

Preparing for the future: Scenarios for Employer Branding through Social Network Sites

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Purpose – Employer branding through Social Network Sites is characterized by a constantly changing, complex environment and lacks of research that provides tools to plan and prepare for the future, understand the interaction among emerging trends and future alternatives, and allows managers to make profound strategic decision-making, stretch their mental models and elaborate on more than one possible future. The purpose of this study is to uncover the future of Social Network Site enhanced employer branding by means of a scenario analysis.

Methodology – To shed light on the future of employer branding, four plausible alternative future scenarios were developed based on the guidelines of the intuitive logistics approach. The drivers of change were selected through academic literature. The scenario logics were defined based on the scenario axes method in which four scenarios were developed around two axes of uncertainty.

Findings –The most unpredictable drivers that are most likely to impact employer branding on Social Network Sites are generational differences between Generation Y and Generation Z and disruptive technologies that enter the market. Based on these two drivers four scenario narratives were developed and implications identified: (1) Multigenerational employer branding: focus on more targeted and tailored employer branding, (2) strategic employer branding: make employer branding a strategic priority, form cross-functional teams and strategic alignment, (3) innovative employer branding: focus on internal efficiency, flexibility and quick adaption to changes, and (4) improving the status quo: focus on continuous enhancement.

Originality/Value – This study presents the results of a scenario analysis and provides a strategic tool kit for decision-making, organizational learning, and a base for further empirical studies that aim to investigate the future of employer branding. Moreover, since scenario analysis is yet not widely applied in the Human Resource literature, this study presents a sound foundation for the realization, advantages, and fields of application for using the scenario analysis method in a Human Resource context.

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Keywords Employer branding, Social Network Sites, Scenario Planning, Scenario Analysis, Generation Y, Generation Z, Disruptive Technologies

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1. EMPLOYER BRANDING IN AN UNCERTAIN FUTURE

Trends affecting the society as a whole such as the demographic change, the digitalization and virtualization of work, and social media challenges force the Human Resource Department to constantly adjust to new conditions and to distinguish itself from competitors in the market (Beechler & Woodward, 2009). The developments of the last decades have proven that economies became more knowledge-based, the labor market changed from a sellers' to buyers' market, and the availability of high-value jobs is greater than the number of suitable job seekers (App, Merk, Büttgen, 2012). The shortage of qualified talents requires organizations to engage in the war for talent attracting the best and the brightest so called a-level employees (Chambers et al., 1998). Moreover, employees from different cultural backgrounds, the target of more women in the workplace, dual-career couples, and single parent families make it essential for organizations and the Human Resource Department in particular, to create an attractive employer brand that meets these different needs (Darcy et al. 2012). To do so, it is crucial for organizations to recognize that creating a unique employer brand comes along with a suitable utilization and strategy for social media application. Social Network Sites provide several opportunities to support employer branding through enhancing the organization's' value proposition, external marketing and internal marketing (Bondarouk et al., 2013). Thus, employer branding is attracting, retaining, and motivating current and prospective employees to 'live the brand' (Maxwell & Know, 2009, p. 893). A branded identity offers major advantages given the recent challenges organizations face as true talent is scarce and organizations are seeking the same skills in their employees (Elving et al., 2013). Therefore, the underlying assumption behind employer branding is that employees have the ability to help building a strong brand and give the brand an identity, distinctiveness and image in order to communicate a unique employment proposition to prospective employees (Srivastava & Bhavnagar, 2010). For the immediate future, Bondarouk et al. (2013) prognosticate in their article concerned with the future of employer branding an increased importance of knowledge in marketing and web-based applications, a more transparent information exchange with the audience on the Web and companies that are more open about how it is to work at that company. Nevertheless, only few attempts have been made to uncover this field of research, for example Brecht et al. (2011), who explore the goals and strategies using Social Network Sites for employer branding, and Martensen et al. (2011) who investigate the impact of Social Network Sites on the employer-employee relationship and confirm a positive effect of self-marketing on Social Network Sites and reputation. Once recognized the impact of Social Network Sites on employer branding, it becomes inevitable not only to analyze past and current development but also to identify possible future trends for Social Network Site enhanced employer branding. Thus, organizations need to look into the future in order to prepare for different scenarios that might occur and to foresee the drivers that have an impact on employer branding. The key motivators and problem statement for this research are displayed in Fig. 1.

Therefore with the goal of uncovering future trends of employer branding through Social Network Sites this investigation will be guided by the research question:

What are possible future developments for employer branding through Social Network Sites?

Further, the key drivers influencing the future developments of employer branding through Social Network Sites will be explored.

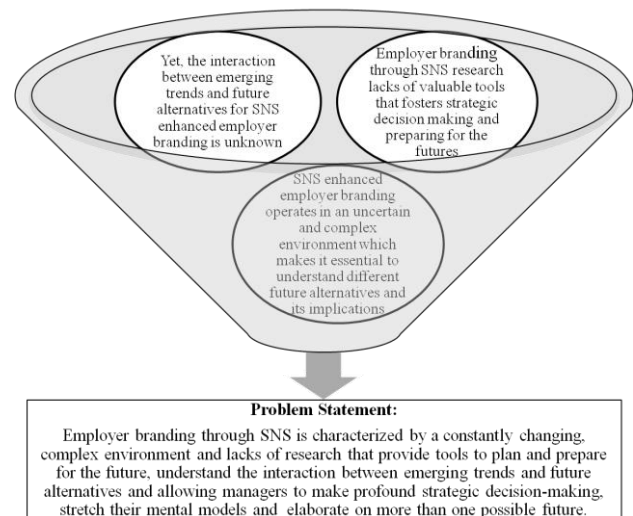


Figure 1. Key motivators and problem statement for studying the future of Social Network Site enhanced employer branding

1.1 Academic and Managerial Relevance

The concept of employer branding has been revolutionized by the rise of Social Network Sites, which shed light on the importance of empirically investigating employer branding in combination with Social Network Sites. However, this has been done only marginally (Brecht et al., 2011; Bondarouk et al., 2011; Martensen et al., 2011) and needs to be further investigated. This topic appears especially worth discussing in times of fierce competition, rapid changes and an unstable, unpredictable environment. Therefore, there is a need for further investigation because future studies in this field of research are scarce and a scenario analysis concerned with employer branding on Social Network Sites has not been conducted before. This research intends to close this gap and provide professionals with meaningful insights into the advantages and outcomes of using the scenario planning method. Thus by investigating the future of employer branding on Social Network Sites, this study contributes to the body of literature as it draws a comprehensive picture of the employer branding concept, process, conditions and most importantly the key drivers that impact future developments. Once this is understood, academics can adapt their research directions accordingly to serve organizations with valuable knowledge and guidelines that they need to meet the upcoming challenges.

In the business world, 'helping organizations to prepare for the future has historically been a concern of the Human Resource Development profession' (Chermack & Swanson, 2008; p. 129). Chermack & Swanson (2008) advocate the need of a partnership between academic professionals and practitioners to fully exploit the advantages of using scenario planning for Human Resource purposes. This underlines the importance of conducting a scenario analysis not only because it is crucial for practitioners to understand the drivers that might impact employer branding through Social Network Sites but also to advance the knowledge of conducting scenario planning in the context of Human Resource Management. Therefore, the practical value of analyzing possible future developments for Social Network Site enhanced employer branding is more efficient recruitment, retention and commitment through a strong company brand and the awareness of possible future

developments on the one hand and a valuable outline of scenarios that might occur for which organization should be prepared for, on the other hand. Finally, this study facilitates organizational practices such as decision-making, strategic thinking and planning, as well as organizational learning since using scenarios may serve as a strategic tool kit for managers, stretch their mental models and minimize unpleasant surprises.

2. UNDERSTANDING EMPLOYER BRANDING AND SOCIAL NETWORK SITES

2.1 Employer Branding

2.1.1 Employer Branding Defined

A recent search using the term ‘employer branding’ returned 6,300,000 hits on Google and 59,400 hits on Google Scholar demonstrating an enormous increase from the 3,000 hits yielded on Google in 2004 (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004) and 32,900 hits on Google Scholar in 2012 (Bondarouk et al., 2014; see Figure 2).

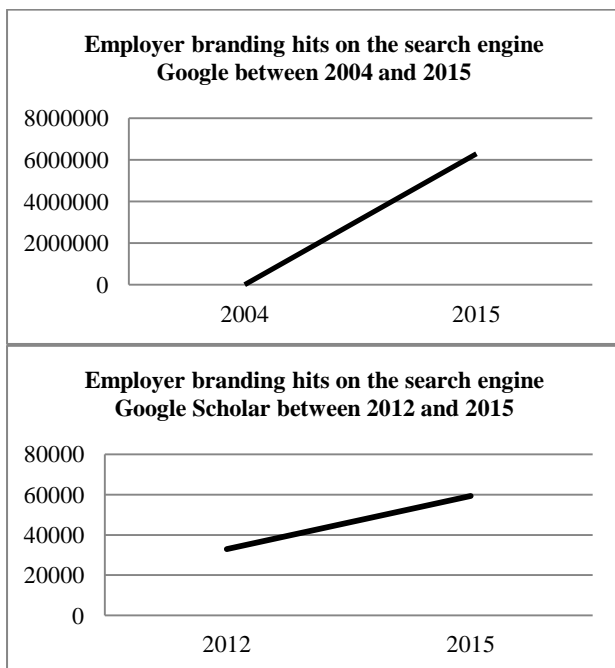


Figure 2. Evolution of Employer Branding Hits on Web Engines

The idea of considering organizations as a brand itself originated in the 1990s and was first discussed by Ambler and Barrow (1996, p. 187) who defined employer branding as ‘the package of functional, economic and psychological benefits provided by employment, and identified with the employing company’. This definition indicates that employer branding involves both promoting internally and externally and contains multiple facets by which organizations aim to achieve the status as an employer of choice (App et al., 2012). However, Aggerholm et al. (2011), criticize that this definition prevents employer branding from unfolding its full potential as it is static, sender focused, obsolete of organizational contexts and do not consider societal demand of corporate sustainability. Instead, they propose a more flexible and stakeholder oriented perspective of the employer branding concept, which they define as “strategic branding processes which creates, negotiates and enacts sustainable relationships between an organization and its potential and existing employees under the influence of the varying corporate contexts with the purpose of

co-creating sustainable values for the individual, the organization and society as a whole” (Aggerholm et al., 2011, p. 113). Other definitions see employer branding as “developing or aligning of expectations that underlie the brand experience, creating the impression that a brand associated with an organization has certain qualities or characteristics that make it special or unique” (Elving et al., 2013, p. 357) or as “a long-term strategy of any given company, aimed at both building a unique and desirable employer identity and managing the perceptions of prospective and current employees” (Bondarouk et al., 2014, p. 27). The various definitions illustrate that there are still inconsistencies in the existing body of literature about the scope, purpose, and conceptualization of employer branding. For the purpose of this study, I borrow the definition of employer branding from Aggerholm et al. (2011, p. 113) and view it as “processes which creates, negotiates and enacts sustainable relationships between an organization and its potential and existing employees under the influence of the varying corporate contexts with the purpose of co-creating sustainable values for the individual, the organization and society as a whole” because it draws a recent, comprehensive picture of employer branding incorporating flexibility and several dimensions of the concept.

2.1.2 Theoretical Foundation and the Role of Employer Branding in Organizations

Employer branding builds on multiple scholarly traditions that help understand the concept from different perspectives, all of which have the same underlying assumption that brands and human capital are some of the firm’s most valuable assets (Wilden et al., 2010). First, the resource based view (RBV) stresses that human capital is necessary to create sustained competitive advantage since it is a critical driver of organizational performance (Michaels et al., 2001). The existence of employer branding is described by the RBV in terms of a technique for attracting, retaining and developing potential and existing employees and therefore a primary source of value and growth (Barney, 1991; Buren, 2012). According to the Social Identity Theory (SIT), people are more likely to be attracted by organization they can identify with and develop a preference for (Lievens et al., 2007). Love and Singh (2011) argue that the more people can identify with an organization and the more they recognize the same values and beliefs within an organization the more likely they will be part of the organization. Since employer branding can be seen as “the collective evaluation of the company as an employer” (Kolesnicov, 2014, p. 10) SIT explains the necessity of engaging in employer branding activities. Next to this, the signaling theory infers that all organizational activities are perceived as signals sent by the organizations (App et al., 2012). Relating signaling theory to employer branding, organizations need to signal their values and characteristics as potential employers to job-seekers to influence the opinion of potential employees of what it would be like to work for the organization (Celani & Singh, 2011). Finally, the concept of ‘person-organization fit’ describes the compatibility between a person and organization, which in turn influences the degree of attractiveness an organization is perceived. Thus, managers need to be aware of the fact that job seekers match their personal characteristics and values with the organization’s culture and identity to achieve congruence or a best possible fit. Employer branding has the ability to foster the matching process between a job seeker and an organization through communicating its culture and values. An overview of the four theoretical scholarly is given in Table 1.

Table 1. Theoretical Foundation for Employer Branding

Scholarly tradition	Description	Relevance for employer branding
Resource based view (RBV)	“sustained competitive advantage derives from the resources and capabilities a firm controls that are valuable, rare, imperfectly imitable, and not substitutable” (Barney et al., 2001, p. 625).	Human assets are the primary source of value which makes talent attraction inevitable.
Social Identity Theory (SIT)	“A social category (e.g. nationality, political affiliation, organization, and work group) within which one falls and to which one feels one belongs, provide a definition of who one is” (Hogg et al., 2014, p.3).	People like to identify themselves with the organization and develop preferences for organizations they perceive as attractive.
Signaling Theory	All organizational activities are perceived as signals sent by the organizations (App et al., 2012).	Organizations signal their values and characteristics as potential employers to job-seekers to influence their opinion.
Person-Organization fit	“The compatibility between people and organizations that occurs when: (a) at least one entity provides what the other needs, or (b) they share similar fundamental characteristics, or (c) both” (Kristof, 1996, p. 45).	Job seekers match their personal characteristics and values with the organization’s culture and identity to achieve congruence or a best possible fit.

The employer branding concept underlies the assumption that an organization must build an “image in the minds of the potential labor market that the company, above all others, is a great place to work” (De Bussy et al., 2012, p.12; Elving et al., 2013). Employer branding is characterized by external and internal communication activities that represent an organization and its unique and distinctive offers (Jenner & Taylor, 2007; Kolesnicov, 2014). Next to this, employer branding is believed to attract potential employees more effectively and creates loyalty, satisfaction and emotional attachment among the existing employees (Cable & Graham, 2000; Cable & Turban, 2003; Davies, 2008). In this respect, loyalty would result in employees who are less likely to quit their job, satisfaction fosters employees to create better relationships with customers, and emotional attachment ultimately leads to employees evaluating their job on affective rather than objective and rational criteria (Davies, 2008). Additionally, since employer branding depends on the organizational perception of existing and potential employees, App et al. (2012, p. 267) argue that ‘an employer perspective must be adapted to effectively position an employer brand’. This would, in turn, minimize costs on multiple dimensions, e.g. in recruiting, marketing income development, and through more effective and efficient communication (Berthon et al.,

2005; Knox & Freeman, 2006; Herman & Gioia, 2001). There are two concepts that are crucial to understand when talking about employer branding: employer attractiveness and employer value proposition (see Table 2). Employer attractiveness is the positive perception of the job and organization which influences people to apply for it, make them stay and engage in it (Hedlund et al., 2009; Judge & Cable, 1997; Turban et al., 1998). To ensure an effective employer branding strategy, employer attractiveness can be seen as an antecedent to the development (Arachchige & Robertson, 2011). Moreover, the evaluation and perception of an employer value proposition depends on the attractiveness of an organization and, the more attractive an organization is perceived, the stronger is the employer brand equity which is the cumulative value of an organization (Berthon et al., 2005; Oladipo, 2013). Next to this, it is important to understand the relationship between employer branding and employer value proposition. According to Backhaus and Tikoo (2004), the first step in employer branding is to determine the employer value proposition, which defines what makes an organization unique and desirable (Mosley, 2007). Therefore, the unique selling proposition of an organization is defined by the set of provided benefits (Barrow & Mosley, 2011). These can be either instrumental or symbolic, where the former describes functional or economic benefits such as salary, and the latter refers to subjective or psychological benefits such as job satisfaction and reputation (Lievens & Highhouse, 2003). Therefore the Human Resource Department needs to promote the unique benefits it can offer, particularly since instrumental employment benefits are increasingly similar among organization. Thus it becomes inevitable for organizations to distinguish themselves from competitors by providing additional symbolic benefits (Lievens et al., 2007).

Table 2. The interrelationship between employer branding, employer attractiveness, and employer value proposition

Concept	Description	Relevance for employer branding
Employer Attractiveness	The positive perception of the job and organization which influences people to apply for it, make them stay and engage in it (Hedlund et al., 2009; Judge & Cable, 1997; Turban et al., 1998)	The more attractive an organization is perceived, the stronger is the employer brand equity which is the cumulative value of an organization (Berthon et al., 2005; Oladipo, 2013).
Employer Value Proposition	Defines what makes an organization unique and desirable (Mosley, 2007).	The employer value proposition needs to be promoted for a strong employer brand

2.1.3 Process Steps and Conditions of Employer Branding

In 1991, Dutton and Dukerich developed a framework, the basic premise of which is that an organization’s identity can be seen from multiple perspectives: internally, externally and construed

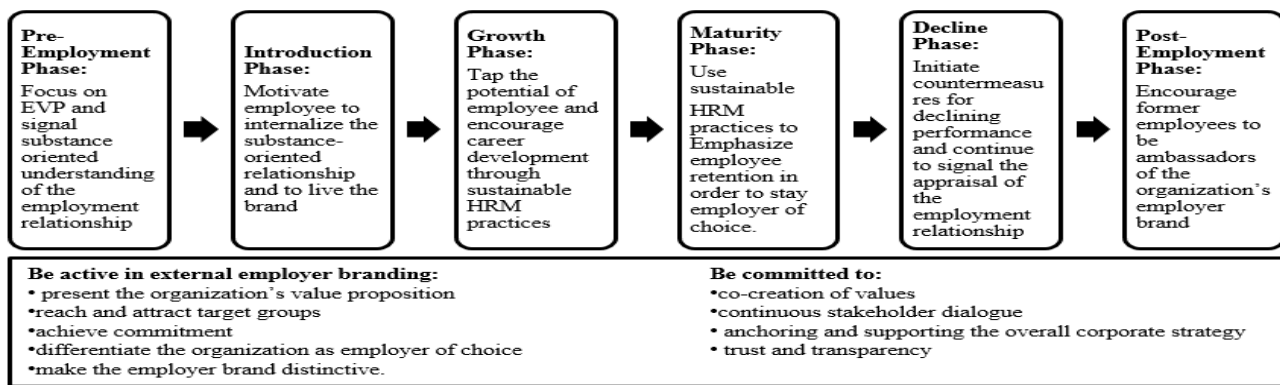


Figure 3. The extended employer branding process (adapted from App et al., 2012)

externally. Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) and Lievens et al. (2007) adapt this framework and modified it to a three step process of employer branding. The first step in employer branding is developing a value proposition of the employer. The second step is externally marketing the value proposition and creating an image for outsiders and the third step is internally marketing the employer brand and building an identity among organizational members (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). More recently, Aggerholm et al. (2011) came up with an extended framework of the employer branding process since they noticed that “employer branding is no longer merely a one-way instrumental tool for recruitment but serves as and facilitate communicative strategic processes for supporting sustainable development and organizational value creation” (p.114). Accordingly, the employer branding process is a dynamic link between the various organizational functions, internal and external stakeholders and the environment the organization is operating in. Thus, the employer branding process is influenced by the corporate strategy, strategic human resource management, corporate social responsibility and societal contexts such as prosperity and recession. Characteristics of this modified process are the co-creation of values with stakeholders according to their expectations on the one hand and the creation of employer-employee relationships featured by a continuous reflection on mutual needs and expectations on the other hand (Aggerholm et al. 2011). Furthermore, the employer branding process can be described through the employee life cycle (Barrow & Mosley, 2011; App et al., 2012). App and his fellow authors (2012) argue that the employee life cycle consists of six stages and each stage involves a key consideration of employer branding. The first stage is pre-employment where employer branding is responsible to signal the employee value proposition to attract potential employees. The second stage is introduction, where it is important to motivate employees to live the brand, followed by growth stage where employer branding focuses on tapping the potential of employees and encouraging career development. In the fourth stage called maturity, employer branding emphasizes employee retention through human resource practices, followed by signal appraisal in the fifth stage called decline. The last stage in the employer branding process, according to App et al. (2012), is post-employment which is characterized by encouraging former employees to be ambassadors of the organization's employer brand. Figure 3 displays an extended version of the employer branding process as proposed by App et al. (2012). The process outlined in Figure 3 aims to include all the different aspects of the employer branding process discussed before. Therefore the interrelationship between internal and external employer branding and the EVP is considered (Backhaus and Tikoo, 2004; Lievens, 2004) as well as the organizational link between employer branding and the different functions and stakeholder

(Apperholm et al., 2011), all of which are embedded in the employee life cycle.

Recognizing the impact of employer branding on the overall success, Wilska (2014) determines the most important elements for building an employer brand. These are, among others, defining the company's profile, caring for reputation in the market, creating a unique organizational culture, encouraging fun in the workplace, and ensuring effective leadership (Wilska, 2014). However, for the success of an employer brand it is crucial that the employer brand strategy is aligned with the overall corporate brand strategy and employer branding strategies need to be adapted to different cultures (Mark & Toelken, 2009; Alniaçık et al., 2014). Next to this, the research conducted by Barrow et al. (2007) provides three aspects important for employer branding: the image and beliefs of individuals about the organization, the internal truth and identity of how working life within the organization is, and the profile or image the organization tries to portray. However, there are also obstacles organizations have to keep in mind for their employer branding activities. According to Elving and VanVuren (2011), organization must expect negative responses to occur when the way an organization promotes itself is inconsistent with the actual corporate identity. The same applies to organizations that use employer branding in a manner that results in ‘green washing’ or ‘identity-washing’ (Elving & VanVuren, 2011).

In summary, employer branding is a vital tool for Human Resource Management that enables organization to enhance its perceived attractiveness, communicate its value proposition and create sustainable relationships with (potential) employees. The RBV, SIT and the ‘person-organization’ fit provide theoretical foundation for the employer branding concept. Moreover it is important to consider internal employer branding, external employer branding and the employer value proposition when creating an employer brand.

2.2 Social Network Sites

Almost everyone uses Social Network Sites to stay in touch with friends and share information and experience with a broad audience (Kim et al., 2010). When in 1997 the first recognizable Social Network Site ‘SixDegrees.com’ was launched, no one expected that this concept would experience such a boom (Boyd & Ellison, 2010). Today, the term Social Network Site is entrenched in the lexicon of both younger and older generations and a wide range of Social Network Sites exist that either aim at a broad audience or niche markets (Budden & Budden, 2009). Social Network Sites are defined as “web-based services that allow individuals to construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and view and

traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system” (Boyd & Ellison, 2010, p. 17). According to Martensen et al. (2011), Social Network Sites are a web of social relations with multiple levels of interconnection that also incorporates distant contacts who do not necessarily know each other. In respect to this, Beck (2007) argues that Social Network Sites have had a significant effect on today’s communication processes by changing its nature and efficiency. The user’s network can be set up through bidirectional confirmations by adding friends or contacts, and a characteristic of most Social Network Sites is the visualization of the user’s direct connections to other users, which is a valuable opportunity for recruiters to approach strangers through mutual acquaintance (Brecht et al., 2012). The motivation for using Social Network Sites and visualization of personal contacts and networks can be explained by the Signaling Theory. In the context of Social Network Sites, the main premise of Signaling Theory is that users send out information to propagate a positive image of them. Therefore, the desire to verify one’s identity to the virtual world and the desire to ensure personal cooperation in personal networks are the two main motivators to use Social Network Sites (Martensen et al, 2011). Following the distinction of Martensen et al. (2011), there are two main groups into which Social Network Sites can be divided. There are business networks such as LinkedIn, the main purpose of which is to establish and maintain business relationships. Due to its professional focus, profiles on business networks display labor market-relevant data and less personal information. The second group of Social Network Sites is leisure networks, such as Facebook, that provide more private and personal information of its users. Similarly, Brecht et al. (2012) distinguished privately oriented Social Network Sites that aim to provide hedonic value and professional Social Network Sites that usually aim to provide utilitarian value to their members. Whereas in the early stages of Social Network Sites individuals rather than organizations were active users, recent development show that the number of organizations and in particular the Human Resource and Marketing Department turning to social networks increased rapidly (Girard et al., 2013; Laick & Dean, 2011). Therefore, the subsequent part will elaborate more on the scope of application for employer branding on Social Network Sites.

2.3 Employer Branding through Social Network Sites

Interest in employer branding through Social Network Sites has increased as technological advancements have led to significant social media consumption changes especially amongst younger generations, for whom social media has become the main source of information access and sharing (Lichy, 2012). Additionally, due to the war for talent which describes the shortage of skilled workforce, companies increasingly exploit the advantages of using Social Network Sites to attract potential employees (Brecht et al., 2012). It is not surprising, therefore, that from year 2011 onwards social media applications became the primary source of vacant positions and information about the prospective company (Laick & Dean, 2011). In particular, since year 2013 the Social Network Sites Facebook and LinkedIn were the main source of information for job seeking students (Herbold & Douma, 2013). In respect to this, Bissola & Imperatori (2014) conducted a study among Italian Generation Yers and social media recruiters to provide recruiters valuable insights onto expectations and behaviors of employees on social media. They found that prospective employees use social media for receiving, seeking, sharing, leading, and experiencing content from both external and organizational controlled sources. Thus, the traditional

information flow of companies shifted from a ‘command and control’ approach to an increased power of user-generated content and easily accessible information (Kolesnicov, 2014). The blurred boundaries between content providers and consumers offer both opportunities and threats. Obviously, companies are threatened by the loss of control over user-generated content, but there are also opportunities to reach and engage more directly with customers in a new manner. According to Girard et al. (2013, p.99) most recruiters use social media applications for recruitment and “both applicants and employees can maintain, mobilize, and develop their social network more efficiently thanks to social network sites”. Letting people worldwide become familiar with the organization as an employer, differentiate themselves from competitors and show what is important to the organization and the value it stands for are valuable opportunities Social Network Sites offers (VanBuren, 2012). However employer branding through Social Network Sites is not something to jump on. Instead, it is a long-term investment which needs to be well thought and well prepared. Nevertheless, only relatively few companies seem to engage in Social Network Site enhanced employer branding so far which may be rooted in Social Network Site presences being mainly managed by the marketing department (Brecht et al. 2012). A common pitfall in employer branding on Social Network Sites is not carefully choosing the information presented on these media particularly without regard to the target group or without an aim to differentiate themselves (Backhaus, 2004). Furthermore, Brecht et al. (2011) conducted a study to identify benefits of a strategically established Social Network Site presence and found that most companies do not pursue explicit strategies for employer branding and started the Social Network Site presence under the premise of trying out (Brecht et al. 2011). However, if companies establish employer branding strategies on Social Network Sites, they get rewarded with increased global reach, improved employer awareness, more positive user bonding, gather valuable feedback and recruit for vacant positions more effectively (Brecht et al., 2011). Another research conducted by Brecht et al. (2012) identified how corporate career presences on Social Network Sites should be realized in order to foster employer branding. They found that corporate career presences on Social Network Sites are recommended to carry both a hedonic value (entertainment, content presentations in different media formats, and Social Network Site features) and a utilitarian value (information about appointments of the Human Resource Department, the daily working routine, information about job offers, corporate news) for their users (Brecht et al., 2012). Moreover, Bondarouk et al. (2012) developed a framework illustrating how social media applications could enhance employer branding in terms of employer value proposition, external marketing and internal marketing. They found that the employer value proposition is facilitated by Social Network Sites as they provide organizational profiles, peer-to-peer communication, knowledge sharing, creating a trustworthy and loyal image. The responsibility of Human Resource managers here is to ensure that the published content is long-lasting and in line with the reality. Furthermore, Social Network Sites impacts external marketing by creating a profile that represents the company, filtering information for specific target groups, reaching a broader scope of people, searching for job candidates, and providing timely and direct customer contact (Bondarouk et al., 2012). Consequently, Facebook and LinkedIn provide new opportunities for recruitment since all the personal and professional information of users are available. Finally, Social Network Sites has the ability to enhance internal marketing in terms of formal and informal communication with the employees, instant messages, and strengthening ties

between employees (Bondarouk et al., 2012). Having an account on the various Social Network Sites allows organizations to present themselves as attractive employer of choice using tweets or instant messages or suggest topics of discussion. Ollington and Harcourt (2013) performed 25 semi-structured interviews with recruitment specialists to determine how social network sites can be effectively used to attract potential applicant. The investigation showed that recruiters should take on the role of a connector between existing and potential employees on social network sites. Moreover, the connector role is a specific attraction mechanism to create numerous weak ties which will be strengthened through branding, transparency and data specificity. Recruiters that take on the connector role and use branding, transparency and data specificity are more likely to attract potential applicants on Social Network Sites (Ollington & Harcourt, 2013). Following this overview of existing literature about this topic, it can be argued that social network sites provide interesting means to improve the employer value proposition, attractiveness and image ultimately resulting in a unique desirable employer brand and more strategically oriented Human Resource professionals. For the coming years, Ollington and Harcourt (2013) propose that social network sites will continue to grow but they are more likely to gravitate towards specialist recruitment sites.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Scenario Planning as a Tool for Uncovering the Future

Scenarios are considered as a valuable tool that provides an overview about the interactions among several trends and events in the future and thus help organizations to be more flexible and prepared in times of uncertainty and change (Hiltunen, 2009). Moreover, they stimulate strategic thinking, help expanding one's scope by creating multiple futures and are particularly suitable for environments characterized by complexity and unpredictability (Amer et al., 2013; Schoemaker, 1991). Recently, the popularity of scenario planning among Human Resource professionals increased which may be grounded on its characteristics to minimize unpleasant surprises and make organizations adaptive to dynamically changing environments (Phelps et al., 2001). Following this logic, scenario planning is "a description of a possible set of events that might reasonably take place" (Jarke et al., 1998; p. 156) and has been defined as "a process of positing several informed, plausible and imagined alternative future environments in which decisions may be played out for the purpose of changing current thinking, improving decision making, enhancing human and organization learning and improving performance" (Chermack & Lynham, 2002, p. 376). Therefore, the underlying premise of scenario planning is to ask 'what if' questions and to explore the most appropriate responses to the consequences of uncertainty rather than to estimate what scenarios are most likely to happen (Duinker & Greig, 2007). Thus, scenario planning is not about making reliable predictions or forecasts. On the contrary, it is about understanding the forces that drive the change (Chermack & Swanson, 2008). Scenarios differ from forecasts and predictions in that they enable its users to formulate complex sets of hypotheses about the future and analyze the past, present and the future which expands the thinking inside the organization to predetermined elements in the external environment (Burt & Chermack, 2008). In fact, "scenarios consist of narratives that consider how alternative futures, typically related to a particular focal issue, may unfold from combinations of highly influential and uncertain drivers, and their interaction with more certain driving forces" (Bohensky et

al., 2011, p.878). Thus, the main advantage of scenario planning is both the process and output of systematic examination of the interaction between uncertainties and emerging trends (Schoemaker, 1991). According to Duinker and Greig (2007), scenario planning is mainly used for two functions: risk management and sparking new ideas and it serves to compensate two common errors in decision making: under prediction and over prediction of change. Characteristics of a well-executed scenario analysis are relevance, plausibility, novelty, differentiation and internal consistency of each scenario (Wilson, 1998; Van der Heijden, 2011). Moreover, Phelps et al. (2001) found support for improved financial performance resulting from scenario planning and Inayatullah (2009) argues that the scenario building process enhances organizational learning, decision making and the identification of new issues that may arise in the future. Table 3 outlines the most striking advantages of using scenario planning in general and why it is useful to apply scenario planning for studying the future of Social Network Site enhanced employer branding.

Table 3. Advantages of using the future study method scenario planning

General advantages of the scenario planning method	Reasons why scenario planning is appropriate for this study
Provides an overview about the interactions among several trends in the future	The future of employer branding is influenced by numerous trends which makes it essential to identify and evaluate these trends
Stimulates strategic thinking and decision making	Employer branding is not yet a strategic priority for organizations but due to its growing importance scenario planning may serve as a strategic tool kit for managers
Minimizes unpleasant surprises	Many of the drivers that might affect employer branding are difficult to predict. Scenario planning explores a range of possible alternative futures to prevent unpleasant surprises
Makes organizations adaptive to dynamically changing environments	Social Network Sites enhanced employer branding operates in an ever changing environment which makes it crucial to provide a tool for planning and preparing
Stretches mental models and fosters organizational learning	Uncovering the future is not easy for both professionals and practitioners. Therefore, researching employer branding by means of a scenario analysis shed light on different ways to investigate the future and helps managers to prepare for the uncertain

To exploit the aforementioned advantages of using the scenario planning method, Amer et al. (2013) list three scenario building principles that include (1) the identification of predetermined elements in the environment, (2) the ability to change mindset to re-perceive the reality, and (3) the development of a macroscopic view of the environment. Regarding the construction of scenarios, Postma and Liebl (2005) claim that the scenario building process is an iterative process where the process steps are interrelated, allowing people to move back and forth. To build scenarios one can either use deductive or inductive methods. This study at hand follows the deductive approach similar to the intuitive logics

approach developed by Royal Dutch Shell (Duinker & Greig, 2007):

1. Define the topic/problem and focus of the scenario analysis.
2. Identify and review the key factors/environmental influences on the topic.
3. Identify the critical uncertainties.
4. Define scenario logics
5. Create/flesh out the scenarios.
6. Assess implications for business, government, and the community.
7. Propose actions and policy directions.

For the purpose of this study, the intuitive logics approach is used as it is the only strictly qualitative approach. Quantitative methods for scenario planning are often criticized as they assume that historical data will prevail in the future (Amer et al., 2013). In contrast, the intuitive logics approach relies on qualitative data which is more subjective but Amer et al. (2013) argue that for projects with a broader scope and a larger time horizon, qualitative methods are considered appropriate. Table 4 displays the main principles of the intuitive logics approach as followed and applied in this research.

Table 4. The intuitive logics approach for scenario planning

Scenario Characteristics	Application of the intuitive logics approach in this research
Purpose for the scenario analysis	Provide base for further experiments, and serve managers with a tool for decision-making, learning and preparing
Starting Point	Concern of how employer branding on Social Network Site might develop due to emerging trends and challenges
Scenario scope	Narrow scope, only applicable for employer branding on Social Network Sites
Time frame	10 years
Methodology type	Subjective and qualitative
Nature of scenario team	1 Researcher
Role of external experts	External experts are used to validate the findings in subsequent studies
Identification of key drivers	Literature research and brainstorming
Evaluation of key drivers	Intuition and logics
Scenario construction	Based on the scenario axes method, in which four scenarios were developed around two axes of uncertainty
Output of scenario exercise	Qualitative set of scenarios in narrative form with strategic implications
Use of probabilities	All scenarios are equally probable
Number of scenarios	4
Evaluation criteria	novelty, feasibility, comprehensiveness, and internal consistency

3.2 Development of Social Network Site Enhanced Employer Branding Scenarios

For the purpose of this study, scenarios were developed to better understand the key drivers of the future for employer branding where uncertainty is high, controllability is low and the impact on the focal issue is significant. The focal issue for this study at hand is to identify possible developments that Social Network Site based employer branding might undergo. To obtain a better overview on which trends might affect employer branding on Social Network Site, several future studies have been consulted. It became apparent that some data sets and analyses were available which were used as base for analysis and for developing exploratory scenarios. Therefore, this paper drew heavily on the findings of Guthridge et al. (2008), Manyka et al. (2013) as well as surveys of the employer branding research institute Universum and the Employer Branding Global Research Study conducted by Michington (2015). Finally, the book “the abc of xyz” by McCrindle (2009) provided a solid overview of different recruitment strategies for Generation X and Generation Y. In a first step, these findings were reviewed and scanned for possible drivers and trends. According to Michington (2015) who summaries key focus areas for employer branding, attracting and recruiting talents from outside local borders might be influenced by political risks and the threat of terrorism. Moreover, he proposed that being clear on what the organization stands for, its mission and value will become even more important for employer branding and should be reflected in employer branding communications. Next to this, Guthridge et al. (2008) argued that the war for talent is one of the growing challenges that force organizations to take talent acquisition more seriously and to constantly improve employer branding activities. Another challenge that should be considered evolved with the expansion into international markets and the general trend towards globalization resulting in global competition for talent attraction (Guthridge et al., 2008). Concerning the findings of the employer branding research institute Universum (2014) that surveyed trends impacting employer branding among Human Resource professionals one can make up three trends requiring a deeper insight. One macro trend affecting the employer branding industry is what is called ‘free agent nation’ referring to the shift from regular (full-time) employment to temporary or part-time workers and minor employment, which might challenge internal employer branding challenges as it becomes more difficult to maintain common organizational cultures and create sense of belonging. An additional macro trend is the ‘information avalanche’ which refers to empowered customers through information availability and increased options for employers. Moreover the social media challenge is another force that impacts on employer branding since social media will certainly continue to rise and building engagement and a community is still undervalued (Universum, 2014). According to Beechler and Woodward (2009), a further driver of employer branding can be made up in the digitalization and virtualization of work as well as the implementation of home offices and teleworking particularly complicating internal employer branding. Another basis for this analysis is the book ‘The ABC of XYZ’ by McCrindle (2009) who investigates how to attract and recruit new generations at work and provide an outlook for the value shift that emerged when Generation Yers enter the job market. According to him, what shapes the future the most is demographic change. The demographic change brings along three trends impacting social network site based employer branding: the transition of generations from Generation Y to Generation Z, the retirement of the Baby Boomers and the aging population (McCrindle, 2009). This demographic change

causes major sociological change, a value shift between generations, and a redefined work life which is all together another megatrend the Human Resource Department has to cope with (Ackermann, 2010). Finally, on behalf of the McKinsey Global Institute, Manyika et al. (2013) investigate twelve potentially economically disruptive technologies and evaluate their affect on employment and the ability to change the nature of work and organizational structures. Therefore disruptive technology advancement is another driver able to transform the nature of employer branding on social network sites.

Based on these findings, a list of driving forces is developed. The next step is to classify these forces according to uncertainty about the outcome and the probability to happen. This is a crucial process step in the scenario analysis since 'uncertainties determine the main difference between the scenarios, while

constant and predetermined elements remain the same for every scenario' (Postma & Liebl, 2005, p.163). Ranking the driving forces according to uncertainty and probability helps reduce the number of forces into a smaller, manageable number. A helpful tool for this is provided by Van der Heijden et al. (2009) who suggest to draw a two-dimensional ranking space which plots 'level of impact' (high/low) against the 'level of uncertainty' (high/low). The forces that are most important and unpredictable are used for scenario construction. Table 5 summarizes the future drivers and elaborates on the reason for inclusion/exclusion for the scenario analysis based on its level of impact and probability. Figure 4 illustrates the future drivers of Social Network Site enhanced employer branding plotted against probability and impact. The two drivers at the bottom right hand corner are selected for the scenario building process.

Table 5. Evaluation of the most unpredictable drivers that are able to impact the future of employer branding through Social Network Site the most

Driver	Inclusion	Exclusion	Reason for Inclusion/Exclusion based on Predictability and Impact
Political risks and threat of terrorism		X	The predictability of these events and ability to impact employer branding are low as they are neither exact forecast nor do they influence the way an employer is perceived by the public
Corporate Social Responsibility		X	The degree to which Corporate Social Responsibility is regarded as important for both current and prospective employees is easily predictable by means of representative survey data.
Digitalization and Virtualization of work		X	This is a process that can be forecasted and companies can adapt fast to these changes.
Increased options and information avalanche for employees		X	This is particularly important for the future of employer branding as it leads to empowered employees and puts pressure on the employer. However, these developments are neither new nor hard to predict, therefore this driver is important for employer branding in general but not for the scenario analysis.
War for talent		X	Labour market forecasts make it easy to predict the availability of talent on the market and therefore this driver is one that largely impacts employer branding in the future but due to its predictably companies can prepare for these events.
Emergence of innovative technologies	X		Those technologies such as the Internet of Things, intelligent Software Systems, and advanced robotics might impact employer branding to a high extent and have the ability to completely change the face of employer branding in the future but yet there is a high uncertainty about how people and businesses will use and accept the new technologies
Value Shift between Generation Y and Generation Z	X		This driver is particularly important as in the following years it is not only Generation Y who needs to be attracted by organizations but organizations need to think about tailored employer branding strategies for the next generation. Yet not much is known about how to attract those people and, depending on the generational differences between these two generations, employer branding will change.
Shift to minor employment		X	This driver influences employer branding to the extent that job satisfaction, motivation and employer reputation might be damaged. However, this driver is neither difficult to predict nor does it influence the future of employer branding to a large extent.
Social Media Challenge		X	The social media challenge refers to the challenge organizations face in terms of building a trustworthy online presence that fosters engagement and community building. Being aware of this driver has both a high impact and low predictability for employer branding but recent research already attempted to identify how to create valuable online presences. Therefore it can be assumed that the social media challenge will become more predictable in the very future.
Globalization		X	Even though Globalization and internationalization of markets lead to an even more fierce competition on the talent market, this process is highly predictable as it does not happen suddenly.
Demographic Change		X	Demographic change influences the development of employer branding to a high extent. However, it has high predictability and thus is not applicable for scenario planning.

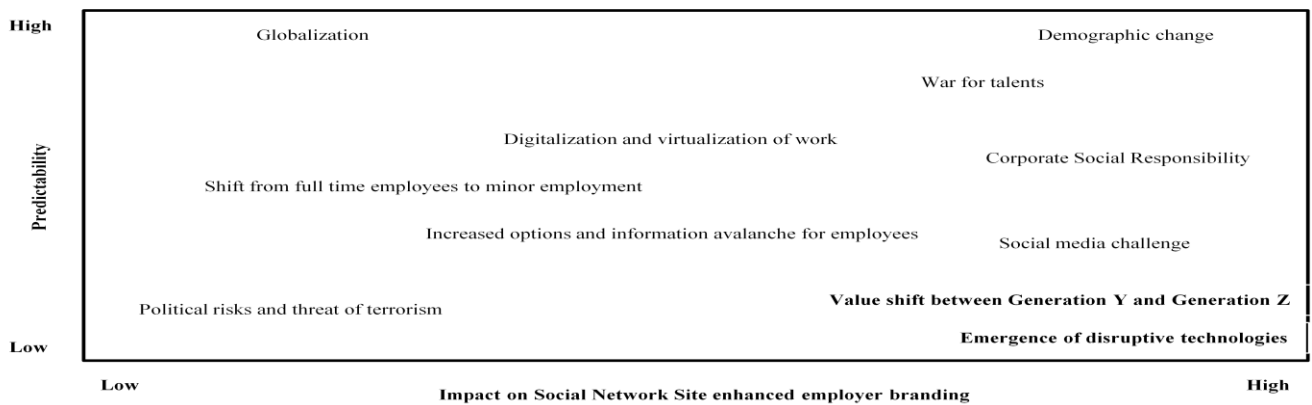


Figure 4. Future drivers of Social Network Site enhanced employer branding plotted against probability and impact

3.3 Scenario Logics Defined

For the development of four independent and completely different scenarios, the author used the commonly applied scenario axes method in which scenarios were developed around two axes of uncertainty. As a first step, it is important to understand the two drivers more deeply, afterwards the two uncertainties are combined and scenarios elaborated.

3.3.1 Axis 1: Disruptive Technologies

“Disruptive innovations create an entirely new market through the introduction of a new kind of product or service, one that’s actually worse, initially, as judged by the performance metrics that mainstream customers value” (Christensen & Overdorf, 2000, p. 72). The term disruptive technology as coined by Christensen (1997) incorporates five important premises. First, a disruptive technology underperforms traditional technologies in terms of what customers have valued. Second, disruptive technologies offer new features to the customers such as price, appearance, convenience, and architecture. Third, disruptive technologies are first commercialized in emerging or insignificant markets. Fourth, before disruptive technologies meet the performance standards of the mass markets they undergo a process of steady improvement. Finally, when disruptive technologies become more mature they are likely to displace traditional dominant technologies. Therefore, disruptive technologies gain lower profits in their early stages but in the long run, they are able to improve business performance (Utterbeck & Acee, 2005). Examples of disruptive innovations according to Christensen & Raynor (2003) are discount department stores; low price, point-to-point airlines or online businesses such as bookselling, education, and travel agents. Markides (2006) points on the importance to distinguish disruptive technologies in terms of technological, business-model, and new-to-the world product innovations as all three types of innovation may follow a similar process to enter existing markets and may have equally revolutionary effects on dominant firms, but different disruptive technologies produce different kind of markets and have different managerial implications. However, what applies to all kinds is that they turn traditional ways of doing things up-side down. A recent study on behalf of the McKinsey Global Institute and conducted by Manyika et al. (2013) investigates disruptive technologies that can transform life, business, and global economy. The authors provide a guide and assessment matrix of those technologies with the greatest potential to impact and disrupt business by 2025. For example they found that mobile internet, the internet of things, and automation of knowledge work changes the nature of work. In an employer branding context, these technologies, if accepted by society, can largely

contribute to new ways of employer branding on Social Network Sites.

3.3.2 Axis 2: Generational Differences between Generation Y and Generation Z

„Generational change has become a critical issue for organizations forced to compete for increasingly scarce human resource” (Sayers, 2007, p. 474). Thus, organizations need to consider differences in personality profiles across generations and changes in attitudes towards work and careers (Macky et al., 2008). According to Constanza et al. (2012), today’s workplaces are characterized by meaningful generational differences between individuals which affect work-related outcomes such as commitment, satisfaction, motivation, risk-taking, and leadership style to a high extent. Therefore, talent attraction becomes more diverse and less predictable, resulting in more complex recruitment and retention of the ‘right’ candidates (Zamparelli, 2011). Accordingly, many companies are reaching out to multi-generational Human Resource and marketing strategies to attract these different groups (Williams & Page, 2011). For the purpose of this study, the analysis of generational differences will be limited to Generation Y and Generation Z because these are the two generations employer branding has to focus in the future.

Members of the Generation Y are seen as autonomous, entrepreneurial individuals who demand to work at their own responsibility and flexibility while requesting immediate feedback and a sense of appreciation (Martin, 2005). Moreover, Generation Yers are characterized by striving after freedom, adaptability and mobility in both business and private life (Martin, 2005). Therefore Generation Yers perceive change and instability as given and professional satisfactions as well as immediacy in all aspects of live are ranked high (Sayer, 2007). Members of this generation are using technologies such as cell phones, e-mail and the internet since childhood. Thus they are regarded as more ‘tech savvy’ than the previous generations which also affect their ability to solve problems by means of collaborative tools (Tyler, 2008). In a similar vein, Reisenwitz and Iyer (2009) call the Generation Y the generation of multimedia and multitasking people. For their professional life, Generation Yers value salary, retirement benefits, job stability, and career satisfaction the most. Additionally, they are familiar with working as a team but demand directions, structure and guidance from their supervisors (Resenwitz & Iyer, 2009). Finally, members of the Generation Y tend to be less loyal to their employers, which may be grounded in the increased options on the job market and the urge for satisfaction and independence (Hira, 2007).

In contrast to Generation Y, Generation Z has not received much attention yet. Therefore, until now, there is only

few written about the characteristics of this generation and researchers struggle to classify Generation Z precisely (Posnick-Godwin, 2010). Generally, members of the Generation Z were born after 1994 and are labeled as the most advanced generation in terms of technology, education, and independence (Posnick-Godwin, 2010). Interestingly, while previous generations averted traditional values, Generation Z seem to be the new conservatives reviving traditional lifestyles, attitudes, beliefs and values (Williams & Page, 2011). Next to this, Generation Z values authenticity and realness but even more important is peer acceptance (Williams & Page, 2011). Therefore the self-concept is mostly defined by the group to which one belongs. Also, these peers greatly influence decisions of the individual. Due to a wider mix of cultural background and heritage, Generation Z is a relatively global, diverse and tolerant generation that values security more than ever (Williams & Page, 2011). Thus, reaching and attracting this generation demands a new way of thinking as Generation Z members have a unique sense of self (Bernstein, 2015). According to the Grail Research Report (2011) that investigates how companies can target Generation Z, organizations should adopt technology-based channels to reach the target, enhance the virtual world presence, offer high value-for-money products and services, and provide green products as well as corporate programs. Moreover, they propose that companies should constantly adapt to the latest technologies as Generation Z is always up-to-date.

4. RESULTS: COMBINING TWO UNCERTAINTIES AND SCENARIO NARRATIVES

Based on the two axes described above, four scenarios were developed and named according to their suggested approaches (Figure 5): (1) Tailoring: adapt the employer branding activities on Social Network Sites according to specific generational needs, (2) Strategic: follow a strategic approach towards employer branding on Social Network Sites, (3) Flexibility: focus on quick adaption of employer branding strategies in terms of emerging technologies, and (4) improvement: improve the status quo. The scenario narratives from a Human Resource manager's point of view that describe how each of the four scenarios would unfold are presented in Table 6.

Table 6. Scenario Narratives from a Human Resource Manager's Point of View

(1) Multigenerational Employer Branding	(2) Strategic Employer Branding
Human Resource managers responsible for Social Network Site enhanced employer branding have to cope with high generational differences between Generation Y and Generation Z. Both generations have different expectations, values and needs. Therefore a 'one-fits-for -all' employer branding strategy is likely to fail rather HR managers are recommend to focus on multigenerational employer branding, for example through more specialized and targeted Social Network Site presence. However, emerging disruptive	Human Resource managers are challenged by two major forces. First the transition from Generation Y to Generation Z implies a rethinking of traditional employer branding to ensure talent attraction and retention across all ages and generations. Next to this, Human Resource managers have to manage the emergence of disruptive technologies. These new technologies offer innovative ways to reach current and prospective employees and lead to a

technologies barely influence reorientation of Social employer branding on Social Network Site enhanced employer branding. This is because the innovative technologies either do not impact traditional Social Network Sites or they are not accepted by society. Thus the HR manager fully concentrates on tailoring the employer branding strategy according to the different generational needs.

reorientation of Social Network Site enhanced employer branding. Next to this, Human Resource managers make employer branding a strategic priority focus on a strategic restructuring, strategy alignment, and internal integration. Finally, to best meet the new challenges, Human Resource managers form cross-functional teams.

(3) Innovative Employer Branding

(4) Improving Status Quo

Human Resource managers recognize that the strategies and channels to reach their target group are only minor impacted by the generational transition. Thus employer branding on Social Network Site does not need to differentiate as members of Generation Y and Z have similar needs and values. Nevertheless, Human Resource managers' major concerns are disruptive technologies. Due to the emergence of disruptive technologies they have to adapt their employer branding strategies accordingly. It is of great importance that Human Resource managers are prepared to adjust quickly to new technologies and channels to reach the target group and to ensure internal efficiency.

Human Resource managers continue to pursue their traditional employer branding strategy on Social Network Sites. As neither the emergence of disruptive technologies nor generational differences between Generation Y and Z influence their way of doing business. This allows HR managers to analyze and enhance their current performance, conduct benchmark studies and financial analysis. Human Resource managers focus on improving the status quo as both drivers are exposed to not influence traditional Social Network Site enhanced employer branding.

4.1 Implications of each scenario

4.1.1 Tailoring: a multigenerational employer branding strategy

The future of Social Network Site enhanced employer branding is challenged by a value shift between the Generation Y and Generation Z. As a result, organizations cannot apply one general employer branding strategy but rather have to analyze how each generation is attracted and retained properly. Yet, it is not known what in particular the Generation Z demands from employers and workplaces but organizations are recommended to stay up-to-date to ensure successful employer branding. The most appropriate strategy to meet the challenge of highly generational differences it to follow a 'tailoring approach'. This implies that organizations adapt their employer branding and social media strategies to the different needs of each generation. It follows that organizations apply multigenerational employer branding which includes different ways to reach the target, for example through more specialized employer branding on Social Network Sites. In practice, organizations offer more than just one profile on the Social Network application and address with each profile a smaller target group. This allows organization to improve internal and external employer branding as well as the employer value proposition since employees and prospective employees feel more addressed through a more targeted Social Network Site enhanced employer branding.

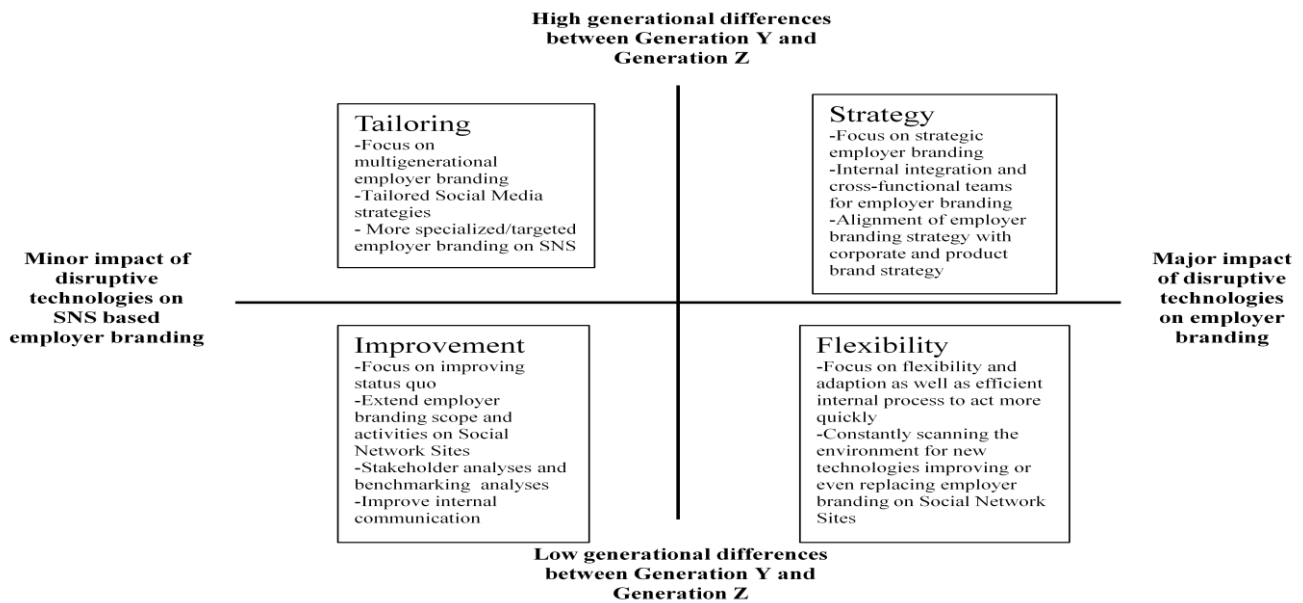


Figure 5. Scenario matrix based on the combination of alternative development pathways for Social Network Site enhanced Employer Branding

4.1.2 Strategy: a strategic approach towards employer branding

Employer branding on Social Network Sites faces major challenges. On the one hand the values, needs and expectations of Generation Y and Generation Z differ to a large extent. On the other hand, disruptive technologies and innovations enter the market and have a high impact on the traditional way of employer branding on Social Network Sites. To meet these challenges, organizations are recommended to make employer branding more strategic with a focus on strategic orientation. To achieve this, employer branding activities and strategies are internally integrated and cross-functional teams work jointly. Both internal integration and cross-functional teams help meet the new challenges as employer branding not only impacts the Human Resource Department but also Marketing, Public Relation and the Communication Department. Additionally, for employer branding to get a strategic focus within the organization it is necessary to align the employer branding strategy with corporate and product strategy. These implications help organizations in times of change to stay competitive and have a successful Social Network Sites enhanced employer branding.

4.1.3 Flexibility: scan the market for new trends and be ready to adjust quickly

For organizations generational differences are only a minor concern. The value shift between Generation Y and Generation Z is marginal. Thus, employer branding does not need to be adapted according to different values and expectations. However, there are several disruptive technologies entering the market which have an impact on the traditional way of employer branding on Social Network Sites. To be prepared, organizations are recommended to follow a ‘flexibility-approach’. It is not known yet what kind of technologies might turn Social Network Site enhanced employer branding upside down but for organizations it is crucial to be flexible in two ways. First, they need to be adaptive to new environments and situations in order to react quickly and adjust employer branding to the new possibilities disruptive technologies might offer. Second, internal processes within an organization need to be flexible to improve efficiency and reduce the time to adapt to new technologies.

4.1.4 Improvement: exploit status quo

Employer branding faces minor challenges that are not relevant enough to change the traditional employer branding on Social Network Sites. This gives organizations the opportunity to focus on how to improve the status quo. Thus, the ‘improvement approach’ suggests that organizations should conduct stakeholder and financial analyses as well as benchmarking analyses to enhance employer branding. Moreover, organizations benefit from extending the employer branding presence on Social Network Sites and focus on improved internal communication within the departments. All together, this leads to an exploitation of the existing status quo and ultimately in more attracted and retained employees.

5. DISCUSSION

Exploring the future of employer branding through Social Network Sites involves evaluating key trends in combination with major challenges the Human Resource Department might face. Since uncovering future development pathways that might reasonably take place is a difficult task, ‘predicting a development future with low uncertainty is essentially impossible’ (Duinker & Greg, 2007, p.214). By taking this into account, this study at hand uses the scenario planning method to understand the scope of possible alternative futures and support organizations with robust management strategies rather than making exact predictions about the future. Based on the findings of the scenario analysis, the future of employer branding might develop in four distinct directions. Each scenario is assumed to be equally probable, comprehensive and internal consistent. However, not all scenarios are equally feasible, for example the implications of the scenario, where a strategic orientation is recommended, are more difficult to follow than exploiting the status quo. Moreover, whereas the first (tailoring), second (strategy), and third (flexibility) scenario is of novelty value for Social Network Site enhanced employer branding, the fourth scenario (Improvement) build upon the traditional principles of employer. Next to this, to evaluate the proposed scenarios, a checklist for overcoming obstacles to effective employer branding is provided by Erdmann, Sichel, & Yeung (2015). The authors argue that ‘scenario planning can broaden the mind but can fall prey to the mind’s inner workings’ (Erdmann et al., 2015, p. 1). Their first

recommendation is to review all trends likely to affect the business and focus on the interconnections. To ensure a sufficient amount of trends and the selection of the most appropriate trends for the scenario analysis, I used literature as a base and analyzed the trend in combination with Social Network Site enhanced employer branding (Table 5). The second recommendation by Erdmann et al. (2015) is to evaluate and prioritize trends using first qualitative, then quantitative approaches. In this research, the selection of key drivers is based on a two-dimensional ranking space which plots 'level of impact' against 'level of probability' (Figure 4). In this way, the drivers were evaluated based on two criteria and qualitative reasoning. Moreover, to overcome the obstacles in scenario planning, it is advised to build the scenarios around critical uncertainties. The four scenarios as proposed in this research are developed based on a scenario matrix, where the two trends that are most unpredictable and have the highest impact on employer branding are used for the scenario construction (Figure 5). Next to this, Erdmann et al. (2013) stress the importance to assess the impact of each scenario and develop strategic alternatives. In this research, the focus is more on scenario narratives and strategic alternatives rather than the impact of each scenario. This would be an interesting avenue for further research. Finally, the last obstacle that needs to be overcome in successful scenario planning is using scenarios as one-off exercise and ignoring social dynamics such as groupthink. On the contrary, it is recommended to encourage free and open debate. Due to the fact that the scenarios presented in this research are developed by only one researcher, social biases such as groupthink could not occur. However, it is important to note, that this research is not completed with the presentation of the four scenarios, rather it is a first step to uncover the future of employer branding and subsequent studies have to follow.

Next to the evaluation of the scenarios, it is essential, to have a closer look how the theoretical foundation as outlined in Table 1 contributes to and substantiate the scenarios for Social Network Site enhanced employer branding. First of all, it is worth mention that each theoretical scholarly contributed to the construction of each scenario. However, the degree to which each scenario builds upon the theory differs. The first scenario 'Tailoring' that suggest to follow a multigenerational employer branding strategy and tailor the employer branding activities according to the generational preferences, has the underlying assumption that people like to identify themselves this the organization (Social Identity Theory), and organizations signal its values to (potential) employees to influence their opinion (Signaling Theory). Additionally, one of the implications for the second scenario 'strategy' is to align the employer branding strategy with the corporate strategy. This implication is based on the assumption that job seekers match their personal characteristics with the organizational culture and identity (Person- Organization fit). The implications of the third scenario 'flexibility' are to focus on internal efficiency, flexibility and quick adaption to technological changes. According to the RBV, organizations need capabilities that are valuable, rare, imperfectly, imitable, and not substitutable. The development of the third scenario is build on the assumption that in order to react best to the emergence of disruptive technologies, organizations need to focus on their resources and capacities.

In sum, this study provides four independent scenarios that have theoretical foundation and are constructed based on qualitative research and subjective intuition and logics. Moreover, the scenarios are evaluated based on novelty, feasibility, comprehensiveness, and internal consistency.

This study holds several limitations that should be noted; however these limitations offer fruitful avenues for further research. First of all, to help scenarios become accepted by organizations, it is helpful to include managers and expert opinions in the construction process of scenarios. In this way, the scenario building process is supported by valuable hints by and experiences of practitioners and managers can test and translate the scenarios to their decision situation in order to check for feasibility, consistency and intelligibility. However, the scope and time frame of this paper as a basis assessment criterion of this Bachelor thesis limits this research to a rather literature based examination of the research topic. Second, given their cognitive limitations, people can only conceive part of future range of possibilities and most importantly they cannot imagine what they don't know. Therefore, the scenarios and future drivers presented in this research are things that we can conceive but there are still things we do not know that we do not know them. This might lead to bias in forecasting the future as it is not feasible to evaluate all possible drivers and scenarios that might have an impact. Following from this, scenario planning is well equipped to deal with predetermined aspects and uncertainties but it leaves the unknowables out of discussion. Since complexity is growing, causality relationships may be ambiguous, and changes emerge suddenly, the business environment turns out to be more difficult to predict than ever before. These unanticipated situations are indicative of blind spots and cannot be identified in trend-based scenarios as they are excluded as logically impossible during the scenario-building process. Finally, the evaluation of future trends and the scenario-building process has been conducted by only one person (the researcher). This could result in an interpretation bias and the findings of this study are narrowed down to the mindset, contextual understanding and perception of one researcher.

However, this research has also some meaningful implications for Human Resource managers and businesses in general. It provides substantial insights in how the future of employer branding might look like. The assessment of the various drivers that influence this development shows that the value shift between generations and the emergence of disruptive technologies are the most unpredictable with highest impact. With a focus on these two drivers, four possible but distinct development pathways were developed. Each development pathway has its own implication. Given the outcomes of this research, organizations are able to prepare adequately for alternative futures and understand the interaction of emerging trends and uncertainty. Moreover, the results of this study assist practitioners in well-founded decision making and strategic thinking. Finally, the results of this study support managers' understanding of environmental uncertainties, stretch their mental models, and fosters processes of organizational learning.

Beyond a practical scope, this study attempts to close a gap in the current body of literature. Database search indicates that this is the first paper researching the future of Social Network Site enhanced employer branding by means of a scenario analysis. Thus with applying this future study method to employer branding on Social Network Sites a new research topic has been introduced. Considering the limitations of this study, several interesting avenues for further research become apparent. To validate the findings of this study it would be crucial to conduct interviews with practitioners and adjust the findings according to their expert opinions. Therefore this study can serve as a basis for further investigations with a more practical orientation. Interestingly as well for further research is the notion that blind spot in the scenario-building process cannot be eliminated. Therefore, a broader scope for this research topic and a larger team of researchers would be helpful

to improve the overall quality of the findings. Next to this, investigating the warning signals and assessing the impact of each scenario for the Human Resource Department, would be a crucial step in further exploring the future of Social Network Site enhanced employer branding.

6. CONCLUSION

This research intended to identify possible future developments for Social Network Site enhanced employer branding as well as key driver that impact this development. Using extant literature as a foundation, an overview of the employer branding concept, process and conditions has been provided and a review of the current body of literature on Social Network Site enhance employer branding has been presented. In providing an answer to the research question, this study shed light on the multiple drivers of employer branding and examine four alternative future pathways for employer branding on Social Network Sites using the scenario planning method. Based on the alternative futures, scenario narratives and implications for each scenario were developed. This study explicitly stresses the importance of using the scenario planning method for Human Resource research and is of novelty value for Human Resource literature as it is the first of its kind that applies scenario analysis for Social Network Site employer branding. Moreover, this study is sought to facilitate the creation of robust management strategies, and help to understand the interactions among several trends.

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