures, experiments, or threats considering participants of the research. If the research procedure changes in the middle of the research, for example, it might have an impact on the participants. External validity refers to generalizing the results to population, which is not included in the research. (Creswell 2003, 171.) This research includes a much larger sample than qualitative research usually does, so participants´ opinion changes should not be a problem. At the same time, the survey period is rather long including several months. This might have an impact on the settings. For example, if a negative news is presented from one of the employer brands in the middle of the survey, perceptions might be more negative after that comparing to perceptions before. This research is an exploratory research by its nature, so generalizing the results to different populations is not the aim of this research.

"Identity can be measured using survey questions" (Costa-Font and Cowell 2015). However, in this research this was done in a simplistic way. For considering the psychological aspects of the research, further studies are required. Personality and social identity could have different variables, which would impact on the research. The focus of the research was marketing, so psychology and sociology were left out on purpose. These parts of the research tried to apply collectively accepted models and theories in a straightforward way, but the field of sociology and psychology might have much more contribution to the generalizations made in the study. However, in an exploratory way, these offer contribution to the field of marketing and employer branding. Personality and identity are

as well something that varies for every individual. Categorizing these under a specific model is an interpretation. It is also necessary to point out, that people may belong to different categories regarding these kind of personality models. It is unlikely, that a person represents only one career type. Probably, people are identified to a combination of these types.

It is crucial to mention, that the researcher works in the employer brand industry. This might increase the possibility of subjective views regarding the topic. It is impossible to avoid the fact that previous knowledge, ideas, experience, and views have an impact on the research.

6   ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

This section of the research will focus on analysing the output from data based on sub-question of the research question. In the end of the chapter, the main research question is being answered with the support of these analyses and theoretical framework.

6.1   Aspects in ideal employer brand perceived by university students

To answer to the first sub-question: What aspects in ideal employer brands are perceived by university students, a total of 5090 responses from UK, Sweden, and Finland were analysed. As is visible from Table 4, the total frequency is 5093. This is a bit over than the survey´s respondents amounts, because in some answers multiple themes were identified. In order to analyse them in a proper way, the answers were categorized in different themes. Hence, the total amount does not match to the total respondents amounts for this analysis.

Table 4. All students´ frequencies

All students

		Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Instrumental	410	8,1	8,1
	Symbolic (Sincerity)	15	,3	8,3
	Symbolic (Innovativeness)	1255	24,6	33,0
	Symbolic (Competence)	235	4,6	37,6
	Symbolic (Prestige)	632	12,4	50,0
	Symbolic (Robustness)	559	11,0	61,0
	Product/Service	884	17,4	78,3
	Industry	322	6,3	84,7
	Other personality traits	185	3,6	88,3
	Other	596	11,7	100,0
	Total	5093	100,0	
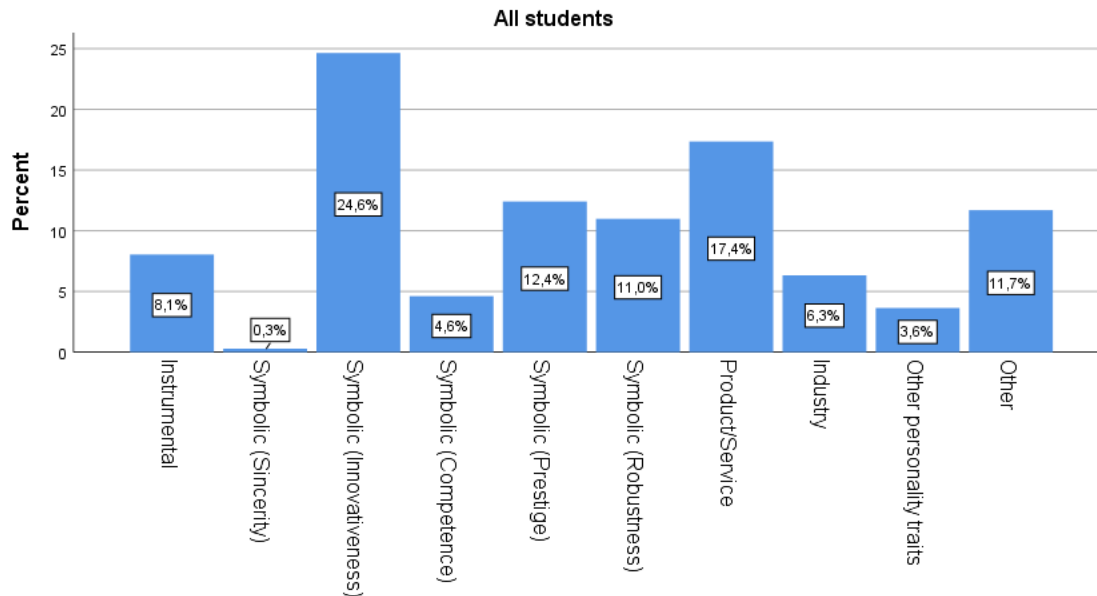
Figure 7. All students´ perceptions regarding their ideal employer brands

10 themes were recognized from the data. First six corresponds to the instrumental and symbolic framework (Figure 7), and the rest were visible from the data through the coding process. The rest of the bits of texts are in Other theme, which did not suite to any theme in this analyse. The analysis was done in a strict way due to the fact that the researcher tried to categorize the bits of texts to the themes, which they clearly belong to. In many cases it is difficult to say does the word or sentence refer to innovativeness, for example, or to something else. So, certain carefulness was considered in the analysis in order to draw actual conclusions and results, and to avoid leaving space for interpretations. At the same time, it is necessary to remind that interpreting textual data is a subjective process.

As is visible from Table 4, the theme that emerged the most is Symbolic theme, which is related to innovativeness. So, it seems that university students perceive innovativeness the most, when considering what is the first thing that comes to their mind when thinking the chosen ideal employer brands as employers. A part of the reason why innovativeness is the most emerging theme might relate to the fact that Google was the employer where most of the data came from. It is possible that Google is perceived as quite innovative considering its reputation as a technology company. Innovativeness frequency was 1255 and percentage 24,6 percent (Table 4). It´s portion is however remarkable when studying the differences from Figure 7. Almost one fourth of the students choose to describe the chosen employer brand with an innovative description. Lievens and Highhouse (2003)

found that innovativeness and competence have symbolic meaning and add value to employer brand, but it seems innovativeness is something which is perceived a lot more than competence. People desire to express themselves through these symbolic meanings (Lievens and Highhouse 2003). Innovativeness is at least perceived the most from ideal employer brands, so might be possible, that innovativeness is something that university students want to express about themselves the most regarding symbolic aspects in employer brands.

The second most emerged symbolic theme was prestige, with frequency of 632 and percentage being 12,4 percent (Table 4). It was not calculated how many of the text bits came from which employer brand, but it might be that Boston Consulting Company may be perceived as a prestige employer brand. Prestige was perceived by significant amount, so this definitely is something that students perceive in their ideal employer brands and might be that they want to express about themselves. Considering signal theory and its contribution to the signals that employers want to send to their audience (Davies et al. 2018), prestige might be something that Boston Consulting Company wants to communicate about themselves.

Robustness was the third symbolic theme to emerge from the data not far behind of prestige with the frequency of 559 and 11 percent of the total (Table 4). As robustness is related to the fact that the employer will not fail (Cambridge Dictionary 2021d), these big employer brands fit to that theme quite well. It is not that far away with its meaning from the other themes, but it might be that university students want to express some sort of strongness about themselves. As over one tenth perceives robustness from their ideal employer brand, it is an important aspect to consider.

Symbolic themes competence and sincerity were not that common to emerge in students responses comparing to the other themes. Competence frequency was 235 and sincerity only 15. Competence was perceived by 4,6 percent of the total and sincerity only 0,3 percent. Competence still has a significant proportion of the total share and might represent a certain group from the respondents in further analyses. However, sincerity amount was rather low. (Figure 7; Table 4) The strict analysis where only the data which represents the theme in a clear way, was assigned to the theme might be the reason, as a lot of honesty related pieces of texts were not found. If for example text related to ethical behaviour would have been assigned to sincerity, the amount would have been bigger. However, the same procedure was followed with the other themes, and the interpretations were strict. Sincerity and honesty do not seem something that university students perceive

directly from ideal employer brands and might be that sincerity is something that they are not that interested to express from themselves. Competence portion of 4,6 percent is a bit surprising. It seems that it is not that often perceived from ideal employer brands among university student, even the frequency of 235 (Table 4) is something that should be taken into account. Rampl and Kenning (2014) mentioned that consultancy companies might be seen as competent employers, but this does not seem to be a dominating perception at least in these results.

Regarding symbolic aspects perceived in ideal employers, it is visible that innovativeness dominates these perceptions. Table 4 shows us that symbolic themes represent more than half of university student´s perceptions, where combined percentage share is 52,9 percent. This is a significant result. Lievens and Highhouse (2003) found that innovativeness and competence are important aspects in organization attractiveness. Even if their study is 18 years old, this research shows similar results regarding innovativeness. It being the most emerging theme in university students´ perceptions considering ideal employer brands, it surely is a factor behind organization attractiveness. All in all, previous research indicates that the role of symbolic aspects in initial employer attraction is important (Lievens and Highhouse 2003). These results seem to support this view.

From Table 4, it is visible that instrumental attributes frequency is 410 and percentage of the total is 8,1 percent. The proportion is not that far away from symbolic attributes like robustness, for example, which is 11 percent (Table 4). However, considering instrumental theme against all symbolic themes, the results clearly indicate that perceptions from university students are much more related to symbolic aspects, like innovativeness and prestige than instrumental, and like, for example, good pay and location (Table 4). Combined proportion of symbolic themes is 52,9 percent and instrumental´s proportion is 8,1 percent. In previous research, for example, Lievens et al. (2007) explained that instrumental aspects like monetary compensation have had a positive impact on attraction towards employers. However, it seems that in ideal employer brands university students perceive much more than just work-related instrumental factors. Though, 8,1 percent is a significant proportion among others, but some specific symbolic aspects are perceived a lot more (Table 4). It is possible that rational consumers, want to maximize these benefits (Lievens and Highhouse 2003), but the first and initial perception consists more often of symbolic value. It seems to be true that symbolic meanings in brands explain their attractiveness as an employer (Rampl and Kenning 2014), as university students choose much

more symbolic meanings than instrumental meanings (Figure 7) related to their ideal employer brands.

It is necessary to keep in mind that instrumental attributes, like monetary compensation, may lead to symbolic conclusions (Highhouse et al. 2007). It might be that answers related to pay may be attached to symbolic conclusions like, for example, prestige, which is a popular theme in the answers (Table 4). Similarly, Table 4 shows that product and services related answers represents a significant proportion of the data with frequency of 884 and 17,4 percent of the total. It is the second largest theme. However, it might be that product and services are related to the biggest theme, innovativeness. This might be true at least with some of the textual data assigned to product and service category. If the respondent has replied something related to the technological service, it might be the innovative related symbolic conclusion behind it, which drives the perception. If considering the results from this point of view, prestige and innovativeness might be even more important to university students. However, analysing this would require further studies.

Product and service-related theme is a significant theme with 17,4 percent. Besides that, industry related theme emerged with 6,3 percent and other personality traits theme with 3,6 percent of the total. Other theme remained in 11,7 percent, including the data that did not fit to the themes mentioned above. It seems that university students´ perceptions are much related to product and services when discussing of ideal employer brands. Similarly, industry is an important aspect. (Table 4) These are related to the output of the chosen company and the industry where it operates. For some, it might be important to work in a specific field like, for example management consultancy or offer certain services. Again, these might be related to symbolic conclusions. Operating in the management consultancy field might offer prestige to one´s self-expression. Then again, when university students think of Google for example, their first perception might relate to the service or products that the company provides, as these are visible in our everyday life. Even, if the survey question asks to consider the company as an employer (Appendix 1), perceptions are much related to the product or service (Table 4). It is understandable with known services and necessary to keep in mind as the percentage share of the total is quite remarkable of the total (Table 4).

Other personality traits are a rather small theme with its 3,6 percent share of the total. This implies that the symbolic themes from marketing modified to employer brand context Highhouse (2003) works quite well. There were some adjectives which did not fit in to these themes. However, the theoretical model fits in a proper way, even if the amount

of data was quite plentiful. Combining these other personality traits to the symbolic themes, the combined percentage share of theme is 56,6 percent (Table 4). This underlines even further the meaning of symbolic attributes, when discussing of university students´ perceptions regarding ideal employer brands. It seems that Aaker (1997) was on the right track, when indicating the importance of symbolic meanings in brands and attraction. The result of it seems to be quite remarkable.

6.2 Ideal employer brands perceived in related with students´ own personality

Table 5. Crosstabulation including themes and personalities

Crosstabulation

| | | | Personality | | | | |
			Enterpris-ing	Investiga-tive	Realis-tic	Social	Total
Theme	Instrumental	Count	11	7	16	8	42
		% within personality	8,0%	8,0%	12,0%	8,4%	9,3%
	Symbolic (Sincerity)	Count	0	0	0	1	1
		% within personality	0,0%	0,0%	0,0%	1,1%	0,2%
	Symbolic (Innovative-ness)	Count	41	30	27	24	122
		% within personality	29,9%	34,5%	20,3%	25,3%	27,0%
	Symbolic (Compe-tence)	Count	6	0	7	5	18
		% within personality	4,4%	0,0%	5,3%	5,3%	4,0%
	Symbolic (Prestige)	Count	15	9	16	11	51
		% within personality	10,9%	10,3%	12,0%	11,6%	11,3%
	Symbolic (Robust-ness)	Count	17	7	14	13	51
		% within personality	12,4%	8,0%	10,5%	13,7%	11,3%
	Product/Service	Count	22	18	30	15	85
		% within personality	16,1%	20,7%	22,6%	15,8%	18,8%
	Industry	Count	6	2	6	8	22
		% within personality	4,4%	2,3%	4,5%	8,4%	4,9%
	Other personality traits	Count	3	2	4	2	11
		% within personality	2,2%	2,3%	3,0%	2,1%	2,4%
	Other	Count	16	12	13	8	49
		% within personality	11,7%	13,8%	9,8%	8,4%	10,8%
Total		Count	137	87	133	95	452
		% within personality	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%

Table 6. Personality crosstabulation´s significance test

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	23,591ᵃ	27	,653
Likelihood Ratio	26,180	27	,509
N of Valid Cases	452		

a. 12 cells (30,0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum
expected count is 19.

It is visible from Table 5 that the respondents amounts, representing certain personalities, are much lower than total respondents amounts, which was analysed in the previous part. Applying the answers from Table 2, the data revealed 137 Enterprisings, 87 Investigatives, 133 Realistics, and 95 Social personalities. Table 6 reveals that the crosstabulation regarding personalities is not statistically significant. This is due to the lack of data and insufficient sample size regarding these personalities.
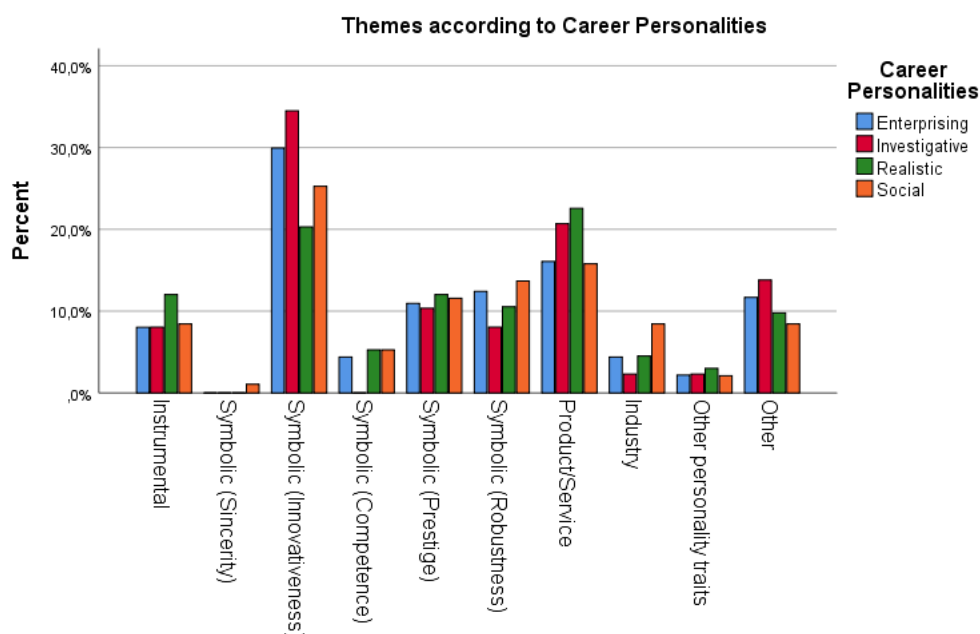

Figure 8. Perceptions according to personality

Starting from the instrumental theme, it is visible from Figure 8, that a Realistic

personality perceives the most instrumental aspects in ideal employer brands. The differences are rather low, as Realistic percentage amount is a 12 percent and others are approximately 8 percent (Table 5). Realistic career personality favours things over other aspects (Figure 1) and traditional values, and might be describes as materialistic (Holland 1997, 21–22). So instrumental benefits and monetary compensations suits to these views.

Symbolic theme related to sincerity was not something these career personalities chose, except minor interest for Social personality. On the other hand, the most emerging theme in the total group, Symbolic innovativeness, was popular among different personalities. Investigative is on the top in this theme with 34,5 percent (Table 5). This suits to Investigative personality´s interests in things and ideas (Figure 1). Analysing data, challenging problems, and investigational behaviour describes this personality (Holland 1997, 22–23), so innovativeness is definitely a proper theme for this personality, and it fits to this character to perceive innovativeness in a such a high level in their ideal employer brand. Enterprising personality is second with 29,9 percent (Table 5). This is an interesting finding, since Enterprising personality is related to people skills and ambition trying to gain economic goals. (Holland 1997, 25–26.) It might be that these career personalities, which is described as extroverts, energetic, and manipulative (Holland 1997, 25–26) might perceive that they can follow these goals in working with innovative companies. Social personality represents less than 25,3 percent from this theme comparing to Enterprising (Figure 8). Social type, being the third in this theme with percentage share of 25,3 percent (Table 5), might also be manipulative, but does not posses technical skills that much (Holland 1997, 24–25). From this point of view, it makes sense that their ideal employer brand is not perceived innovative compared to others, but it is still an important share and the biggest share for this personality (Figure 8). It might be that Social type perceives innovativeness as related to social problems, that intrigues this personality type (Holland 1997, 24–25). We see differences in this theme as Realistic personality´s percentage share is 20,3 percent (Table 5). This is different compared, for example, to the Investigative personality. Realistic personality is interested in things (Figure 1), and values systematic behaviour together with technical challenges (Holland 1997, 21–22). As this personality has higher percentage share in the instrumental theme (Figure 8), it might be that products and services, and maybe developing them, are interesting for this personality, but they are not the ones with brand new innovative ideas. This suits to the systematic behaviour.

Symbolic theme related to competence is less than six percentages for every personality type, and 0 percent for the Investigative personality (Table 5). It is necessary to keep in mind that Investigative´s total was the lowest being 87 (Table 5). Some differences are visible in the symbolic theme related to prestige. Realistic personality and Enterprising have 12 percent and 10,9 percent shares. The Realistic with traditional values and Enterprising who wants to possess leadership skills (Holland 1997, 21–26) might perceive prestige in their ideal employer brands from these reasons. As symbolic attributes are important to self-expression (Lievens and Highhouse 2003), Realistic may want to express prestige as rather traditional value and Enterprising maybe wants to express leadership qualities through prestige. The social situation seeker, Social personality, is second in this theme with 11,6 percent share. It might be that prestige is something that people who value social situations appreciates in their ideal employer brands. It may offer social prestige as well. On the other hand, the investigational Investigative personality may not perceive prestige that important in their ideal employer brands, or at least the first perception from those. This personality´s share was 10,3 percent. However, the differences are rather small in this theme (Figure 8).

From Symbolic theme, Robustness, a noticeable thing to mention is that the Investigative personality does not perceive robustness that high compared to others, percentage being 8 percent (Table 5). Might be that different social and cultural aspects intrigue more (Holland 1997, 22–23) than robustness in an ideal employer brand. Social personality is the first in this theme with 13,7 percent (Table 5). Social type enjoys being with people (Holland 1997, 24–25), so it may be that they prefer robust and bigger organizations at least compared to small start-ups, so they can enjoy the company of big teams and colleagues.

Figure 8 indicates that product and services are something that interests the Realistic type. This is understandable considering the things oriented (Figure 1), technical and materialistic personality type (Holland 1997, 21–23). This personality may perceive its ideal employer brand more from materialistic perspective. The product and service aspect of the brand might be important due to the orientation towards objects. Social personality on the other hand perceives the lowest amount of product and service related mentionings with percentage share of 15,8 percent (Table 5). This goes together with the fact that they are more interested on people first of all (Figure 1) and then social and ethical activities (Holland 1997, 24–25). It might be that personality types focused on human relations do

not perceive products and services as the first thing that comes to mind for an ideal employer brand.

Industry related theme and other personality traits theme did not receive much support among these personality types, percent being less than 9 percent (Table 5). Social personality is higher in this theme compared to the rest of the personalities. Similarly, the other personality traits theme remained below four percentages. The final theme, Other, has some differences, Investigative personality having the biggest percentage share. (Figure 8) The frequencies of this analysis were much lower (Table 5), so every theme is not that popular among these personality types.

There is a discrepancy on personality differences when comparing instrumental theme to symbolic themes. In the instrumental theme, the biggest difference is 4,0 percent and in symbolic innovativeness it is 14,2 percent (Table 5). Might be that personality impacts more in symbolic perceptions than instrumental ones, due to the view of self-expression being more related to symbolic attributes (Lievens and Highhouse 2003). However, we do see similar differences in product and service theme as well, though not as relevant differences as in the symbolic theme innovativeness (Figure 8).

It is visible from Figure 8, that personality might impact on how university students perceive their ideal employer brands. There are differences between different personality types and similar aspects, which are visible in personalities, are visible in the perceptions. This supports the social identity theory´s view of human desire to express one´s values (Rampl and Kenning 2014). The brand personality of the potential employer may be used as an intermediary for this purpose, so it is possible for the applicants to see the employer brand as a possibility to express themselves through their brands. (Rampl and Kenning 2014) The fact that investigational personalities perceive the most innovativeness and traditional value holders are above other personality types, for example in prestige related theme, supports this view. Humans desire to identify themselves in organizations to improve their self-esteem (Highhouse et al. 2007), and employer brands might be just the right tool for it. Though, further research is necessary to study this phenomenon in a proper manner with larger sample size.

6.3   Ideal employer brands perceived in related with social identity

In analysing the third sub-question, how are ideal employer brands perceived in related with students´ own social identity, nationalities were chosen as variables to represent social identity, since nationality and language are examples on how social identity may be

defined (Costa-Font and Cowell 2015). The data used is the same data, which was ana-lysed in the first sub-question. However, data from Sweden is not included in this analy-sis. So overall, the data includes respondents from UK and Finland. In order to follow the nationality comparison idea, international students are removed from this sample. There-fore, the sample size differs from the first analysis, where international students were included. Finland and UK were chosen because the nationalities assumably differ from each other more than, for example, Finnish and Swedish residents. Therefore, this is a more relevant comparison for the analysis of the influences of social identity.

Table 7. Crosstabulation including themes and nationalities

Crosstabulation

| | | | Nationality | | |
			FIN	UK	Total
Theme	Instrumental	Count	45	125	170
		% within nationality	8,2%	6,8%	7,1%
	Symbolic (Sincerity)	Count	2	11	13
		% within nationality	0,4%	0,6%	0,5%
	Symbolic (Innovativeness)	Count	91	455	546
		% within nationality	16,5%	24,9%	23,0%
	Symbolic (Competence)	Count	39	107	146
		% within nationality	7,1%	5,9%	6,1%
	Symbolic (Prestige)	Count	69	190	259
		% within nationality	12,5%	10,4%	10,9%
	Symbolic (Robustness)	Count	132	157	289
		% within nationality	23,9%	8,6%	12,2%
	Product/Service	Count	85	292	377
		% within nationality	15,4%	16,0%	15,9%
	Industry	Count	26	136	162
		% within nationality	4,7%	7,4%	6,8%
	Other personality traits	Count	3	115	118
		% within nationality	0,5%	6,3%	5,0%
	Other	Count	60	238	298
		% within nationality	10,9%	13,0%	12,5%
Total		Count	552	1826	2378
		% within nationality	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%

Table 8. Nationality crosstabulation´s significance test

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Sig-nificance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	133,728ᵃ	9	,000
Likelihood Ratio	136,635	9	,000
N of Valid Cases	2378		

a. 1 cells (5,0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum ex-
pected count is 3,02.

As we can see from Table 7, in Finland the frequency is 552, which represent 23,3 per-
cent of the total 2378. UK´s frequency is 1826, which represents 76,8 percent of the to-
tal. This means that the frequency from UK is over three times higher than from Fin-
land. Considering the population of these countries, the difference is not an essential
problem for the analysis. Table 8 indicates that the differences between these nationali-
ties are statistically significant.
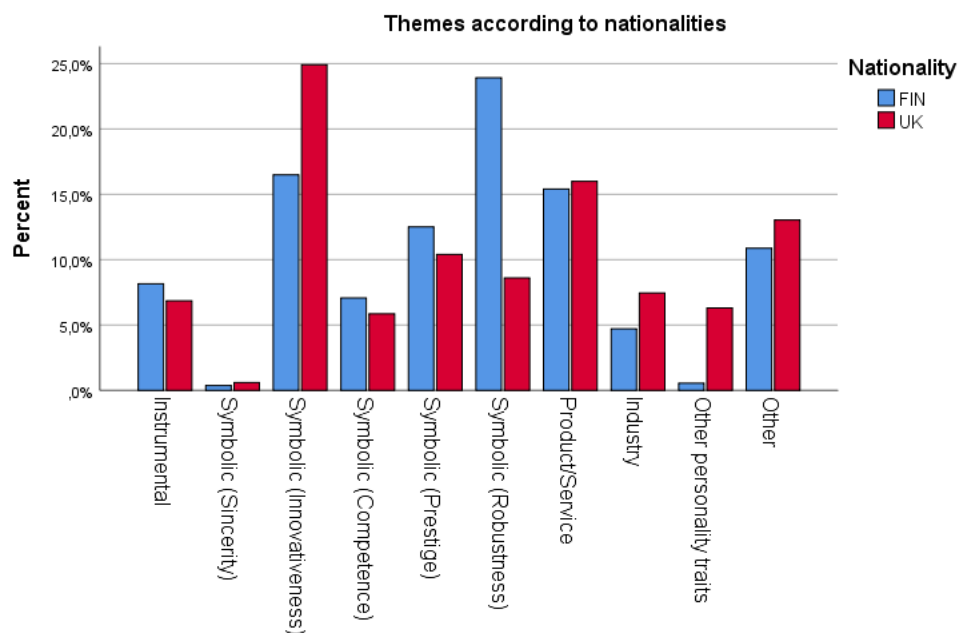
Figure 9. Perceptions according to nationality

From Figure 9, it is possible to notice that the instrumental theme has quite small differ-
ences among the two nationalities. Finnish university students perceive a bit more in-
strumental aspects in their ideal employer brands, but the difference is not that

significant, if considered to the rest of the themes. A small difference indicates that Finns might be slightly more interested in salary, good benefits, and similar attributes. As rational consumers maximize their utility regarding instrumental aspects (Lievens and Highhouse 2003), Finnish people might be more rational in this way due to not concentrating that much on the symbolic aspects. However, the difference is rather small.

Symbolic sincerity is not that represented on UK citizens and Finnish people answers (Figure 8), as was the case with all respondents (Figure 7). On the other hand, symbolic theme related to innovativeness shows interesting results (Figure 9). It is noticeable from Table 7 that university students with UK nationality perceive much more innovativeness related attributes from their ideal employer brands with the portion of 24,9 percent compared to Finns´ 16,5 percent. This is a significant difference. From this theme it is possible to say that social identity, presented in this study as nationality, has an influence on how university students perceive ideal employer brands. It is difficult to say why UK citizens perceive more innovativeness compared to Finns, but at least regarding these employer brands it seems to be so. Maybe innovativeness is not that important perception for Finnish university students when it comes to their ideal employer brands, at least compared to UK. Even though 16,5 percent is quite significant proportion, it might be interesting to study in the future whether Finnish people are interested towards this theme in a more profound way.

Symbolic theme competence is perceived 7,1 percent by Finns and 5,9 percent by UK citizens. The difference is rather small in this theme. Finns perceive competence related attributes a little more than UK citizens. Regarding symbolic theme prestige, Finns seem to perceive prestige related aspects in their ideal employer brands more than UK citizens proportions being 12,5 percent for Finns and 10,4 percent for UK. (Table 7) There is a small difference and behind this may be numerous factors. As organizations are used to improve self-esteem (Highhouse et al. 2007), maybe Finns have a bigger urge to improve their self-esteem by trying to identify themselves in prestigious organizations. Or it might be that Finland as a smaller country and population are more interested in prestigious companies, as university students might have more actual changes to be hired from a prestigious company than UK with its huge population. Therefore, Finns might perceive ideal employer brands in a more prestigious way than UK students, as they actually believe their changes to be hired in these. It might be as well that as a small population, Finns see these four enormous employer brands in a more prestigious way. These brands as employers might be seen more prestigious when one is considering them from

a small nation located in the corner of Europe, compared to UK university students, who might be more familiar with these brands as employers. Finland´s older respondents (Figure 5) might influence on this as well. Maybe older students closer to graduation perceive more prestige due their age.

In symbolic theme robustness, the difference among Finns and UK citizens is the biggest. 23,9 percent of Finns perceive robustness related aspects in their ideal employer brands as 8,6 percent of UK citizens do the same. (Table 7) The reason is difficult to tell, but it might be that the reasons are similar to prestige theme. As robustness theme is related to strongness of the company and it not failing, might be that people from smaller nation sees these big and well-known brands being actually big, strong, and prestigious ones as well. Might be that the world looks bigger, if you are located in a smaller place. Smaller country´s nationality surely modifies a person´s social identity and it seems to have significant influence on how employer brands are perceived. Robustness is also the most perceived theme among Finns as innovativeness is among UK citizens (Figure 9). This would be highly interesting to study further with data from other countries, is robustness something that people from smaller nations seek for, and innovativeness more something that people from bigger countries seek for.

Product and service-related theme is the most equal among two nationalities. Finns proportion is 15,4 percent and UK citizens 16,0 percent. This indicates that nationality at least does not influence on how much product and service-related attributes are perceived regarding ideal employer brands. UK citizens on the other hand perceive more industry related aspects than Finns (Figure 9). UK citizens proportion is 7,4 percent and Finns´ 4,7 percent (Table 7). The difference is not as significant as in some themes (Figure 9), but it might be that UK citizens are more interested to be employed by specific industries, and therefore perceive industry from their ideal employer brand as the first perception.

Other personality themes seem to be interesting as Finns do not perceive it almost at all, percent being 0,5 as UK citizens share is 6,3 percent (Table 7). From this result it is visible that the instrumental-symbolic framework´s symbolic attributes cover quite well Finns´ perceptions, but UK citizens still perceive other personality traits in these brands. This is an interesting finding, which indicates that social identity influences on how university students perceive human personalities in employer brands. Aaker (1997) based his brand personalities model into an idea of human personalities attached to brands, but it is interesting results first of all that it applies to employer brands and social identity actually influences on that. Aaker´s (1997) view of human personalities attached to brands is

visible in all of the symbolic themes and their differences, but the other personality traits theme supports the view even further. Figure 9 strengthens the view that people with different social identity perceive human personalities in employer brands in different ways.

On the other theme, UK citizens´ proportion is 13,0 percent and Finns´ 10,9 percent. There is a slight difference as well. (Table 7) All in all, it is fascinating that in some themes the difference is really significant while in some other themes the difference is only a few percentages or less. Innovativeness and robustness were the themes with the most difference in this analysis, while in sincerity and product and service themes the difference is rather small. Although, the sincerity theme is not much represented at all. Instrumental theme has quite small difference as symbolic themes seem to have bigger differences. Nationality seems to influence more on how university students perceive symbolic aspects compared to instrumental or product and service-related themes. (Figure 9) According to social identity theory, company´s image is used as a measurement by current employees to see how outsiders are evaluating them. Peer acceptance is something, which applicants aim to achieve with an organizational membership. (Lievens and Highhouse 2003.) These results indicate that symbolic aspects in employer brands are more important in this, and social identity influences quite significantly to which symbolic aspects are perceived as the most in ideal employer brands.

Rather significant differences are visible in Figure 9. However, it is necessary to keep in mind that UK respondents were much younger than Finnish respondents and closer to graduation (Figure 5; Figure 6). This might influence the results. Younger respondents might relate innovativeness, for example, more to their ideal employer brands, which was the case among UK respondents (Figure 9). Age group relates to one´s social identity as well, so from this perspective this does not disrupt the results. However, it might be an explaining factor, and requires further analysis.

6.4   Answering to the research question

From previous analyses, it is visible that university students perceive especially symbolic aspects in their ideal employer brands. This represents more than half of the all perceptions in this researches results. If other personality traits are included, the amount increases even further. Instrumental aspects related to work itself are important as well as

product and services related aspects. Symbolic sincerity is not that relevant aspect in perceptions, and innovativeness seems to be the most perceived aspect.

From theoretical framework´s perspective, where identity is constructed from subjective personality and objective social identity (Figure 4), the results indicate that personality may have an influence on how university students perceive ideal employer brands. Different personalities favoured different aspects and personalities, like Realistic favoured product and services, which fits into its materialistic personality. The Investigative personality is the highest in the innovativeness theme, which definitely fits to its personality. The differences indicate that personality influences on how university students perceive ideal employer brands and similar personality aspects are favoured that fits into student´s own profile. Attaching more similar personality aspects to employer brands than one possesses, seems to have some support, but further studies are definitely needed regarding the topic. Yet, this research provides indications to Aaker´s (1997) view that human characteristics are related to brands, and supports Rampl and Kenning (2014) view that this perspective fits to employer brand research.

Lievens and Highhouse (2003) modification from Aaker´s (1997) brand personality aspects fits well into employer brand context. It seems that symbolic attributes and instrumental attributes are the most perceived aspects from ideal employer brands. Human desire to express their self-image and personality through their employer gains support from this study. As symbolic attributes are used for self-expression (Lievens and Highhouse 2003), and those are expressed more than half, 52,9 percent, in an open field answer, this seem to be the most important attributes for university students´ perceptions regarding their ideal employer brand.

It is crucial still to remember that a market signal, for example, monetary compensation may lead to instrumental or symbolic conclusions (Thornbury and Little 2007). In this way, it may be questioned whether actually an instrumental aspect like, for example, good pay may still lead to symbolic conclusion, like having more prestige due to a good financial situation. Alternatively, buying expensive clothes or a car with a big bonus might lead to self-expression indicating prestige. Still, it is considered as an instrumental attribute in this model. These conclusion processes need more qualitative research to be analysed properly.

Regarding personality´s influence and social identity´s influence, it seems from this research that both influences on how university students perceive their ideal employer brands. In the final part of the analyse, between UK citizens and Finns, there were

significant differences between them. Peer acceptance is something humans seek through belonging to a group, and company image is a tool to communicate skills and values to the public (Lievens and Highhouse 2003). As this relates strongly to social identity, it seems that social identity is an important factor behind these choices. As symbolic aspects relate to social approval (Hoppe 2018), it seems understandable why symbolic attributes are important to university students and those are perceived in a much higher rate than other attributes. Though, there are significant differences between different symbolic attributes. Sincerity did not seem that relevant in this study whereas innovativeness, prestige, and robustness are rather important (Figure 7). Sincerity has been more important in previous studies (Sung and Kim 2010; Rampl and Kenning 2014) so this is an interesting result. In this study it seemed that other aspects are more important and perceived in a higher degree. It might be that the employer brands chosen influenced on the result, as the brands represents gigantic and well-known employer brands. Some smaller local employer brands might be perceived as more sincere. In previous studies sincerity has been related to brand trust, for example (Sung and Kim 2010; Rampl and Kenning 2014). Whether instrumental attributes lead to symbolic conclusions or not, it still is an important theme among university students´ perceptions and should not be forgotten. The attribute, together with symbolic themes, are defining university students´ perceptions regarding ideal employer brands.

Companies recognize which signals from their employer brand work at the marketplace. Applicants receive these signals and see these as a way to strengthen their self-image. (Davies et al. 2018.) This means that university students use the signals they receive from their ideal employer brands, and these are related to specific aspects regarding the company (Lievens and Slaughter 2016). With this restricted knowledge, applicants then decide which employer is the best option to promote themselves to others. The process seems rather complex and could have several pitfalls, like for example, deceitful communication from the employers´ side. If self-image is improved by something that later is found to be false, the applicant or current employer might feel betrayed. Building self-image is a rather sensitive issue. Considering the signals and these magnificent employer brands, further studies could be interesting regarding the topic, whether these signals are similar between different countries coming from these multinational corporations. Our evidence showed significant differences between UK citizens and Finns, but if university students from these countries have received different signals, the perception might be different due to this. On the other hand, if social identity influences so much on

these perceptions, and especially nationality, it might not even be efficient to send similar signals, if the employers wish to influence on these perceptions.
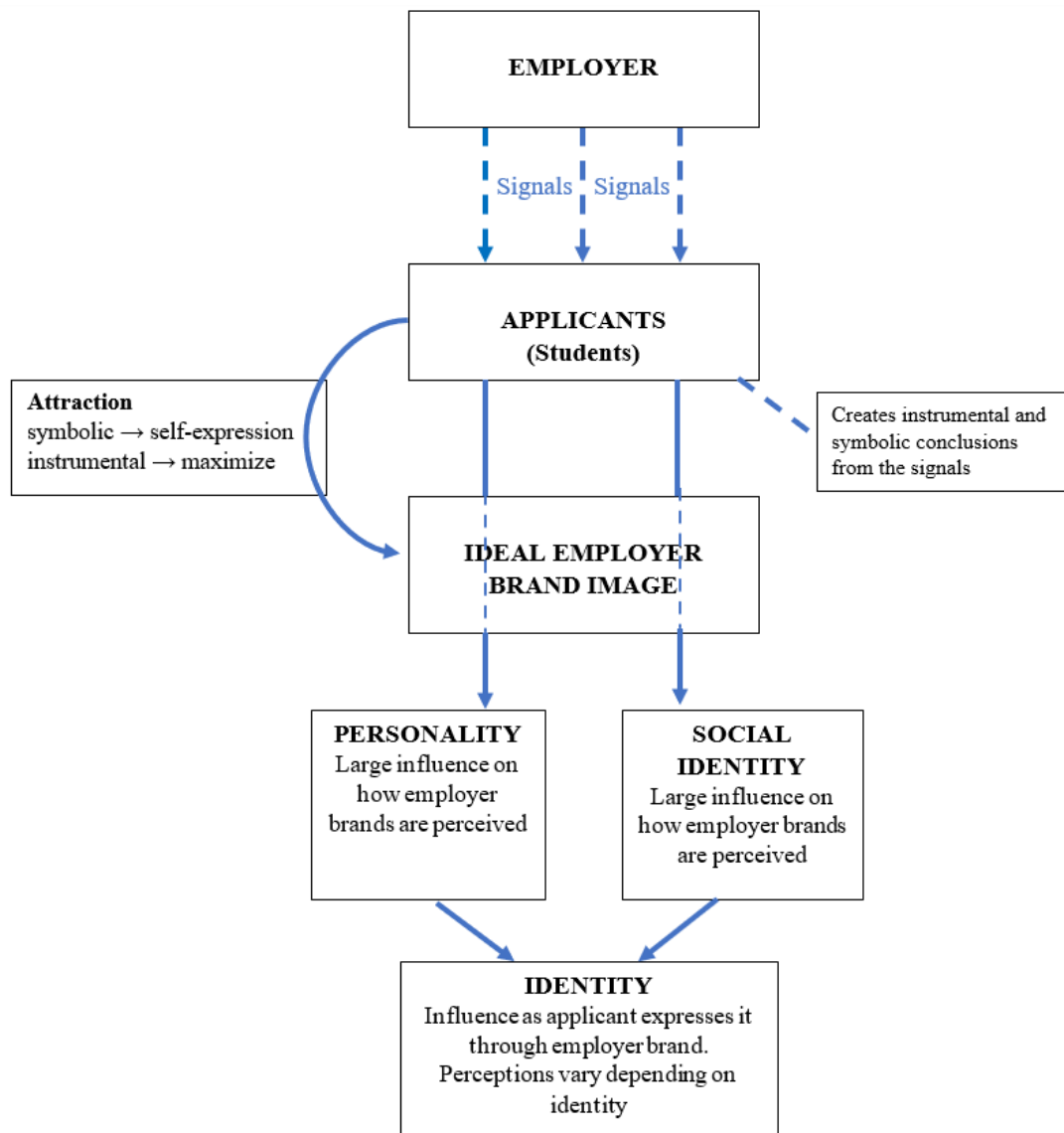
Figure 10. Theoretical framework completed

To answer to the research question, how do university students´ identities influence their perception of an ideal employer brand image, it looks like applicants express their identity through employer brand. This happens through personality characteristics and social identity both having influence. Applicants with different personalities perceive their ideal employer brands in different ways attaching those characteristics to the brand they possess themselves, or that they see necessary to their interests. Between different social identities, there exists significant differences on how university students perceive ideal

employer brands. Employer brands seem important factors in person´s identity expression and symbolic aspects are important in this, but they have significant differences as innovativeness seems to be the most important following prestige and robustness. Instrumental and product and service-related aspects are perceived in a significant rate regarding to ideal employer brands. Identity has influence on how much each of these attributes are perceived compared to the others.

7 CONCLUSION

In this section the conclusion of the research is presented briefly. At the end of the chapter there are managerial implications together with limitations and further research topic.

7.1 Research summary

This research studied in an exploratory way a relatively new phenomenon. The research applied mixed methods methodology in order to offer insights in the best possible way. The analysis part discussed of statistically significant differences between employer brand aspects and social identities. Personality differences were not statistically significant in this research due to the lack of data. This does not rule out, that these differences do not exists, as the cause of statistically not significant results was insufficient sample size. This requires further research.

This research indicates that symbolic aspects in ideal employer brand are perceived in a higher rate among university students than other brand aspects. The most perceived symbolic aspect is innovativeness. Work-related instrumental attributes are important together with product and service-related attributes. Employer brand image may be divided in different sections, but in the end, it is visible that brand personality characteristics are important in perceptions regarding ideal employer brands.

Identity has an influence on which attributes of the employer brand are perceived. This is due to the human desire for self-expression, in which employer offers a perfect communication channel. Social identity seems to have influence on the perceptions regarding ideal employer brands. Similarly, it was visible in the research that students might perceive aspects in their ideal employer brands, which relate to their own personality characteristics. Together social identity and personality form identity, which can be expressed to the public using employer brand image.

7.2 Contribution to the theoretical discussion

This research contributes to the theoretical discussion regarding employer branding and marketing which its own theoretical model. However, the exploratory research offers further research topics to specific segments, than rather than an actual theoretical model

ready to be tested. Identity´s influence regarding ideal employer brands has not been studied before, and hopefully this opens the field for further research.

7.3   Managerial implications

For business managers this research offers a new way to categorize respondents based on something else than their main field of study, which is often the case in employer branding research focused on university students. This study indicates that significant differences are found between identity factors regarding ideal employer brand perceptions. For example, if nationality influences significantly to applicant´s perceptions, as this research indicates, it can be questioned whether the message communicated should be similar in different countries from employer´s side, if the company is multinational.

The symbolic meanings related to ideal employer brands seem to be the perception, which occurs the most among university students. Maybe it has always been like this, or maybe younger generations have an increasing desire to express themselves. This is something that managers working with employer brands should take into account. Future talents might be difficult to attract just with traditional instrumental incentives. As potential applicants are interested in expressing themselves through their employer´s brand image, it might be beneficial to keep the image truthful. Identity formation might be a sensitive process, and if deceptive image is used for this, it might be quite difficult to accept.

The company´s brand is related to employer brand, and it was visible in this research as well. The products and services are difficult not to be related to the employer brand. As the product or service influences highly on perceptions about the employer brand, and if the product or service is boring, it might be more difficult to create an interesting employer brand. Employer brands cannot be seperated entirely from the company brands, so it should be adapted with the perceptions regarding products or services. Of course, if the company brand is interesting, it should be used to create an interesting product brand as these go hand in hand.

7.4   Limitations and further research topics

This research was limited to Finland, UK, and Sweden. These results are not meant to be generalized as they are done in an exploratory way. Although, the research did offer some indications how ideal employer brands are perceived among university students in these three countries. The research included only four different employer brands, which limits the results. Although, the employer brands were from different industries and the aim was to choose employer brands, which attract different audience, different brands might offer different results.

Survey participants received different kind of incentives as a result to answering to the survey. This might have an impact on the answers. Although, the online survey removes automatically the respondents who answer too quickly clicking through the survey, the incentive might attract specific type of people depending on the incentive.

The quantitative analysis of the research is the part, which can be repeated with the same results. However, the first qualitative part is a subjective interpretation of textual data. From this reason the research is not possible to repeat in an exactly similar way.

This research offered plenty of different research topics for future. Symbolic attributes, innovativeness and robustness, had a lot of differences between UK citizens and Finnish respondents. Would be interesting to find out, if similar differences are seen between other smaller and bigger countries and does age influence on this. With the help of qualitative research method, further insight could be found regarding what students actually mean with innovativeness and robustness, and why they perceive these in their ideal employer brands, and what do they expect from their ideal employer brands regarding these attributes.

This research found indications that similar personality characters are attached to ideal employer brand as people possess themselves. However, further research is required to analyse this with larger data amounts. The personalities might be measured or defined in a more accurate way as well. Similarly, different indicators are required to measure social identity to strengthen this research´s indications.

As same signal may lead to instrumental or symbolic conclusion, it is rather difficult to define which one it actually is regarding one specific perception derived from employer brand. This is a place for further research to study the final conclusion derived from the employer brand, and the cause of that conclusion.

Instrumental-Symbolic framework seem relevant in the employer brand field. However, it might need some adaptations in the future, as the world changes and, for example, the amount of remote work increases. The instrumental view works still regarding employer brand attributes, but it might be time to update those attributes, as long as the instrumental idea of the model is kept.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Universum Global Survey 2020

Question Number	QUESTIONNAIRE STUDENTS 2020
2.SP	**What matches your biggest time commitment best?**
	I'm a student
	I work / I'm a professional
1.SP	**Where did you get the CareerTest from?**
	My career services
	My student union
	A professor/lecturer
	A friend or fellow student
	My alumni network
	Trade or professional union
	Professional network or organisation
	A friend, colleague or fellow alumni
	My university/college department
	A student organisation
	An employer
	Social media
	Other
	If you selected Social Media or Other please specify (Open text)
	If you selected Employer please specify (Open text)
	Your Background
4.SP	**Gender:**
	Female
	Male
	Other
	I prefer not to say
3.S	**Age:**
	15 years or younger
	16 - 19 years
	20 - 21 years
	22 - 23 years
	24 - 25 years
	26 - 29 years
	30 - 39 years
	40 years or older

5.SP **Country of citizenship:**

Please select all that apply.
[List of countries]
Other
I prefer not to say

7.P **Where do you currently live?**
[List of regions/states etc]

I do not live in (Survey Country)
I prefer not to say

Your Educational Experience

8.S **What qualification or degree are you currently pursuing?**

8.P **What's the highest educational qualification or degree that you've earned?**
[List of degrees]
Other, please specify:
None

9.S **When do you expect to graduate with this qualification or degree?**
2019
2020
2021
2022
2023
2024
2025 or later

10.S **Are you studying at a college or university in <COUNTRY>?**
Yes
No

(Only If answer to 10.s = Yes)
11.S **What best describes your student status?**
Please select all that apply.
Full time student
Part time student
International student
Exchange student
Distance learning student
Other

(Only if answer to 11.S = Exchange student)
12.S **Please specify:**
I'm on exchange in <COUNTRY>
I'm on exchange from <COUNTRY>

13.S	(Only if answer to 10.S= No) **Have you studied at a college or university in <COUNTRY>?**
	Yes, I was on exchange in <COUNTRY>
	Yes, but I'm currently studying in another country
	No

14.S	(Only if answer to 12.S = I´m on exchange in <COUNTRY>) OR 13.S=Yes, I was on exchange in <COUNTRY>) **In which country is your home college or university located?**
	[List of countries]
	Other

15.S	(Only if 11.S=International Student) **Do you plan to return to your home country after graduation?**
	Yes
	No
	Undecided

16.S	(Only if 10.S=Yes) **Which college or university do you attend?**
17.S	(Only if 13.S= Yes, but I´m currently studying in another country) **Which college or university in <INSERT SURVEY COUNTRY> did you attend?**
	(Only if 11S= Exchange Student or International Student) **Which college or university in <INSERT SURVEY COUNTRY> do you attend?**

18. S	**What's your main field of study?**
18.P	**What was your main field of study?**
	If your degree covers more than one of the options, please choose the option that matches your main focus.
	[List of main fields]
	Other

19.S	**[MARKET SPECIFIC GRADE QUESTION]**
	[Market specific list]

20.S	(Only f 18.P=Other) **Since you have chosen 'Other,' you will now be shown a list of all areas of study.**
20b.S	**Please choose the alternatives that fit what you are studying best.**

20c.S	**Please select your major(s)/main area(s) of study.**

20d.S	**Business**
	Please select as many as applicable.
	[List of areas of study]
	Other Business

20e.S **Engineering**
Please select as many as applicable.
[List of areas of study]
Other Engineering

20f.S **IT**
Please select as many as applicable.
[List of areas of study]
Other IT

20g.S **Natural Sciences**
Please select as many as applicable.
[List of areas of study]
Other Natural Sciences

20h.S **Humanities/Liberal Arts**
Please select as many as applicable.
[List of areas of study]
Other Humanities

20i.S **Law**
Please select as many as applicable.
[List of areas of study]
Other Law

20j.S **Health/Medicine**
Please select as many as applicable.
[List of areas of study]
Other Health/Medicine

Considered Employers

35.SP **Below is a list of employers*. Please select which employers you would consider working for.**
Choose as many as applicable.

Please note that your current employer can't be selected.
*This is a list of relevant employers among your peer group in your country.
[List of employers]

Please select at least 1 Employer.

Ideal Employers
36.SP **Now choose the employers you most want to work for, your Ideal Employers.**
Please select as many as applicable.
If your favourite employers are not in your current selection, you can go back to the previous question and add them to your list.

36b.SP	**Now choose the five (5) employers you most want to work for, your five Ideal Employers.**
	If your favourite employers are not in your current selection, you can go back to the previous question and add them to your list.
	[Market specific employer list]
	Please select 1-5 employers.

37.S	**Have you applied or will you apply to these employers?**
37b.S	**Have you applied or will you apply to this employer?**
	Answer for each of the selected ideal employers
	Yes, I've applied
	Yes, I'll apply
	Yes, I might apply
	No
	I don't know

39.SP	**What's the first word that comes to your mind when thinking of these companies/organisations as employers?**
	Open text question

40.SP	**What's the first word that comes to your mind when thinking of this company/organisation as an employer?**

We want to know what you associate with your ideal employer(s), for that we'll ask you to evaluate your ideal employer(s) based on 4 sets of attributes.

People & Culture

41.SP	**Which of the following do you associate with each employer?**
42.SP	**Which of the following do you associate with this employer?**
	Please select as many as applicable.
	A creative and dynamic work environment
	A friendly work environment
	Commitment to diversity and inclusion
	Encouraging work-life balance
	Interaction with international clients and colleagues
	Leaders who will support my development
	Opportunities to make a personal impact
	Recognising performance (meritocracy)
	Recruiting only the best talent
	Respect for its people
	None of the above
	Please answer for each employer.

Employer Reputation & Image

| 43.SP | **Which of the following do you associate with each employer?** |
| 44.SP | **Which of the following do you associate with this employer?** |

Please select as many as applicable.
Attractive/exciting products and services
Corporate Social Responsibility
Embracing new technologies
Ethical standards
Fast-growing/entrepreneurial
Innovation
Inspiring leadership
Inspiring purpose
Market success
Prestige
None of the above
Please answer for each employer.

Job Characteristics

| 45.SP | **Which of the following do you associate with each employer?** |
| 45b.SP | **Which of the following do you associate with this employer?** |

Please select as many as applicable.
Challenging work
Customer focus
Flexible working conditions
High level of responsibility
High performance focus
Opportunities for international travel/relocation
Professional training and development
Secure employment
Team-oriented work
Variety of assignments
None of the above
Please answer for each employer.

Remuneration & Advancement Opportunities

| 46.SP | **Which of the following do you associate with each employer?** |
| 46b.SP | **Which of the following do you associate with this employer?** |

Please select as many as applicable.
Clear path for advancement
Competitive base salary
Competitive benefits
Rapid promotion
High future earnings
Good reference for future career
Leadership opportunities
Performance-related bonus
Sponsorship of future education
Support for gender equality
None of the above
Please select an answer for each employer

People & Culture		
47.SP	**Which of these aspects are most important to you?**	

Please select a maximum of 3 alternatives.
A creative and dynamic work environment
A friendly work environment
Commitment to diversity and inclusion
Encouraging work-life balance
Interaction with international clients and colleagues
Leaders who will support my development
Opportunities to make a personal impact
Recognising performance (meritocracy)
Recruiting only the best talent
Respect for its people

Please select a maximum of 3 alternatives.

Employer Reputation & Image		
48.SP	**Which of these aspects are most important to you?**	

Please select a maximum of 3 alternatives.
Attractive/exciting products and services
Corporate Social Responsibility
Embracing new technologies
Ethical standards
Fast-growing/entrepreneurial
Innovation
Inspiring leadership
Inspiring purpose
Market success
Prestige

Please select a maximum of 3 alternatives.

Job Characteristics		
49.SP	**Which of these aspects are most important to you?**	

Please select a maximum of 3 alternatives.
Challenging work
Customer focus
Flexible working conditions
High level of responsibility
High performance focus
Opportunities for international travel/relocation
Professional training and development
Secure employment
Team-oriented work
Variety of assignments

Please select a maximum of 3 alternatives.

	Remuneration & Advancement Opportunities
50.SP	**Which of these aspects are most important to you?**

Please select a maximum of 3 alternatives.
Clear path for advancement
Competitive base salary
Competitive benefits
Rapid promotion
High future earnings
Good reference for future career
Leadership opportunities
Performance-related bonus
Sponsorship of future education
Support for gender equality

Please select a maximum of 3 alternatives.

52.SP	**How important are each of the below aspects to you?**

People & Culture
Employer Reputation & Image
Job Characteristics
Remuneration & Advancement Opportunities
1 - Not important at all
2
3
4
5 - Very important

	Why Not Ideal?

Your opinion can help employers to stay relevant and improve to become more desirable.

54.SP	**These employers weren't among your top choices, why not?**

Open text answer

54b.SP	**This employer wasn't among your top choices, why not?**

Open text answer

55.SP	**Below are some common reasons why employers don't end up as a top choice. Which of the following apply in your case?**

Please select as many as applicable.

Their employer reputation and image aren't attractive

The characteristics of the jobs they offer aren't attractive

The remuneration opportunities aren't attractive

The advancement opportunities aren't attractive

I don't identify with their company culture

The competition to get a job is too intense

They haven't been responsive to my requests

Their geographical location doesn't suit me

I don't think they recruit graduates from my school

I'm not qualified to work there

I don't know enough about them

Other

Awareness

This is the same list of employers you saw earlier.

56.SP **Please select all companies/organisations which you haven't heard of as employers.**

Please select as many as applicable.

[List of employers]

Thank you for your feedback so far. We now will ask you a few questions about your future career plans and previous experiences. This section allows us to identify what career type you are, as well as help employers and universities understand where the professionals of the future aim to be.

Industries

57.S **Which industries are you most interested working in after graduation?**

You can choose up to 5 industries.

Auditing and Accounting

Aerospace and Defence

Animal Care

Architecture and Urban Planning

Arts, Entertainment and Recreation

Audiovisual and Multimedia

Automotive

Banks

Brewery, Distilling and Tobacco Product Manufacturing

Chemicals

Civil Engineering

Computer and Network Security

Computer Games

Computer Hardware

Computer Software and Technology

Construction

Consumer Electronics and Household Appliances

E-Commerce

Education

Energy

Farming and Agriculture

Fashion, Accessories and Luxury Goods

Fast Moving Consumer Goods

Financial Services and Technology

Health, Wellness and Fitness

Hospital and Health Care

Insurance

Internet Content and Information

IT and Engineering Consulting
Legal Services
Logistics and Supply Chain
Management and Strategy Consulting
Manufacturing
Market Research
Marketing, Advertising and PR
Mechanical and Industrial Engineering
Media
Military/ Policing / Security
Mining and Metals
Non-Profit
Passenger Transportation
Pharmaceutical and Biotechnology
Property and Real Estate
Retail
Social Care
Telecommunication and Networks
Tourism and Hospitality
Utilities
Other, please specify:

Experiences

58.SP **Which of the following experiences do you have?**

Please select as many as applicable.

I've lived abroad

I've studied abroad
I've done internships or apprenticeships abroad
I've done internships or apprenticeships in my home country

I've had a summer job abroad
I've had a summer job in my home country
I've had a job related to my area of study
I've had a job not related to my area of study
I've had a leading role in student organizations

I've been a group leader in student events
I've been a team leader in a sport club
I've been a tutor
I have my own start-up
I've done volunteer service
I've done military service
Other, please specify:

Your Skills

59.SP **Which of these skills do you consider yourself strongest in?**

Please select a maximum of 3 alternatives.
Responsibility
Communication
Positive attitude

Team work
Problem-solving
Work ethic
Adaptability
Integrity
Flexibility
Time management

Please select a maximum of 3 alternatives.

60.SP **Which of these skills do you most want to improve?**

Please select a maximum of 3 alternatives.
Responsibility
Communication
Positive attitude
Team work
Problem-solving
Work ethic
Adaptability
Integrity
Flexibility
Time management

Please select a maximum of 3 alternatives.

61.SP **Which of the following languages are you fluent in?**

Please choose all that apply.
[Language list]

After Graduation

62.S **Do you plan to continue studying after obtaining your current degree?**

Yes
No

63.S **Which of the following would you most prefer as your first job after graduation?**

Start my own business
Work for a start-up
Work for a national company/organisation
Work for an international company/organisation
Work in the public sector
Work for a small or medium-sized enterprise (SME)
Other

64.S **What do you imagine as the ideal size of your first employer?**

1 to 10 employees
11 to 50 employees
51 to 250 employees
251 to 500 employees
501 to 1 000 employees
1 001 to 5 000 employees
5 001 to 10 000 employees

More than 10 000 employees

	Salary
65.S 65b.SP	**What salary do you expect to earn in your first job after graduation? (Please provide a before-tax salary, excluding commissions and bonuses.)** **1. Select 'monthly' or 'annual' salary.**

Monthly
Annual

65c.SP	**2. <monthly or annual> amount in (CURRENCY):**

Please give your answer in full numbers only, without symbols, full stops or commas.

	Communication Channels
66.SP	**Through which channels have you learnt about these employers in the last 12 months?**
66b.SP	**Through which channels have you learnt about this employer in the last 12 months?**

Please choose as many as applicable.

Career magazines
Career guides
Brochures presenting career possibilities at a company/organisation
University press
Student organisation publications
Career guidance websites
Employers' career websites
Social media
Online job boards
Online meetups
Career fairs
Blogs
Employer presentations on campus
Case studies as part of curriculum
Skills training sessions organised by employers
Conferences arranged and hosted by employers
Employer office/site visits
Alumni events
Industry fairs/conferences
Competitions/games (hackathon, business case, quiz etc)
None of the above

Please answer for each employer.

	This is the same list of communication channels you've seen in the previous question.
67.SP	**In general, which channels do you use to learn about potential employers?**

Please choose as many as applicable.
Career magazines
Career guides
Brochures presenting career possibilities at a company/organisation
University press
Student organisation publications

Career guidance websites
Employers' career websites
Social media
Online job boards
Online meetups
Career fairs
Blogs
Employer presentations on campus
Case studies as part of curriculum
Skills training sessions organised by employers
Conferences arranged and hosted by employers
Employer office/site visits
Alumni events
Industry fairs/conferences
Competitions/games (hackathon, business case, quiz etc)
None of the above

Rotation1

68.SP **In general, whose advice do you trust the most when thinking about applying for a job?**

Please select a maximum of 3 alternatives.
Parents
Siblings
Friends
Teachers/Professors
Colleagues
Online influencers
Company representatives
Online reviews
Advisors from my school/university
Other, please specify

Rotation1

69.SP **Have you attended any career development related events (career fairs, conferences, company presentations, etc.) in the past 12 months?**
Yes
No

Rotation1

(Only if 69.SP=Yes)
69b.SP **Which activities/services were available?**

Please choose as many as applicable.
Recruitment talk
Employer presentations
CV-check
Networking sessions
Employer booths
Personality or skills assessment
Career counseling
Job application coaching
Job interview coaching

Competitions
Other 1, please specify:
Other 2, please specify:
Other 3, please specify:

Rotation1
(Only if 69.SP=Yes)
69c.SP **Which activities/services did you participate in or use?**

Please choose as many as applicable.
Recruitment talk
Employer presentations
CV-check
Networking sessions
Employer booths
Personality or skills assessment
Career counseling
Job application coaching
Job interview coaching
Competitions
Other [Label pipe from previous question]
Other [Label pipe from previous question]
Other [Label pipe from previous question]
None

	Rotation1
69d.SP	(Only if 69.SP=No) **Which activities would you have liked to be there?**

Please choose as many as applicable.
Recruitment talk
Employer presentations
CV-check
Networking sessions
Employer booths
Personality or skills assessment
Career counseling
Job application coaching
Job interview coaching
Competitions
Other 1, please specify:
Other 2, please specify:
Other 3, please specify:
None

	Rotation1
70.SP	**How would it affect your decision to apply for a job if the employer isn't present on social media?**

It wouldn't affect my decision at all
It would make me less interested in them
I wouldn't consider working for them

	Rotation 2
71.SP	**If you wanted to learn about an employer, which online channels would you use?**

Please choose as many as applicable.
Their career website
Their corporate website
Their LinkedIn company page
Their Facebook careers page
Their Instagram careers account
[Employer online channels]
Other, please specify:

	Rotation 2
71b.SP	**Which one would you check first?**

Their career website
Their corporate website
Their LinkedIn company page
Their Facebook careers page
Their Instagram careers account
[Employer online channels]
Other [Label pipe from previous question]

	Rotation 2
71c.SP	**Where do you spend the most time checking for information about employers?**
	Please sort by clicking each channel in order from most to least time spent.
	Their career website
	Their corporate website
	Their LinkedIn company page
	Their Facebook careers page
	Their Instagram careers account
	[Employer online channels]
	Other [Label pipe from previous question]

	Rotation 2
72.SP	**How important is it for you to see the following types of information on employers' online channels?**
	Day-to-day tasks
	Training and development
	Advancement opportunities
	Remuneration and benefits
	What the workplace looks like
	The company's market performance
	Diversity and inclusiveness
	Thoughts from company leaders
	How they are innovating in their industry
	Social events and activities for employees
	Corporate Social Responsibility
	Products and services
	Very important
	Important
	Slightly important
	Not important

73.S	**Which employer has impressed you the most with their recruitment activities at your college/university in the past 12 months?**
	Open text question
75.SP	**Which employer has impressed you the most with its social media activity in the last 12 months?**
	Open text question
	Your University Experience
	This section covers your thoughts and opinions about your college/university. Your feedback is invaluable for colleges and universities in order for them to know in what they should improve.

76.SP	**What's the first word that comes to your mind when you think of your college or university?**
	Open text question

78.S | **How satisfied are you with your college or university?**

0 - Not at all satisfied
1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10 - Extremely satisfied

77.SP | **What helped you most when choosing your college and university?**

Please select a maximum of 3 alternatives.
Students/alumni of the university
Career and university fairs
Friends
University directories/guides
University's website
Information at my high school
Information event at university
Newspapers/magazines
Social Media
Parents or relatives
University rankings
University's promotional material
Other, please specify:

79.SP | **If you were to restart your studies, what would you do?**

Please select your most preferred option.
Attend a different college or university within <PIPE IN COUNTRY>
Attend a college or university abroad
Attend the same college or university
Seek employment instead of going to college or university

79b.SP | **Which university or college would you rather have attended?**

[Dropdown list of all universities in country, excluding selected university]
Other

Reputation & Image

80.SP | **Which of the following attributes do you associate with your college or university?**

Please select as many as applicable.
Internationally renowned
Educational excellence
Studying with the best students
Research excellence

Heritage and tradition
Successful alumni
Alumni hold leadership positions
Drives innovation and/or entrepreneurship
Drives changes in society
Unique programs

| 81.SP | **Which of these are most important to you?** |

Please select a maximum of 3 alternatives.
Internationally renowned
Educational excellence
Studying with the best students
Research excellence
Heritage and tradition
Successful alumni
Alumni hold leadership positions
Drives innovation and/or entrepreneurship
Drives changes in society
Unique programs

Please select a maximum of 3 alternatives.

| | **Educational Offering** |
| 82.SP | **Which of the following attributes do you associate with your college or university?** |

Please select as many as applicable.
Excellent professors/lecturers
Stimulating learning environment
Teaching relevant skills
Programs/opportunities to study abroad
High quality of programs
Variety of courses
Adequate teacher/student ratio
Easy access to study materials
Availability of study space
Interdisciplinary courses

| 83.SP | **Which of these are most important to you?** |

Please select a maximum of 3 alternatives.
Excellent professors/lecturers
Stimulating learning environment
Teaching relevant skills
Programs/opportunities to study abroad
High quality of programs
Variety of courses
Adequate teacher/student ratio
Easy access to study materials
Availability of study space
Interdisciplinary courses

Please select a maximum of 3 alternatives.

	University Life
84.SP	**Which of the following attributes do you associate with your college or university?**

Please select as many as applicable.
Creative and dynamic atmosphere
Friendly and open environment
International student body
Support for gender equality
Institutional commitment to diversity and inclusion
Attractive location
Safe campus environment
Wide range of extracurricular activities
Affordability of studies
Good meal plans / cafeterias

85.SP	**Which of these are most important to you?**

Please select a maximum of 3 alternatives.
Creative and dynamic atmosphere
Friendly and open environment
International student body
Support for gender equality
Institutional commitment to diversity and inclusion
Attractive location
Safe campus environment
Wide range of extracurricular activities
Affordability of studies
Good meal plans / cafeterias

Please select a maximum of 3 alternatives.

	Employability & Future Opportunities
86.SP	**Which of the following attributes do you associate with your college or university?**

Please select as many as applicable.
Target school for employers in my field
Good reference for future career and/or education
Launching pad for international career
Opportunities to network with employers
Strong ties with industry
Focus on professional development
Supports and develops entrepreneurialism
Teaching skills employers are looking for
Supports and develops innovation
Good employment opportunities

87.SP	**Which of these are most important to you?**

Please select a maximum of 3 alternatives.
Target school for employers in my field
Good reference for future career and/or education
Launching pad for international career
Opportunities to network with employers

Strong ties with industry
Focus on professional development
Supports and develops entrepreneurialism
Teaching skills employers are looking for
Supports and develops innovation
Good employment opportunities

Please select a maximum of 3 alternatives.

Below are the attributes that you think are important and associated with your college/university.

88.SP **Which of these do you think your school excels at?**
Please choose all that apply.
[List from "Reputation & Image"]
[List from "Educational Offering"]
[List from "University Life"]
[List from "Employability & Future Opportunities"]
None of the above

89.SP **Below are the attributes that you think are important but are not associated with your college/university. Which of these do you think your school needs to urgently improve?**
Please choose all that apply.
[List from "Reputation & Image"]
[List from "Educational Offering"]
[List from "University Life"]
[List from "Employability & Future Opportunities"]
None of the above

Career Services

90.S **Which of these career services have you used at your college or university?**
Please select as many as applicable.
Visiting companies/organisations
Interaction with alumni
Coaching/mentorship program
Career/job/internship fairs
Employer presentations
University-run job board
Career counseling
Trainings for resume/CV writing and interviews
Job search training
Personality or skills testing
Recruitment talks
Case studies by employers
Information about career tracks
Other, please specify:
None of the above

91.S   Which of these would you like to see at your college or university?

Please select a maximum of 3 alternatives.
Visiting companies/organisations
Interaction with alumni
Coaching/mentorship program
Career/job/internship fairs
Employer presentations
University-run job board
Career counseling
Trainings for resume/CV writing and interviews
Job search training
Personality or skills testing
Recruitment talks
Case studies by employers
Information about career tracks
Other, please specify:
None of the above

92.S   Why haven't you used the career services offered at your college or university?

I've already secured employment
I'm too busy
It's too early in my studies
I'm not aware of these services
These services aren't available
The offered services aren't relevant to me

93.S   How would you rate the career services offered at your college or university?

0 - Poor
1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10 - Excellent

94.S **What channels would you like your career services to use to communicate with you?**
Please select as many as applicable.
University website
Email
Text messages
Social media
Printed university news
TV screens within the university
Notice boards
Other, please specify:
I'm not interested in receiving information from them

95.S **On which platforms would you be willing to follow your career services?**
Please select as many as applicable.
[Online platforms]
Other 1, please specify:
Other 2, please specify:

Appendix 2. Coding and definitions of the codes

Code	Definition
Product	All text and meanings related to the products that the employer offers
Service	All text and meanings related to the service that the employer offers
Offering	All text and meanings related to other offering that the employer offers as a company
Management consulting industry	All text and meanings related to management consulting industry
Technology industry	All text and meanings related to technology industry
Beauty industry	All text and meanings related to beauty industry
Pharmaceutical industry	All text and meanings related to pharmaceutical industry
Personality traits	All text and meanings which refers to personality traits and are not included to sincerity, competence, innovativeness, prestige, and robustness
Other	All text and meanings which is left outside of the theoretical themes or the themes mentioned above