Exploring the Relationship between Employee Branding and Brand Loyalty

- A qualitative case study

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Acknowledgement

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Växjö, 2013-05-27

________________  ________________  ________________
Daniel Andersson    Karin Hafstad       Pontus Skoog Hjertquist
Abstract

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Authors: Andersson Daniel, Hafstad Karin, Skoog Hjertquist Pontus
Tutor: Viktor Magnusson
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Title: Exploring the relationship between employee branding and brand loyalty – A qualitative case study
Keywords: Employee branding, the employee branding process, brand image, brand loyalty, sources of messages, psychological contracts, desired brand image, employee brand image

Background: Making customers loyal to the brand have become a key issue for marketers to achieve since it acts as a major contributor to competitive advantage. The brand image is argued to be the main source for brand loyalty and organizations continuously seek ways to achieve brand loyalty through enhancing their image. Employee branding makes it possible for organizations to consistently deliver a desired brand image to the customers, through its employees, and it could therefore be of importance to explore the relationship between employee branding and brand loyalty.

Research questions: RQ1: How does the organization’s management communicate its desired brand image to the employees?
RQ2: How do the various sources of messages contribute to employees’ knowledge of the desired brand image?
RQ3: How do the various sources of messages contribute to the upholding of the psychological contract between the employees and the organization?
RQ4: How does the image projected by employees influence brand loyal customers?

Purpose: The purpose of this thesis is to explore the relationship between an organization’s employee branding and brand loyalty.

Methodology: Conducted as a single embedded case study, semi-structured interviews

Conclusion: The empirical investigation revealed that employee branding activities could strengthen customers’ loyalty towards the brand. Employee branding therefore influence customers’ satisfaction, commitment, trust, and identification to the brand.
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1 Introduction

This introduction chapter will introduce the reader briefly to the concept employee branding. The chapter starts with the background to introduce the key concepts followed by a problem discussion where the authors problematize the research area. Finally, the chapter ends with the purpose of this thesis.

1.1 Background

Companies invest millions of dollars every day in their external branding activities to enhance loyal customers. But branding is more than just selling a product or service (Sartain, 2005). It aims to establish a significant and differentiated presence that attracts and retain loyal customers. Further, branding gives a meaning and fulfillment to the product and enables companies to develop a unique image for the product in the customers mind (Businessdictionary, 2013-03-23). However, the outcome of the branding activities generates minimum success if the companies do not make it a priority to manage the brand from inside (Sartain, 2005). The employees and their behavior have for many years been argued to be the key factor for an organization´s success (Henkel, Tomzcak, Heitmann and Herrmann, 2007; Caruana and Calleya, 1998). Employees should therefore be seen as one of the most valuable assets of an organization, since they are part time marketers and play a vital role of how the organization is perceived (Grönroos, 2008). It is important to remember that the behavior of the employees in their interactions with the customers affects customers’ associations to the brand (Ekinci and Dawes, 2009). The brand image of an organization aims to ensure that customers hold strong and favorable associations of the brand in their mind (Heding, Knudtzen and Bjerre, 2009; Keller, 1993). Thus, when this is accomplished the brand image can enhance brand loyal customers (Kabiraj and Shanmugan, 2011).

The associations of the brand are formed through customers’ contact and past experience with the brand (Dobni and Zinkhan, 1990). The behavior of the employees in their daily work therefore contributes to the perception of a brand’s image (Ekinci and Dawes, 2009). Miles and Mangold (2004) even argue that employees have the
ability to reinforce, strengthen and create a brand image for the products and the organization they work for. The brand image that encompasses the organization is argued to be the most important source to enhance brand loyalty (Kabiraj and Shanmugan, 2011). Further, brand loyalty act as a major contributor to competitive advantage, in terms of increased market shares, high return on investment, brand extension, and high brand equity (Kabiraj and Shanmugan, 2011; Dau and Wensly, 1988).

The concept of employee branding makes it possible for the organization to consistently deliver its desired brand image to the customers through its employees (Miles and Mangold, 2005; King and Grace, 2009), this through managing the brand from inside. There are other concepts for managing the brand from inside as well. Internal branding is a concept that is similar to employee branding. However, the difference between the concepts becomes clear in the potential outcomes of each concept. The outcomes of internal branding activities are argued to generate a census of “one company” and to enhance employee commitment towards the brand, and thereby deliver on the brand promises (Punjaisri and Wilson, 2011; De Chernatony and Vallaster, 2005; Aurand et al., 2005). Employee branding, on the other hand, aims more specifically to enable employees to project a desired brand image. When the potential outcomes of each concept is discussed, it becomes clear that employee branding focuses mainly on customer oriented outcomes, such as favorable reputation, loyal customers, and customer retention (Miles, Mangold, Asree, and Revell, 2011; Miles and Mangold, 2005). In contrast to internal branding, which is more focused on employee oriented outcomes (Punjaisri and Wilson, 2011; De Chernatony and Vallaster, 2005; Aurand, Grochels, and Bishop, 2005).

The development of employee branding is formed by the degree to which the employees adapt the brand image of the organization and are motivated to project that image to customers (Miles and Mangold, 2004). However, this requires that the organization actively work on a daily basis to ensure that the employees are projecting the desired brand image. The organization can manage their employee branding by considering and take actions towards the “employee branding process”. The process explains how an organization, through various sources of messages, can ensure the employees to understand the desired brand image and keep them motivated to project
it to customers. The outcomes of such activities can serve as a source of competitive advantage for the organization (Miles et al., 2011).

1.2 Problem discussion

The brand image is constructed at the top of the organization within its mission, values (Miles et al., 2011), and vision (Mirvis, Googings, and Kinnicutt, 2010) and is delivered from the managers to the employees who finally project the image to the customers (Miles et al., 2011). There are two critical factors with employee branding that needs to be fulfilled. The employees must first understand the desired brand image. Secondly, the employees must be motivated to engage in the behaviors that are necessary to deliver the desired brand image to others (Miles et al., 2011). Henkel et al. (2007) further argue that brand consistent employee behavior is a critical factor for an organization’s success. Thus, it also implies that employee behavior can destroy the brand (Miles and Mangold, 2005). Gotsi and Wilson (2001) argue that the employees in their interaction with the customers could be responsible for the lost of millions of dollars spent on advertising and products. It is therefore extremely important that the employees project an image that characterizes the image of the organization (Gotsi and Wilson, 2001). The behavior of the employees therefore underlines the commitment to pursue the goals of the organization (Caruana and Calleya, 1998). This implies that it could be a problem for companies if the employees do not understand the brand image and/or are not motivated to project the image to customers.

Miles et al. (2011) showed in their research that employee branding enables organizations to achieve competitive advantage. The achievement was gained by ensuring that employees reflect the organizations underlying values and desired brand image (Miles et al., 2011). The image that surrounds the organization’s brand is according to Kabiraj and Shanmugan (2011) the main source to generate competitive advantage through brand loyalty. Further, brand loyalty in comparison to customer loyalty is more than just customers repurchase intentions, it concern the emotional aspects among customers and thus involve the underlying reasons for repurchase intentions (Jacoby, 1971). Brand loyalty has thus become one of the most important issues for companies to enhance, since it act as a major contributor to competitive advantage (Kabiraj and Shanmugan, 2011; Dau and Wensly, 1988). Making customer
loyal to the brand has therefore become the key issue for marketers to achieve (Kim, Morris, and Swait, 2008) and hence serves as the aim for an organization’s marketing program (Kabiraj and Shanmugan, 2011). Since it is argued that the image that surrounds an organization is the main source for brand loyalty (Kabiraj and Shanmugan, 2011) and that organizations continuously seek for ways to achieve brand loyalty through enhancing their image (Miles and Mangold, 2005), it could be of importance to explore the relationship between employee branding and brand loyalty. More research could give clarity of the relationship and thus guide organizations for the achievement of brand loyalty.

1.3 Purpose
The purpose of this thesis is to explore the relationship between an organization’s employee branding and brand loyalty.
2 Literature review

This chapter is a review of existing literature within the field of employee branding. The chapter starts off by reviewing the literature regarding employee branding and managers and employees role in employee branding. Thereafter, the existing literature regarding the employee branding process will be presented followed by a review of the concept brand loyalty. Finally, the chapter ends with a chapter summary.

2.1 Employee branding

Employee branding could be explain as the process by which employees’ adapt the desired brand image of an organization. This further contributes to employees’ motivation to project the desired brand image to customers (Miles and Mangold, 2004). An organization’s desired brand image could be explained as the image that the organization wants their customers to experience. Every message that goes through the organization should be consistent with its missions and values and hence reflect the desired image of the organization. Further, the employees’ knowledge and understanding of a brands image is the key criteria with employee branding. This is influenced by the internal and external messages of the organization (Miles and Mangold, 2007b).

The brand image is likely to be aligned when the employees understands the desired brand image of the organization, and are motivated to project it to others (Miles and Mangold, 2005). However, the employees’ ability to deliver the desired brand image is dependent on (1) how the organization projects that image to the employees and (2) how quickly the employees adapt the brand image. These two factors are vital for organizations to enhance, since the employees must perceive the desired brand image before projecting it to customers (Miles and Mangold, 2004). Employees’ trust for the organization they work for is also vital in order for the employees to adapt the desired brand image (Miles and Mangold, 2004; Punjaisri, Wilson, and Evanschitzky, 2009). Therefore, the employees have a major influence on the whole organization’s brand image (Miles and Mangold, 2004). Hence, the success of the brand is dependent on if the organization and the employees are communicating as one unit (De Chernatony,
Cottam, and Segal-Horn, 2006). Boyd and Sutherland (2006) argue that employee branding is a tool that increases the value of the brand, since it enables companies to differentiate themselves and its products. This sort of positioning could be difficult for organizations achieve. When an organization succeeds with this positioning, it could result in sustainable competitive advantage. The competitive advantage could be generated in terms of high service quality, enhanced employee satisfaction and performance, increased customer satisfaction, and increased positive word of mouth communication (Miles and Mangold, 2004; Miles and Mangold, 2005). Organizations should therefore make employee branding a key business objective (Boyd and Sutherland, 2006).

2.2 Managers’ and employees’ role in employee branding

It is vital that the employees are not only aware of the brand values but also that they understand that their behavior in customer contact situations lays the foundation of how the organization is perceived externally (Henkel et al., 2007). Further they need to understand that the brand is valuable and hence it must be communicated throughout the whole organization. Thus, the employees must understand the benefits of employee branding and how they contribute to the success of the organization (Boyd and Sutherland, 2006).

Miles et al. (2011) state that the employees who clearly understand the aspect of projecting the brand image, can deliver on the organization desired expectations. However, this requires that the management put effort into translating the brand values into daily activities so that the employees easily can understand and transform these values in their interaction with the customers (Punjaisri and Wilson, 2007; De Chernatony et al., 2006). Managers not only have to make their employees understand that good customer service essential for the business, they also need to ensure them to understand the underlying values that the employee’s behavior results in. Otherwise the customer service might not be as good as desired (Miles et al., 2011). Gotsi and Wilson (2001) even argue that if the behavior of the employees does not reflect the expectations that are communicated externally it will damage the organization’s reputation. According to Wilden, Gudergan and Lings (2010) clear brand signals lead to a clearer brand image in the employees’ minds. However, it is common that organizations do not have a formally stated desired brand image. In addition to the
organization’s mission statements, the organization should provide the employees with formal documents that clearly and explains the desired brand image that customers can expect form the organization (Miles and Mangold, 2007a). Wilden et al. (2010) further argue that a brand image that causes a mismatch between expectations and reality can result in employees’ dissatisfaction and eventually also decreased employee retention. They state that it therefore is important for organizations to set appropriate brand statements that clearly communicate employment values and expectations from the employees (Wilden et al., 2010).

The brand can only be reinforced when the employees act in accordance with the organization (De Chernatony et al., 2006). Maxwell and Knox (2009) argue that it is important to understand what employees find positive about the organization and thereby help to support the behavior of the employees with the brand values (Maxwell and Knox, 2009). Successful brands are therefore dependent on ensuring that employees correctly interpret the brand values and stay committed to enact the values in their interaction with customers (De Chernatony et al., 2006). However, if employees perceive that the organization has broken its promises, the employees’ trust towards the organization will decrease. The brand image is then compromised and the employee may not deliver the levels of customer service that the organization and customers desire (Miles and Mangold, 2004). This can only be avoided if senior management “walk the talk”, whereas the managers lead by example. If the organization is about to project one brand image, the senior management must act as an important mediator (Boyd and Sutherland, 2006). Hence, brand consistent employee behavior is a critical factor for an organization’s success (Henkel et al., 2007). Therefore, the success of the brand can only be improved if the organization and its employees act as one unit, where the behavior of each employee reflects the desired brand image of the organization (Miles and Mangold, 2004). Structures, processes and initiatives are therefore needed to enable brand-oriented employees (Henkel et al., 2007).

2.3 The employee branding process

The employee branding process describes the relationship between an organization and its employees and if/how the employees are enabled to project the organization’s desired brand image. Thus, the employee branding process makes it possible for the
organization to consistently deliver its desired brand image to the customers (Miles and Mangold, 2005). Miles and Mangold (2007b) argue that by developing an employee brand through the employee branding process can provide a source of sustainable competitive advantage for the company. This means that a well-managed process will provide a competitive advantage achieved through the employees of the organization (Miles and Mangold, 2007b). The employees adapt the desired brand image and as a result of the employee branding process they stay motivated to project the image to the customers (Miles and Mangold, 2005).

Figure 1 - The employee branding process  (Adapted from Miles and Mangold, 2005, pp. 537)

2.3.1 Mission, vision and values
The organization’s mission and values are the cornerstones in the process and states the organization’s reason for being and how the mission will be accomplished. The mission and the values further provide the foundation for how the desired brand image should be defined (Miles and Mangold, 2005). An organization’s mission has according to Mirvis et al. (2010) to do with the purpose of the organization. The mission basically answers the question of why the organization exists (Mirvis et al., 2010). The values of an organization are described as underlying beliefs and unwritten standards that works as a guide for behavior (Rokeach, 1973; cited by Williams, 2002). The values further answer the question of how the organization will
act to achieve the organizations vision, which is described as the desired future for the organization (Mirvis et al., 2010). The vision further becomes clear for the employees through consistent communicate the mission and values of the organization (Miles and Mangold, 2005).

### 2.3.2 Sources of messages

Mahnert and Torres (2007) argue that the internal communicating effort is vital to create and maintain the brand internally. Managing the brand internally should not only focus on the objectives of the company, it should be balanced between the objectives of the organization and the wants and needs of the employees (Lings and Greenley, 2009).

The expectations and values of the organization are communicated through *informal* and *formal, internal* and *external* messages (De Chernatony et al., 2006; Miles and Mangold, 2004). Messages transmitted within the organization must be clear and go in line with the mission and values of the organization. These types of messages will enable employees to know, understand, and experience the desired brand image (Miles and Mangold, 2004) and further contributes to the upholding of employees psychological contract with the employer (Miles et al., 2011). Miles and Mangold (2007b) state that the employee branding process is predicted on achieving and also maintaining messages throughout the whole organization (Miles and Mangold, 2007b). Messages stem from several organizational sources (Miles and Mangold, 2004), where the human resource management is argued to be one of the most important sources of communicating the *formal internal messages* that will guide the behavior of the employees (Miles and Mangold, 2005; Lings and Greenley, 2009). Thus, the human resource management systems should be seen as the guardian of the brand values and it is therefore important that the human resource management not only has a comprehensive understanding about the brand values but also manage to guide their activities to all employees (Lings and Greenley, 2009). The formal internal messages also consist of public relations systems. Public relations can according to Miles and Mangold (2004) influence the brand image. Further, public relations can be used in an employee branding context, where organizations can direct its public relations activities internally to employees in order to create an impression. The formal internal messages can emotionally connect employees to the brand and the organization (Miles and Mangold, 2004), since it enables employees to understand
brand consistent behavior through brand related information and training (Henkel et al., 2007).

The informal internal messages derive from coworkers and managers. It can consist of interactions and observations of employees, supervisors, and friends that work for the organization (Miles and Mangold, 2004). Thus, the socialization aspect is important because it enables employees to share brand values (Hartline, Maxham and McKee, 2000) and for new employees to understand the brand values (De Chernatony et al., 2006). This enables them to bond with other employees and understand how to behave in accordance with the brand values (De Chernatony et al., 2006) and also to improve employees’ commitment towards the organization (Hartline et al., 2000). The messages transmitted from managers and leaders of the organization controls the socializations aspect among employees and are referred to as influence of organizational leadership (Miles and Mangold, 2004). It is their role to set standards of employee behavior and thus what requires from them (Boyd and Sutherland, 2006). The organization’s culture could also influence the employees and thus be seen as another informal internal source of messages (De Chernatony et al., 2006). Organizational culture could for example consist of different values, norms, or standards of behavior that send messages to the employees regarding how they should work in order to reach the organization’s goals. The employees might feel that they receive mixed messages if the values, norms, and different standards of behavior are not in line with other messages. Such mixed messages could according to Miles and Mangold (2004) make employees feel that the organization lacks integrity and result in that employees work inconsistently (Miles and Mangold, 2004).

Furthermore, the organization must take in consideration that their external messages are not only perceived by the customer, but by the employees as well. The informal external messages derive in forms of customer feedback in terms of word of mouth communication from external sources. The organization must ensure to evaluate customer feedback and to have in mind that this feedback can affect employee’s psychological contracts. Therefore, it is important that the informal external messages are consistent with the brands values (Miles and Mangold, 2004). The formal external messages consist of advertising and public relations, which contributes to employees understanding of the organizations brand image (Miles and Mangold, 2004). It is argued that employees through their behavior can strengthen or harm the brand values.
that are communicated externally (De Chernatony and Harris, 2001). It is therefore important that the whole organization is communicating as one unit (De Chernatony et al., 2006).

If the internal and external messages are inconsistent, it could result in a perception of duplicity and could negatively influence employees’ behavior and ability to deliver the brand image, which the organization desires. Thus, to avoid an inconsistent brand image, the external messages should go in line with the organization’s internal messages. (Miles and Mangold, 2004; De Chernatony et al., 2006)

2.3.3 Psychological contract
A psychological contract refers to an individual’s belief in mutual obligations between two parties, for example between an employee and an employer. This belief means that a promise has been made and where a consideration has been offered in exchange for that promise, which binds the concerned parties to a set of mutual obligations (Rousseau and Tijoriwala, 1998). Miles and Mangold (2005) argue that the psychological contract is an important part of the employee branding process since it makes employees trust their employers and enforce the motivation for serving customers and co-workers (Miles and Mangold, 2005). Thus, it requires that managers find appropriate ways to relate to employees (McDermott, Conway, Rousseau and Flood, 2013). When the messages are perceived different from what the employees experience in their daily basis, the psychological contract between the employer and the employees potentially breach (Miles et al., 2011). If the employees feel that their psychological contracts with the organization has been upheld, they are more likely to feel that the organization deliver its promises to their customers. In this case, the employees are likely to fulfill the organization’s expectations on them by projecting a desired brand image and also deliver a high level of service to the customers (Miles and Mangold, 2004).

2.3.4 The employee brand
Miles and Mangold (2007b) define the employee brand as “the image presented to an organizations customers and other stakeholders through its employees” (Miles and Mangold, 2007b: pp 77). Employees’ knowledge about the brand image and their upheld psychological contract with the organization have a major influence on employees ability to deliver the desired brand image of the organization (Miles et al.,
2011). The previous steps in the process influence the brand image that the employees are about to project. If the organization has managed to communicate the expectations and desired behavior of the brand, and if the psychological contract between the organization, managers and employees has been upheld, the employees have the ability to deliver the desired brand image to the customers. Hence, project the image that is expected from the organization (Miles and Mangold, 2004).

2.3.5 Outcomes of the employee branding process
If the employee can deliver the desired and expected brand image of the organization it can result in positive outcomes for the organization. However, if the message that goes through the organization is not transformed correctly to the employees, or if the psychological contract has been broken, the organization could negatively influence the employee turnover, productivity, and word of mouth (Miles and Mangold, 2004).

2.4 Brand loyalty
The concept of brand loyalty is explained as customers’ tendency to prefer and purchase more of one brand than of others (Jacoby, 1971). Brand loyalty is one of the most valuable contributors for competitive advantage and has become one of the most important issues for organizations to enhance. Brand loyalty serves as the aim for an organization’s marketing program, since it might generate high market shares, high return on investment and basically high brand equity (Kabiraj and Shanmugan, 2011). This is generated by loyal customers in terms of growth of per customer revenue, decrease in operating costs and increase in premium price (Reichheld, 1996; cited by Kabiraj and Shanmugan, 2011). It is further explained that brand loyalty can provide both customers and organizations with essential benefits. For the customer the brand he is loyal to can act as a signal of achieved expectation. Since the brand sends familiar and favorable signals, the customer buys the brand with more comfort. The customer believes that the brand will meet his expectations. This comfort would mostly be the result of the credibility of the brand that has been established from the customer’s past experiences of the brand (Kim et al., 2008). A brand loyal customer is less sensitive to competitors marketing and generates greater sales and revenues (Delgado-Ballester and Munuera-Alemán, 2001). Thus, the question of how to make customers more loyal to the brand has become one of the important issues for marketers (Kim et al., 2008).
Brand loyalty is explained as relational phenomena that refer to an acceptance and rejection function. In other words, it does not just concern to select in certain brands but also to select out others (Jacoby, 1971). Jacoby and Kyner (1973) explain it further. They state that brand loyalty does not just concern the repeat purchase behavior of a brand, but also the underlying reason of that behavior (Jacoby and Kyner, 1973). Brand loyalty further includes behavioral and attitudinal components. Behavioral component, also known as purchase loyalty refers to the process of repeated purchases where different brands are evaluated and where the customer chose one brand as the optimal (Jacoby and Kyner, 1973). Attitudes components, concern customers attitude towards the brand that he is loyal to (Jacoby, 1971). Attitudinal components further include a degree of dispositional commitment in terms of some unique values associated with the brand (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001). Further, Hee and Myung (2012) describe that when a customer enjoys both behavioral and attitudinal aspects, the brand commitment increases, which would have a positive impact on brand trust. These two elements positively influence the brand preferences and could therefore affect brand loyalty (Hee and Myung, 2012).

Brand trust refers to an organization’s willingness and ability to keep promises, which is determined on customers’ past experiences and prior interaction that has generated satisfaction towards a brand. Brand trust should therefore be seen as a key-mediating variable to develop brand loyalty (Delgado-Ballester and Munuera-Alemán, 2005). Nawaz and Usman (2011) emphasize that brand loyalty towards a brand is determined first of all by the quality of the features from the product or service. The perceived quality further affects satisfaction, trust and commitment towards the brand that also contribute to brand loyalty (Nawaz and Usman, 2011; Hee, Li, and Harris 2012). Furthermore, brand satisfaction is “... the outcome of the subjective evaluation that the chosen alternative meets or exceeds the expectations” (Engel et al., 1990; Cited by Bloemer and Kasper, 1995, pp 314). The outcome of a satisfied customer could be intention to repurchase the brand (Mittal and Kamakura, 2001) and tendency to recommend and talk favorable about the brand to others (Wangenheim and Bayón, 2007). However, a satisfied customer does not necessarily have to be a loyal customer. Brand loyalty can be deeply rooted within customers’ intension and behavior towards the brand (Bloemer and Kasper, 1995). Further, some authors argue
that brand loyalty is dependent on if customers can identify themselves with the brand (Hee et al., 2012), where the brand image is the most important source to enhance brand loyalty (Kabiraj and Shanmugan, 2011). Thus, identification between a customer and a brand is also important if the customers are to be emotional attached to a particular brand, which symbolizes an affective committed customer (Iglesias, Singh, and Batista-Foguet, 2011).
2.5 Chapter summary

Table 1. Chapter summary theoretical concepts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theoretical concepts</th>
<th>Summary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mission, vision and values</td>
<td>The missions and values are the cornerstone in how the organizations’ desired brand image should be defined (Miles and Mangold, 2005). The vision further describes how the organization should act to reach the desired future of the organization. (Mirvis et al., 2010).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sources of messages</td>
<td>Informal internal, formal internal, informal external and formal external messages will enable employees to know, understand, and experience the desired brand image (Miles and Mangold, 2004) and further contribute to the upholding of employees’ psychological contract with the employer (Miles et al., 2011)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychological contract</td>
<td>A mutual belief that an obligation has been made between two parties, for instance between an employee and an employer (Rousseau and Tijoriwala, 1998). This is an important part in the employee branding process since it makes employees trust their employers and enforce the motivation for serving customers and co-workers (Miles and Mangold, 2005)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employee brand image</td>
<td>The image that employees are to project (Miles and Mangold 2004).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brand loyalty</td>
<td>Consist of four factors:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Commitment (Nawaz and Usman, 2011; Hee, et al., 2012; Iglesias et al., 2011)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Trust (Nawaz and Usman, 2011; Hee et al., 2012)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. Identification (Hee et al., 2012).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3 Research model and research questions

After having reviewed the existing literature about the relevant concepts, this chapter will provide a research model that will work as a framework for this thesis. The model is constructed by the authors and landed in four research questions that need to be answered in order to meet the purpose.

3.1 Research model

The purpose of this thesis was to explore the relationship between an organization’s employee branding and brand loyalty. The model presented below is based upon the literature review and represent different theoretical concepts considered necessary to investigate in order to meet the purpose. The first step of the research model aimed to clarify the organization’s mission and values in order to get an understanding of the organization’s desired brand image, which according to Miles et al. (2011) serves as cornerstones for the desired brand image (Miles et al., 2011). In addition to the mission and values the organizations vision was also found as a cornerstone in the development of an organization’s desired brand image, since the vision describes the desired future for the organization (Mirvis et al., 2010). Furthermore, the brand image of the organization is then communicated through four sources of messages, formal internal (FIM), informal internal (IIM), formal external (FEM) and informal external (IEM) messages. These sources of messages will determine how the organization communicates the desired brand images to its employees. (See figure 2)

![Figure 2 – Step one]
The different sources of messages further contribute to the extent to which the *psychological contract* between the employees and the organization is upheld, and the *employees’ knowledge of the desired brand image* of the organization (Miles et al., 2011). This will thus bring knowledge about how the organization is managing and developing their employee branding so that employees understand and are being motivated to project the desired brand image of the organization. It will further bring knowledge regarding in what way the different sources of messages affect employees’ motivation and ability to project the desired brand image of the organization.

![Diagram](image)

**Figure 3 – Step two**

The employees’ *knowledge of the desired brand image* and if the employees feel that psychological contract has been upheld, have impact on the employee brand image. This will determine if the employees have adopted and thus are projecting the desired brand image of the organization (Miles and Mangold, 2004; Miles et al., 2011). All the steps until this stage will give empirical evidence of how the organization is managing the desired brand image internally and in what way it contributes to employees’ motivation and ability to project the desired brand image. Therefore the previous steps are necessary and lay the foundation to determine the final step in the research model (see figure 4 - the research model), which involve the brand loyal...
customers of the organization. This would enable empirical evidence to be gathered about the relationship between an organization’s employee branding and in what way that could be related to brand loyalty.

![Research Model](image)

**Figure 4 - The research model**

Previous steps are all included in the final research model, which is presented above (see figure 4 – the research model). This research model will be the guidance for how the research will be conducted. It will serve as the foundation for the operationalization and hence a tool to explore the relationship between employee branding and brand loyal customers.

### 3.2 Research questions

The research model landed in four research questions that need to be answered in order to solve the purpose of this thesis:

- **RQ1**: How does the organization’s management communicate its desired brand image to the employees?
- **RQ2**: How do the various sources of messages contribute to employees’ knowledge of the desired brand image?
- **RQ3**: How do the various sources of messages contribute to the upholding of the psychological contract between the employees and the organization?
- **RQ4**: How does the image projected by employees influence brand loyalty?
4 Methodology

This chapter will explain how the thesis was conducted. The chapter consists of theory reviews of the available methodological choices for this thesis, followed by the author’s motivations. Finally, the chapter ends with a summary of the methodological choices.

4.1 Research approach

4.1.1 Inductive VS Deductive research

Inductive and deductive are the two main approaches in research. The inductive research is based on that the theory is the outcome of the research, where the findings of the theory prompted the whole research (Bryman and Bell, 2011). The inductive approach can be explained as the researcher creating or improving theory out of data (Ghauri and Grønhaug, 2005). Thus, it implies generalized conclusions on the basis of observations and thereby forms a new theory. The deductive research approach on the other hand is the opposite of inductive research approach and is the most common view to investigate the relationship between theory and data (Bryman and Bell, 2011). The deductive approach means that the researchers draw conclusions through logic reasoning (Ghauri and Grønhaug, 2005). It starts with an investigation in existing literature and from that a hypothesis that is based upon existing theory is found (Bryman and Bell, 2011). The constructed hypothesis needs to be expressed in operational terms, which means that is has to show exactly how the concepts or variables are to be measured before they are tested empirically (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2009). Based upon the outcome of the gained empirical data the hypotheses are finally conformed or rejected. Finally, a potentially revision of the existing theory might be a fact, (Bryman and Bell 2011) which means modifying the theory in relation to the findings. A deductive approach is more common in a quantitative research, but that does not imply that it is exclusively used only for a quantitative research. Further, a deductive research approach is often less risky than an inductive research approach. Consequently, the risk in which a deductive approach could face is
the risk of non-response of the questionnaires, whereas an inductive approach could face the risk that no useful data or patterns would emerge (Saunders et al., 2009).

Saunders et al., (2009) argue that one research approach might not exclude the other. It is fully possible to combine the inductive and deductive research, and in many cases, even more favorable. A combination of the two approaches often refers to abduction, which is the most recommended approach for identifying patterns, to reveal deep structures (Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2000).

This thesis was based on a combination of inductive and deductive research approach and thus the approach of abduction. This is motivated as followed; the research has its basis in existing theory and from the theory the operationalization of the investigated concepts derives, which is the approach for deduction (Bryman and Bell, 2011; Saunders et al., 2009). Further, the inductive reasoning becomes clear through the two following statements; (1) this research aims to get a deep understanding of the research context and (2) is less concerned with the need to generalize. These are characteristics that emphasize an inductive research approach (Saunders et al., 2009). Moreover, the conclusions might end up in a modification of the existing literature, where the relationship between employee branding and brand loyalty might become clear or the risk of no useful data or pattern matching could emerge in order to explore the relationship.

4.1.2 Qualitative VS Quantitative research
Quantitative research is constructed as a research approach that emphasizes quantification in the collection and analysis of data, often in forms of numbers and statistics. The aim with a quantitative study is to make generalizations of the processed results of the conducted study. Qualitative research, on the other hand, is constructed as a research approach that focuses on words rather than the quantification and is often carried out in forms of interviews and focus groups. The qualitative research strategy is less formalized and used to describe complicated situations. Such strategy strives to gain deeper knowledge and understanding of the studied problem (Bryman and Bell, 2011), through identifying underlying behavior and attitudes among respondents (Creswell, 2009). A qualitative research often contains multiple sources of data and does not rely on data collected from one source. Qualitative research could contain data collected from interviews, observations,
and/or documents in natural settings (Creswell, 2009). Therefore, qualitative research can be used to describe and emphasize different contexts, where the researcher picks up and describes details within the contexts (Bryman and Bell, 2005).

This thesis was conducted as qualitative in its approach, since it aimed to explore the relationship between two concepts and thus required rich information. Further, the thesis required qualitative data to be collected from internal organizational activities in order to meet the purpose. The qualitative approach was also the most suitable approach since the interest of the thesis does not lay in gathering statistical information. In order to meet the purpose of this thesis, it required data to be collected within one specific context.

4.2 Research design

Research design can be explained as the plan the researcher use to answer the research questions (Bryman and Bell, 2011; Shukla, 2008; Saunders et al., 2009). This make the choice for research design important, since the consequence of a poorly developed research design fails to provide clear answers of the research questions and thus the relevance and rigor of the investigation could be questioned (Shukla, 2008; Saunders et al., 2009).

There are three research designs that are most common in marketing research; exploratory design, descriptive design and causal research design (Shukla, 2008; Saunders et al., 2009).

An exploratory research design is often qualitative in its approach (Shukla, 2008) and is to be used when the research problem is not clear (Ghauri and Grønhaug, 2005). It is normally carried out at the early stages of a research, with the aim to clarify research problem and research direction (Bryman and Bell, 2011). A key characteristic with an exploratory research design is that it allows the researcher to be flexible due to the fact that the research area is not absolute clear (Ghauri and Grønhaug, 2005). This induces that the researcher might need to change research direction as a result of new data and new insight within the research field. Thus, the consequence with an exploratory research design could be that time reveals that the research is not needed to be taken any further (Saunders et al., 2009). However, this does not necessarily mean that the research problem is not understood. It is therefore
no reason not to use prior information that may concern the research area. Further, an exploratory research design requires key skills in theorizing, which refers to the ability to observe, get information and construct explanation for the research area (Ghauri and Grønhaug, 2005).

In a descriptive research design the problem is structured and well understood (Ghauri and Grønhaug, 2005). These designs answer who, what, when, where and how questions and aims to get a deeper understanding about the research subject (Bryman and Bell, 2011). The key characteristics of a descriptive research design are structure, precise rules and procedures. Thus, it implies a detailed plan concerning what sample frame to use, how to collect data, and how to measure the concepts. The variation in the data collection process should be held as its minimum. Further, a descriptive research design may include more than one variable (Ghauri and Grønhaug, 2005). The most common way for both quantitative and qualitative research is to use a cross-sectional research design (Bryman, 2006). However, if the cross-sectional research design is to be used in a qualitative approach the quality criterion of validity and reliability must carefully be evaluated (Bryman and Bell, 2011). Further, a cross-sectional research design aims to determine patterns and relationships between variables. The cross-sectional design could be single or multiple, which implies that data is collected at a single point in time, and thus not study variables over time (single), or data collection at a single point but on multiple cases (multiple) (Ghauri and Grønhaug, 2005; Bryman and Bell, 2011).

A causal research design is used to establish if one variable determine or causes the value of another variable (Ghauri and Grønhaug, 2005; Bryman and Bell, 2011). Further, in causal research the problems that are under investigation is well structured and the cause and effect between variables is examined. The main task is to isolate causes and investigate if and to what extent causes result in effects. The causal design is complicated and the main objective should be to focus on some key characteristics in order to successfully manage this kind of design (Ghauri and Grønhaug, 2005).

All three previous discussed research designs were evaluated when the choice of research design was made. The causal research design as mentioned before aims to determine how one variable causes the value of another variable (Ghauri and
Grønhaug, 2005; Bryman and Bell, 2011), which was not the aim for this study. The choice was between the exploratory research design and the descriptive research design. This thesis has its base in an immature stage of a research field, which implies that the research area is not absolutely clear. Thus, employee branding and brand loyalty has been separately investigated, but how the concepts could be related in an employee branding context are yet to be investigated. The research problem was clearly understood but since no relationship between the two concepts has been established, the research direction for this thesis could change while conducting the data and thus provide new insight within the research area or the consequence of no further research is needed. This implies that a descriptive research design was excluded and the choice of research design therefore refers to the exploratory research design.

4.3 Data sources

There are two different data sources: secondary data and primary data. Secondary data is data collected for some other purpose than solving the problem at hand (Bryman and Bell, 2011). The first advantageous of this type of data is that the collection saves time and money. The secondary data is useful not only for solving the research problem, but also to explain and to better understand the problem (Ghauri and Grønhaug, 2005), since it can provide the researcher with background information necessary to guide the research project (Bryman and Bell, 2011). The researchers have to evaluate the secondary data in contrast to the research problem, whether or not the available data is useful (Ghauri and Grønhaug, 2005).

Primary data, on the other hand, is data collected first-hand in order to solve the specific research problem. The data is dependent on the research problem and research design. This type of data is advantageous since it provides the study with tailor-made information specific for the research problem (Ghauri and Grønhaug, 2005). The collection of primary data is resource and time consuming (Bryman and Bell, 2011), which is the argued main disadvantage with primary data (Ghauri and Grønhaug, 2005).

This thesis demanded mostly primary data, since it aimed to explore a specific research problem. The primary data was collected to get a deeper understanding of how the image was transformed through the organization and how it was projected
through the employees. The data collected from the customers aimed to get a deeper understanding of the relationship between the brand image that is projected through the employees and how this could be related to brand loyalty. Thus, primary data was collected from managers, employees, and customers through several in-depth interviews. Secondary data was collected from the organization’s annual report from the year of 2012. The secondary data was collected in order to provide background information about the organization’s mission, vision, and value statements. Thus, it provided empirical data about the desired brand image of the organization and thereby data that guided the thesis.

4.4 Research strategy

Saunders et al. (2009) emphasize that no research strategy is superior or inferior to the other. Thus, what is important is not the meaning of a particular strategy but whether it makes it possible to answer the research questions and objectives (Saunders et al., 2009). Yin (2009) performs a framework that describes in which situation different strategies are the most relevant to use. In order to determine which strategy that is best suited for the intended research, three conditions need to be considered; (1) forms of research question, (2) the extent of control a researcher has over actual behavioral events, and finally (3) if it is needed to focus on contemporary events (Yin, 2009).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research strategy</th>
<th>Form of research question</th>
<th>Requires control over behavioral events</th>
<th>Focuses on contemporary events</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Experiment</td>
<td>How, why</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Survey</td>
<td>Who, what, where, how many, how much</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Archival analysis</td>
<td>Who, what, where, how many, how much</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes/no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History</td>
<td>How, why</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case study</td>
<td>How, why</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 5 - Research strategies (Adapted from Yin, 2009, pp. 8).

The five strategies that Yin (2009) states are the most common in business research and they were all taken into consideration while the strategy of this thesis was selected. In order to determine which strategy that would serve as most appropriate for this thesis an explanation of each strategy was needed.
4.4.1 Experiment
The goal with experimental research strategies is to verify, falsify, or establish the validity of the stated hypotheses. One or several variables can be considered, to be able to establish differences of effects. When the purpose of the research is an investigation of a cause and effect relationship, this research strategy is argued to be the most suitable (Yin, 2009). By studying one or more experimental groups to certain treatments this relationship can be investigated. After this is done, the results that are found are compared to those that are carried out from results that are found from controlled groups that are not taking any treatment. At first, the problem is formulated and the hypothesis often focuses the actual issues. Secondly, to test the stated hypothesis the researcher views all conditions, except from the independent variables. The changes that the researchers find in the dependent variables are after this first observed and then recorded. The independent variables are tested one by one to get a clearer understanding of the relationship between these variables and the dependent ones. Thus, this method can be problematic to use in an investigation regarding social science (Phophalia, 2010).

4.4.2 Survey
Survey strategies are often used when the researcher aims to collect data and to present it in a statistical form. The data is collected from a sample of the target population and on the basis of the result that are gathered, the researcher aims to make generalizations (Bryman and Bell, 2011). The strategy is argued by Yin (2009) to be suitable for studies that aim to predict certain outcomes (Yin, 2009).

4.4.3 Archival analysis
Archival analysis is a research strategy that involves observations of collected documents of the unit of which the research have interest. This strategy is considered to be most suitable for a research that aims to describe incidents or a specific phenomenon. It is, likely to the survey, a relevant strategy when the researcher predicts certain outcomes. (Yin, 2009)

4.4.4 History
This strategy aims to collect data that are related to the research’s specific problem by viewing the past. This sort of information is mainly collected from written documents of different types. It can be reports, documents, diaries or newspapers. This strategy
can add human knowledge about the past to the researcher and it can thereby also result in useful knowledge for the future. (Phophalia, 2010)

### 4.4.5 Case study

Case study strategies are useful for intensive analysis of one unit. The goal with such strategies is to emphasize factors that could be developed from the unit in relation to the context and relevant theory. (Bryman and Bell, 2011)

Such strategy is relevant when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly defined (Merriam, 1998) and is highly appropriate when there is no opportunity to control or manipulate variables, but when situations or events need an explanation (Gray, 2009). The case study should therefore consist of research questions based on how and why questions (Yin, 2009). In a case study the researcher makes an intensive investigation on a group, a person, an organization, an institution, a community or an entire culture. The researcher gathers relevant information about present status, past experiences and environmental forces that could contribute to the behavior and the individuality of the unit (Creswell, 2009; Gray, 2009). Limitations might be that this usually is an expensive method to use. It is also difficult to make generalizations on a single case and then apply it on a whole population (Phophalia, 2010). However, Yin (2012) argues that the aim is not to generalize a case in order to apply it on the whole population. Instead, a case study can be generalized analytically. An analytic generalization is when researchers use the study’s theoretical framework and through that creates a logic that could be applicable in other situations (Yin, 2012). Objectivity is also argued to be of great importance in case study research, in order to minimize the risk of personal bias caused by the researcher (Phophalia, 2010).

A case study can be single or multiple in its approach. Which approach to choose depends on the context and the specific case. A single case could be selected since it provides the research with an opportunity to analyze a phenomenon that few have researched before (Saunders et al., 2009). Regardless of if the case is single or multiple in its approach, it could have a holistic or embedded level (Yin, 2012). A single holistic case study could be chosen when testing hypothesis or a theory on one
unit (Gray, 2009). A single embedded case study regards one specific unit as well, but involves different units of analysis. A unit of analysis could for example be data collected from one specific group of employees within an organization (Yin, 2012). The levels are the same for multiple case studies. When a study requires multiple cases, but does not require several units of analysis, a multiple holistic case study can be chosen. If the study requires both several cases and different units of analysis, the best case would be a multiple embedded case study (Gray, 2009).

The explanation of each strategy above indicates that experiment, survey, archival analysis and history as strategies are not relevant for this thesis. First, experiment as a strategy was excluded due to the fact that it aims to establish the cause and effect between variables. The survey as well as the archival analysis is appropriate when research questions should answer *who*, *what*, *where*, *how many*, and *how much* questions (Yin, 2009). Considering this, together with the fact that survey, as a strategy is most suitable for quantitative studies, these two strategies were not appropriate for this thesis. Considering the table presented by Yin (2009), the history as a strategy could have been appropriate for this thesis. However, since it aims to collect data through an investigation of the past (Phophalia, 2010), this strategy was excluded.

Since this thesis aimed to describe one unit and several units of analysis, it was conducted as a single embedded case study. The thesis had three different units of analysis in order to get deep insight in the organization. Further, the case study strategy was also considered the most appropriate since the thesis aimed to explore the relationship between two concepts. The bounds are not absolutely clear, even though they have been studied separately. Furthermore, the single embedded case study can also be motivated as the most appropriate one by using Yin’s (2009) framework. The research questions were posed in (1) form of how and why questions, (2) the study is not in need for control of behavioral events, rather to understand behavior, and (3) focuses on contemporary events. These are all characteristics that symbolize a case study (Yin, 2009).
4.5 Data collection method
The data collection task begins when the researcher has defined the research problem and further also the research plan. The researcher has to decide whether primary or secondary data should be used for the study and it is according to this decision the method of data collection should be selected (Kothari, 2004). There are a huge variety of methods to choose from when deciding how to collect the data for a specific study. The following five are considered to be the main methods; observations, surveys, interviews, focus groups, and content analysis. *In-depth interviews, observations* and *focus groups* are mainly used when collecting data for research studies with a qualitative approach. For collecting quantitative data surveys, structured interviews, structured observations, and content analysis are the most relevant data collection method to use (Bryman and Bell, 2005).

4.6 Data collection instrument
As mentioned in chapter 4.5, this thesis was a qualitative research and therefore the three mentioned qualitative data collection methods were relevant for this thesis and explained further below.

4.6.1 Focus groups
*Focus groups* can be described as a qualitative method in which the researcher interviews a group of people, where the aim is to allow the respondents to discuss about a certain topic with each other (Bryman and Bell, 2005). The session often lasts between 90 minutes and two hours and it is recommended that it is led by a trained moderator (Sachdeva, 2009). A focus group aims to give the researcher a deeper understanding of a specific subject. It is also interesting for the researcher how the respondents act in a situation when a subject is discussed in a bigger group. It is analyzed how the respondent acts and reacts on the other respondents’ opinions. The focus group is a method when the mutual construction of meaning is vital (Bryman and Bell, 2005).

An advantage of focus groups is that the session can be relatively unstructured. Hence, the respondent’s experiences and opinions about a certain subject can be discussed in a way that does not limit the respondents (Bryman and Bell, 2005). The respondents should be encouraged to ask questions to each other and share and
comment other respondents’ experiences and opinions (Kitzinger, 1995).

The group dynamics can result in that the respondents find new and more innovative ways and this can in turn lead to more creative ideas of solving problems. In a focus group the respondents have the opportunity to bring up and discuss topics that they find more interesting and important for the discussed subject. The moderator of the focus group therefore takes a relatively passive role in the session, with the aim to ensure that the discussion is not leaving the subject. The respondents get the opportunity to lead the direction of the discussion and this is also one of the main advantages with focus groups as a method (Bryman and Bell, 2005). However, there are some disadvantages with group dynamic and focus group as a data collection method. First, the respondents might not be willing to share their opinions due to the possible consequence of group pressure. Further, the presence of other respondents could compromise the confidentiality of the individual respondents’ answers, which might affect the respondent’s willingness to share personal opinions and thus, it can limit the usefulness of the gathered data (Kitzinger, 1995).

4.6.2 In-depth interviews

Interviews are probably the most frequently used method when it comes to qualitative research. Bryman and Bell (2005) argue that it is the interview’s flexible character that makes it attractive in qualitative research. An in-depth interview is less structured than the methods used in quantitative research. In qualitative research the interviewer puts a larger focus on trying to understand the respondent’s opinions and beliefs. (Bryman and Bell, 2005)

The interviewer is given room to ask questions that are not presented in the prepared questionnaire. It is important to get to know as much as possible about the respondent’s opinions regarding the specific subject, and therefore probing is a vital part of the in-debt interview. The respondent should be the one who controls the direction of the session, with support from the interviewer. The main focus during this sort of method session is to get as detailed answers from the respondent as possible (Bryman and Bell, 2005). The interview method’s strength is also that it aims to be similar to an everyday conversation situation. The researcher does not want to control the session, but rather to let the respondents take the lead. The difference between the
interview and an everyday conversation is that the researcher aims to get some specific questions answered and this requires that the researcher has to be slightly directive during the session (Holme and Solvang, 1997).

In a qualitative interview standardized questionnaires are not used, this because of the researcher’s intension of not directing the respondents significantly. Instead, the researcher writes down some underlying information in a manual. This to make it easier to make sure that the interview will go in a direction that can help the researcher solving the questions. Thus, it implies that the researcher should not be too bound by the manual. (Holme and Solvang, 1997)

Bryman and Bell (2005) makes a distinction between structured and qualitative interviews. The qualitative interviews tend to be less structured and it is the respondent’s standpoint, perceptions, and points of views that are of importance. The qualitative interviews further allow the interview to take different directions in order to gain deeper understanding about what the respondent finds relevant and of great importance (Bryman and Bell, 2005). An unstructured interview allows the researcher to just take short notes while going through different pre-set themes. In an unstructured interview the interviewer could ask just one single question and then respond to information that seems useful. This type of interviews tends to be similar to a conversation in its character. The semi-structured interview tends to be more structured. The researcher has a list of questions and topics that should be covered during the interview, which is often referred to as the interview guide. Even though this type of interviews is more structured, the respondent is allowed to answer the questions “freely”. The interviewer is also allowed to follow up questions that are not stated in the interview guide. (Bryman and Bell, 2011)

Both the unstructured interviews and the semi-structured interviews are flexible in its process. The main goal of these interviews is to get an understanding of how the respondents frame and understand the different things. Also, what the respondents sees as important in explaining and understanding the events, patterns, and forms of behaviors that are investigated (Bryman and Bell, 2011). The interviews can take place face-to-face or over the telephone. Face-to-face interviews tend to be more costly than the telephone interviews due to the fact that the researchers could have
interview sessions at different locations and thereby would have to travel. During the face-to-face interview, the respondent’s behavior can be observed which is argued to be advantageous. However, the telephone interview is argued to be advantageous, since the risk for interviewer bias could be lower (Jacobsen, 2002).

4.6.3 Observations

Observations are a data collection method that aims to observe peoples’ behavior in order to do an analytic interpretation (Gray, 2009). This method allows the researcher to determine dynamic behavior more accurately than from a questionnaire or from interviews. Thus, it gives an understanding of different behavior, attitudes and situations. However, it is difficult to translate the observed behavior into scientifically accepted information and to meet the quality criteria of validity and reliability (Ghauri and Grønhaug, 2005).

According to Bryman and Bell, (2011) there are a number of different approaches of observations that can be used in business research, for example: structured, systematic, participant, non-participant and simple observations. However, the two most common forms of observations used are participant and non-participant observations (Bryman and Bell, 2011; Ghauri and Grønhaug, 2005). The first mentioned allows the researcher to actively participate in the situation where the studied behavior is to be determined, whereas non-participant observation aims to observe without intervene or participate in the situation that is being investigated (Bryman and Bell, 2011; Ghauri and Grønhaug, 2005).

Observations was excluded as data collection method in this thesis, since the information needed to answer the purpose must be generated by the respondents’ opinions about the organization’s behavior, rather than information from observed behaviors in different situations within the organization. Further, since the thesis aimed to explore the relationship between two concepts, data were collected from three different segments within the organization. The data had to be rich and in-depth in order to meet the purpose. Since in-depth interviews allow data to be collected without the risk of group pressure and the exploitation of individual respondents’ answers, this data collection method were considered appropriate because the thesis needed respondents’ personal values and beliefs. The interviews were constructed as
semi-structured, since the questions followed an interview guide and thereby allowed proper questions. This was considered as the most efficient approach for the reason that it allows the respondents to answer freely but within a limited frame. The aim with the interviews was to get a deeper understanding in order to explore the relationship between the concepts. It was also a relevant choice of method since it opened up for the interviewer to ask probing questions, that may bring information to the research that was not considered before the interviews were actually conducted. Also, to minimize the risk that other respondents would influence one respondent’s answer, which could be a consequence of the group pressure, the focus group was excluded as a data collection instrument. The interviews were held both face-to-face with the respondents and via telephone.

4.6.4 Operationalization and measurement of variables

The operationalization is critical for the research and should show how the theory will be measured in the reality (Holme and Solvang, 1997). Without defining theory and concepts it is not possible to relate them to the gathered data. It is therefore important to map empirical observations and theory to relate findings to the knowledge base. If the research is descriptive, conceptual definitions of the theory are needed (Ghauri and Grønhaug, 2005). It further requires specified operational definition in order to enable coding of the findings (Ghauri and Grønhaug, 2005; Holme and Solvang, 1997). An operational definition is needed since it aims to make the concepts closely related to the objective reality. And thus, it contains of conceptual definitions that describe how a certain phenomenon could be discovered in the objective reality (Arbnor and Bjerke, 1994). In other words, the operationalization process involves the transformation of concepts into measurements and first when the concepts are clearly defined the data collection can begin. (Arbnor and Bjerke, 1994).

The theoretical concepts served as the foundation for the operationalization in this thesis. These concepts were identified in the literature review and were then visualized in the research model (see chapter 3). First, a conceptual definition of each concept was made in order to provide information of the meaning of each concept and to be able to relate them to the gathered data. Further, each theoretical concept was transformed into operational definitions in order to explain how these concepts were applied to gain the data needed for this particular thesis. This would give clarity of
how the theoretical concepts could be used in reality (Ghauri and Grønhaug, 2005). Finally, the theoretical concepts were transformed into specific and measureable variables to ensure that the questions that the operationalization was built upon reflected the intended theoretical concept. The measures are connected to the questions in the questionnaires (see appendix 1, 2, and 3).

The employee branding process, conceptualized by Miles and Mangold (2004), contains several factors that the organization needs to consider while managing employee branding. These factors have been operationalized to give clarity to each concept’s contribution in the employee branding process (see operational definition). Finally, in order to understand the relationship between employee branding and brand loyal customers, a theoretical definition of brand loyalty was needed. The literature review provided two aspects of brand loyalty (behavioral and attitudinal). These aspects of brand loyalty consist of concepts such as, satisfaction, commitment, trust, and identification. Theoretical and operational definitions of each concept were necessary in order to develop questions that reflected brand loyalty and thus brand loyalty in the context of employee branding.
Table 2. Operationalization of the employee branding process

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concept</th>
<th>Conceptual definition</th>
<th>Operational definition</th>
<th>Measures</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Employee branding process** | “The image presented to an organization’s customers and other stakeholders through its employees” (Miles and Mangold, 2011) | Give understanding of how the brand image is transmitted within the organization through the employee branding process. | - Missions and values (Miles, and Mangold, 2005)  
- Messages (Miles, and Mangold, 2004)  
- Psychological contracts (Miles, and Mangold, 2004)  
- Employee brand image (Miles, and Mangold, 2004)  
- Outcomes of the employee branding process (Miles, and Mangold, 2004) |
| **Missions and values**    | The mission and values are the foundation for the definition of the desired brand image (Miles and Mangold, 2005) | To get an understanding of the organization’s desired brand image. | - Mission (Miles, and Mangold, 2005)  
- Values (Miles, and Mangold, 2005)  
- Vision (Mirvis et al., 2010). |
<p>| <strong>Messages</strong>               | Messages that would enable employees to know, understand, and experience the desired brand image (Miles and Mangold, 2004) | To get an understanding of how the organization communicates the desired brand image to their employees | - Informal internal messages, formal internal messages, and informal external messages (Miles and Mangold, 2011) |
| <strong>Informal internal</strong>   | The informal internal                                                                   | How the behavior                                                                       | - Coworker influence                                                                                                                |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>messages</strong></th>
<th>Messages derive from coworkers and managers. It can consist of interactions and observations of employees, supervisors, and friends that work for the organization (Miles and Mangold, 2004)</th>
<th>from managers and co-workers contributes to the employees’ knowledge about the desired brand image and how the psychological contracts are being upheld.</th>
<th>(Miles and Mangold, 2004) - Influence of the organization’s culture (Miles and Mangold, 2004) - Influence of organizational leadership and management (Miles and Mangold, 2004)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Formal internal messages</strong></td>
<td>Messages that stem from human resource management systems and public relation systems. Will guide the behavior of employees (Miles and Mangold, 2004). There should also be brand related information and training sessions (Henkel et al., 2007)</td>
<td>How the human resource management and public relation systems contribute to the upholding of employees’ psychological contracts and to employees’ knowledge of the desired brand image</td>
<td>- Written documents (Henkel et al., 2007) - Training sessions (Henkel et al., 2007) - Public relations systems (Miles and Mangold, 2004)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Informal external messages</strong></td>
<td>The informal external messages come in form of word of mouth from external sources (Miles and Mangold, 2004)</td>
<td>To gain understanding of how informal external messages are influencing employees’ knowledge about the desired brand image and upholding of psychological contracts.</td>
<td>- Word of mouth (Miles and Mangold, 2004) - Customer feedback (Miles and Mangold, 2004)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Formal external messages</strong></td>
<td>The formal external messages consist of advertising and public relations which contribute to employees understanding of the organizations brand</td>
<td>To get an understanding if the promotional processes also reflect organizational values externally and how these</td>
<td>- Advertising (Miles et al., 2011) - Public relations (Miles et al., 2011)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Psychological contracts | “An individual’s beliefs in mutual obligations between a person and another party” (Rousseau and Tijoriwala, 1998) | To get an understanding of how managers act in accordance with the brand image and thereby keep employees motivated to project that same image. | - Promise keeping (Miles, and Mangold, 2004)  
- Motivation (Miles, and Mangold, 2004)  
- Lead by example (Boyd and Sutherland, 2006)  
- Mediation by managers (Boyd and Sutherland, 2006) |
| Employees knowledge of the desired brand image (Messages) | “The employees who clearly understand the aspect of communicating the brand image, can deliver the organization’s desired expectations (Miles et al., 2011) | To get an understanding of which messages that contributes to employees’ knowledge about the desired brand image. (For theoretical definitions of each variable, see “messages”) | - Informal internal messages  
- Formal internal messages  
- Informal external messages  
- Formal external messages (Miles and Mangold, 2004; Miles et al., 2011) |
| Employee brand image | The image that the employees are about to project to others (Miles and Mangold, 2004) | To get an understanding of how the employees have perceived the desired brand image. | - Desired brand image (Miles and Mangold, 2004)  
- Behavior (Miles and Mangold, 2004) |
| Outcomes of the employee branding process | “If the employee can deliver the desired and expected brand image of the organization it can result in positive outcomes for the organization” (Miles and Mangold, 2004) | To get an understanding if and how brand loyalty could be a positive outcome of the employee branding process. | - Brand loyalty |
Table 3. Operationalization of brand loyalty

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Concept</th>
<th>Conceptual definition</th>
<th>Operational definition</th>
<th>Measures</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Brand loyalty</strong></td>
<td>Customers’ tendency to prefer and purchase more of one brand than of others. Consist of behavioral and attitude components (Jacoby, 1971)</td>
<td>To get a deeper understanding for the relationship between the employee branding process and customer brand loyalty.</td>
<td><strong>Behavioral aspects:</strong>&lt;br&gt;- Satisfaction (Nawaz and Usman, 2011; Delgado-Ballester and Munuera-Alemán, 2005)&lt;br&gt;- Commitment (Nawaz and Usman, 2011; Hee et al., 2012)&lt;br&gt;- Trust (Nawaz and Usman, 2011; Hee, et al., 2012)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Satisfaction</strong></td>
<td>“Brand satisfaction is the outcome of the subjective evaluation that the chosen alternative (the brand) meets or exceeds the expectations” (Engel et al., 1990; Cited by Bloemer and Kasper, 1995, pp 314)</td>
<td>To get an understanding for the behavioral aspect of brand loyalty. In this context – how the behavior of employees leads to customer brand loyalty.</td>
<td><strong>Attitudinal aspects:</strong>&lt;br&gt;- Overall quality (Nawaz and Usman, 2011)&lt;br&gt;- Confirmation of expectations (Kim et al., 2008)&lt;br&gt;- Repurchase intention (Jacoby and Kyner, 1973; Mittal and Kamakura, 2001)&lt;br&gt;- Positive word of mouth (Wangenheim and Bayón, 2007).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Commitment | Identification between a customer and a brand is important if the customer is to be emotional attached to a particular brand, which symbolizes an affective committed customer (Iglesias et al., 2011). | To get an understanding of how employee branding affects the attitudinal aspect of brand loyalty. In this context – how employee branding affects customer commitment towards the brand. | - Emotional attachment (Hee et al., 2012; Iglesias et al., 2011).  
- Affective commitment (Iglesias et al., 2011).  
- Identification with the brand (Hee et al., 2012; Iglesias et al., 2011). |
| Trust | Refers to the past experiences and prior interaction that has generated satisfaction towards a brand (Delgado-Ballester and Munuera-Alemán, 2005) | Understanding for both attitudinal and behavioral aspects of brand loyalty. In this context – how the process of employee branding affects customers’ trust in the brand. | - Promise keeping (Delgado-Ballester and Munuera-Alemán, 2005). |
| Identification | Brand loyalty is dependent on if customers can identify themselves with the brand (Hee et al., 2012) | To gain deeper understanding for the attitudinal aspect of brand loyalty. In this context – how the image, projected by employees, affects customers’ identification to the brand. | - Image delivered by employees (Kabiraj and Shanmugan, 2011). |

The questions in the interview guides derived from the measures in the operationalization. The questions regarding employee branding and the employee branding process can be found in appendix 1 – interview guide managers, and in appendix 2 – interview guide employees. The questions regarding brand loyalty can be found in appendix 3 – interview guide customers. The measures were stated after
each question in order to make it easier to connect the specific question to the specific measure.

4.6.5 Interview guide

An interview guide is less specific than the notion of a schedule used in structured interviews. The interview guide can contain a brief list of memory prompts of areas that are to be covered during the interview, which is mostly for the unstructured interviews, or a pre-set of questions and issues that will be covered in the semi-structured interviews. The interview guide does not necessarily have to contain of words, it could also contain visual items that are related to the subject (Bryman and Bell, 2011). However, it is important that the interview guide is compared to the specific research problem in order for it to serve as a tool for solving the problem and covers the areas that need to be covered (Ghauri and Grønhaug, 2005).

Three different interview guides were conducted before the interviews were held. The questions were based on the operationalization presented in paragraph 4.6.4 – Operationalization and measurements of variables, and the interview guides can be found in appendix 1, 2, and 3.

The first interview guide (see appendix 1 – interview guide managers) was conducted for the first segment of the organization, the managers. The questions were based on the theoretical concepts about the employee branding process in order to collect data regarding how the organization handled this within the organization. The questions also provided data about the organization’s desired brand image.

Interview guide two (see appendix 2 – interview guide employees) was conducted for the employees of the organization, which were the second segment. The questions were addressed for the employees that interact with the end customers of the organization. The questions were based on the theoretical concepts about the employee branding process in order to collect data regarding how the process contribute to their knowledge and motivation of projecting the desired brand image.
Finally, the last interview guide (see appendix 3 – interview guide customers) was addressed for the third segment, the customers of the organization. These questions were based on the theoretical concepts of brand loyalty. The questions collected data regarding how the customers perceived the brand image and how employees’ behavior contributed to their loyalty towards the brand.

4.6.6 Pretesting

Pretesting is a useful way to prepare the data collection for a study. Through a pretest the researcher can clarify whether the questions are understandable for the respondents or not (Ghauri and Grønhaug, 2005). The pretest aims to provide valuable inputs in designing the finalized study, through identifying potential problems and weaknesses of the interview guide. The purpose of a pretest can be to provide early indications of the outcomes of the principal interview guide (Bryman and Bell, 2011).

Before this thesis’ main empirical investigation was started, the authors made a pretest for all three questionnaires to clarify the relevance of the interview questions. First, the questionnaire for the managers of the organization was pretested by a senior lecturer at Linnaeus University, Soniya Billore. Her feedback was considered to be of high value, since her expertise and knowledge within economics and branding generated valuable feedback about some flaws in the questions. After the first pretest the questionnaire was modified in consideration of the feedback. The questionnaire was thereafter carried through a second pretest on Dr. Magnus Hultman, who is an associate professor in marketing at Leeds University. This was done in order to ensure that the questionnaire was relevant and to minimize the risk that the first pretest missed any vital issues.

The questionnaire for the employees of the organization was further pretested on Viktor Magnusson, who is a tutor at Linnaeus University, with special knowledge within the field of branding, and on Dr Magnus Hultman. The questionnaire was again modified in consideration of the feedback and was thereafter pretested on an employee that belonged to the investigated organization to determine how the questions were perceived. This indicated which questions that needed an explanation and which potential prober questions that could arise.
Finally, Soniya Billore audited the questions for the customers. After having gotten the questions analyzed by her, the authors decided to test the questions on one person that fitted into the sample frame of brand loyal customers. While testing the questions on this customer, the authors got an understanding of how the questions could be perceived by the customers and if some questions should be added or reformulated.

The main reason behind the pretests was to make sure that the formulated questions were relevant and useful for the thesis. The authors wanted to ensure the quality of the questions before the main investigation was conducted, to generate as much useful data as possible for the result.

4.7 Sampling
Sampling refers to the process of obtaining information about a whole population by examining only a specific part of it (Kothari, 2004). The sample can be explained as a part of the population that is chosen for a certain study. The population consists of all the entities that the researcher chooses to sample from. The sample can be chosen for example on the basis of nations, cities, schools, or companies (Bryman and Bell, 2005). It is time consuming and expensive for a researcher to investigate a whole population and therefore a sample are selected to represent the population (Holme and Solvang, 1997) in order to minimize the risk of bias (Kothari, 2004). If this is succeeded the study will result in valid and reliable conclusions (Kothari, 2004). It is important that the researcher documents the information collected from the specific sample in order for others to be able to repeat the study in the future (Holme and Solvang, 1997).

Curtis, Gesler, Smith and Washburn (2000) argue that the choice of sample should be evaluated in consideration of a six-step checklist. First, the sampling strategy should be relevant for the conceptual framework and should enable the researcher to get the information needed to answer the research questions. Secondly, the sample should generate in-depth information for the phenomenon under investigation. Further, the sample should enable the researcher to do generalizations (Curtis et al., 2000), which for a qualitative study means analytic generalization (Yin, 2012). The sample should also generate reliable descriptions and explanations. The researcher should further
ensure that the relationship between him and the respondents is ethical in its nature. Finally, the researcher must ensure that the sampling plan is feasible (Curtis et al., 2000).

BMW was sampled for this thesis due to several reasons. First, BMW is considered to be one of the world's strongest brands with a strong brand equity (Kapferer, 2008). An organization with strong brand equity further indicates that the organization also has a strong brand loyal customer base (Kabiraj and Shanmugan, 2011; Dau and Wensly, 1988). Furthermore, a strong brand loyal customer base was needed in this thesis in order to explain the relationship between the two concepts. Secondly, after a short dialogue with the Training Cluster Manager at BMW Group, it could be confirmed that BMW Group actively works with educating the employees. This indicated that BMW Group could work with employee branding and therefore it was considered appropriate as a sample. During the dialogue, the authors pitched the purpose for the thesis and the Training Cluster Manager was positive to let BMW Group work as the case for this thesis. Since some parts of the thesis require full insight from within the organization and its potential employee branding activities, the authors were promised access to the information required. Further, the high level of potential insight within the organization and the strong possibility that BMW has a high amount of brand loyal customer due to the strong brand equity, BMW was chosen as an appropriate case to explore the relationship between employee branding and brand loyalty.

Finally, in order to meet the purpose, it required access to employees who on a daily basis interact with the customers of BMW. Therefore Paulssons Bil in Helsingborg, which is a BMW reseller, was selected. All employees at BMW resellers are educated in brand behavior by BMW, which indicated that the employees at Paulssons Bil would provide this thesis with valuable information. The sample of Paulssons Bil was done due to access.

4.7.1 Sampling frame
Bryman and Bell (2011) describe sample frame as the listing of all units in the population from which the sample will be selected (Bryman and Bell, 2011). The
sample frame consists of all items of a set of objects. The sampling frame should be correct, comprehensive, appropriate and reliable. It is of great importance that the sample frame is as representative as possible for the specific population (Kothari, 2004). If the sample frame is not comprehensive, is inaccurate or suffers from some kind of similar deficiency, the sample that is derived from it might not represent the population (Bryman and Bell, 2011). Miles and Huberman (1984) argue that sampling from a qualitative study differs from a quantitative study in the sense that a qualitative researcher tend to work with a smaller sample and further tends to be more purposive rather than random (Miles and Huberman, 1984). A purposive sample, also called judgmental sample, refers to that the sample is being selected precisely based upon the samples special knowledge about the context being investigated. However, it is important to ensure that the purposive sample is reliable and has the competence needed to generate useful data. Further, purposive sample is a nonrandom technique that does not have a clear set of respondents. It rather allows the researcher to decide what needs to be known and based upon that, the researcher finds people with expertise, special knowledge or experience within the investigated subject. However, a purposive sample is not free from bias. It is therefore important not to generalize the interpretations beyond the sample population in order to prevent to be influenced by inherent bias (Tongco, 2007). However, a qualitative study allows the researcher to do analytic generalization of the sample, which according to Yin (2012) means that the same theoretical propositions can be applied in other situations where the same concept and constructs might be relevant (Yin, 2012).

For this thesis the authors needed to choose three sample segments. In order to get rich and in-depth information it was vital that people with special knowledge, expertise or experience was interviewed to ensure that the data collected was reliable and relevant for this thesis and hence useful to meet the stated purpose. Therefore, a purposive sample was selected for all the three segments.

The first sample consisted of persons from the organization’s Nordic head office, i.e. people who are familiar with questions regarding employee branding. It was necessary for the thesis to gather information from persons with this type of knowledge to be able to clarify how they perceive the organization's brand image and how that image is transferred to the employees.
The second sample segment was the employees of the organization, i.e. the persons who are in direct contact with the customers. Therefore the employees at a BMW reseller were selected. This to get deeper understanding of what contributes to their knowledge and motivation to project the desired brand image and how they in turn perceived the brand image.

The third sample segment consisted of brand loyal customers of BMW. This was needed in order to explore the relationship between employee branding and brand loyalty. Customers appropriate for this thesis was considered to be customers who have purchased more than one product from BMW.

4.7.2 Sampling selection and data collection procedure

Identifying the desired brand image of BMW

Before the data collection from the interviews for each segment was conducted, the organization’s mission, vision and values were identified through the annual report of 2012. This provided a foundation of BMW Group’s desired brand image and thus served as a tool to determine how well the managers internalize this in their daily work as well as through their communication.

Interviews with managers of BMW

To determine how BMW as an organization manage their employee branding it was vital that the people with knowledge within the area were interviewed. Thus, the first interviews were held at the head office of BMW Group in Sollentuna, Sweden, with the Training Cluster Manager and with the Information Manager of BMW Group. The interviews were conducted simultaneously face to face, and were recorded with the approval of the respondents. The respondents had before the interviews been informed about the purpose of this thesis and hence been given some basic information about the research area. The interviews lasted for about one hour and the two managers were given a lot of space to talk freely. These two managers gave valuable information about which messages BMW Group use to communicate their desired brand image, how they behave in accordance with this image, and finally how
they ensure that employees know, understand and experience the desired brand image of the organization. Finally, a third interview, performed over telephone, was held with the manager for brand education for BMW Group. This interview was considered valuable since the manager of brand education work on a daily basis with the brand behavior of the employees. The interview was conducted over telephone and lasted between 20-30 minutes and the same questionnaire was used for all interviews.

BMW Group was in this investigation referred to as “BMW”. Thus, whenever information collected from the managers at BMW Group is presented, it will be referred to as e.g. “the managers of BMW”.

**Interviews with employees of BMW**

To understand how the image projected by employees could be related to brand loyalty in any extent, it was considered vital to interview employees who in their daily work are interacting with customers. The interviews were therefore performed on the employees of Paulssons Bil in Helsingborg, Sweden, which is a BMW reseller. The interviews were conducted over telephone, since the employees could not ensure that they would have time for any in-depth interviews at any specific time and because of customer meetings. The procedure was similar as the previous interviews for the managers. The employees were informed about the purpose of this thesis and were thus ensured that their answers were anonymous. The interviews lasted for about 30-40 minutes and were conducted with five different employees.

The employees of Paulssons Bil were referred to as “employees” throughout the investigation. The employees are hired by Paulssons Bil AB and are educated by BMW Group.

**Interviews with customers**

The interviews with the organization’s customers were held at Paulssons Bil in Helsingborg, Sweden. An interview guide were conducted and brought to the interviews. The interview guide had gone through a pretest and covered all the topics needed. The authors were allowed to circulate in the showroom and talk to customers of BMW in the search for brand loyal customers. As the thesis required already loyal customers of BMW, the marketing manager at Paulssons Bil also provided the authors
with a list of potential respondents. The sales and marketing manager at Paulssons Bil had, on behalf of the authors, carefully selected customers form the customer register that fulfilled the criteria for brand loyal customers. Before the interview sessions began, the authors informed the respondents about the purpose of the thesis and that the answers were treated anonymously.

The customers that were on the list provided by the manager were contacted via telephone. The telephone interviews were conducted on six respondents lasted between 30-40 minutes and was held on a speakerphone where one author held the interviews and the others were taking notes. Two respondents were also interviewed face-to-face at Paulssons Bil. The authors got access to the conference room, which was the location for the interview sessions. The face-to-face interviews lasted between 30-40 minutes. The customers of Paulssons Bil were referred to as “customers” in the investigation.

The data collection for the three segments was gathered from a total of three interviews from managers, five interviews from the employees and eight interviews from the brand loyal customers of BMW. Furthermore, the total number of interviews that were conducted covered the data needed from the three segments and did not require any further data to be gathered. In accordance with a purposive sample technique there is no need for any set number of respondents, but should instead involve respondents with competence within the research area and it is up to the researcher to determine when the data needed is gathered (Tongco, 2007). Thus, it further implied that the choice of respondents was carefully selected and that the number of respondent chosen from each segment was considered to be enough due to the fact of recurrent answers.

4.8 Data analysis method
After having collected the data, it should be processed and analyzed in accordance with the purpose at the time of developing the research plan. This is of great importance for a scientific research study and for making sure that the researcher has gathered all the relevant data for making comparisons and analysis (Kothari, 2004). A qualitative research often generates a large number of data, which makes it challenging to present it in an understandable way. The data analysis in a qualitative research should therefore be developed in different steps (Creswell, 2007). However,
according to Gray (2009) there are many different approaches to analyze qualitative data and there are no clear rules regarding what approach that is the most appropriate for different qualitative strategies. Common for analyzing qualitative data is that it aims to break down data into small units, to visualizes their characteristic elements and structure (Gray, 2009). Miles and Huberman (1984) argue that qualitative data analysis consist of three flows of activity. The first step is data reduction, which is the process of preparing and organizing the data. Data reduction is done in order to reduce the data into themes by the process of coding (Creswell, 2007). It is important to define the codes that are being used in order to assemble the coded evidence into broader themes and thereby make it appropriate for the study (Yin, 2012). Data reduction further involves the process of selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting, and transforming the data in such way that final conclusions can be drawn and verified. Data reduction is an ongoing process of a qualitative research, which occurs not only in the data analysis, but also throughout the whole research project (see figure 6) (Miles and Huberman, 1984).

![Figure 6 - Components of a qualitative data analysis](image)

The second step is the data display, which is defined as “an organized assembly of information that permits conclusion drawing and action talking” (Miles and Huberman, 1984, pp. 21). Data display aims to visualize the data, either in terms of text, or in terms of metrics, graphs and networks, which enables the data to be visualized in a more compact form.

The final step is the conclusion drawing and verification, which is the process of deciding what things actually mean. This involves identifying patterns, noting
regularities, irregularities, explanations, possible configurations, causal flows and propositions (Miles and Huberman, 1984). Yin (2009) argues that if pattern matching is to be relevant to a case study, the predicted pattern of specific variables needs to be defined before the collection of data (Yin, 2009). In addition to pattern matching, explanation building should also be taken into consideration while conducting a case study. The explanation building technique refers to that the research questions will lead the analysis, which allows the researcher to identify insightful descriptive patterns and possible causal relationships (Yin, 2012).

As there are no clear rules on what approach that is best suited for a qualitative data analysis (Gray, 2009), this thesis focused on the three flows of activity developed by Miles and Huberman (1984). Further, since the aim with this thesis is to explain the relationship between two concepts, it might be necessary to reduce data that is overfluent to understand this relationship. It is vital that the visualization of data for each concept is absolutely clear in order draw conclusions and find patterns that would enhance the relationship between the two studied concepts. Thus, the data gathered from the semi-structured interviews could take different directions depending on how the respondents answer. As a result of this, the probing questions might differ and could arise new issues that need to be understood (Gray, 2009). The operationalization was used as a foundation to make sure that the interviews were held to the studied subject. This enabled the authors to ask proper questions that were in line with the theoretical concepts and hence minimized the risk of losing focus from the theoretical concepts regardless the direction of the interviews. Furthermore, since this analysis will relate to theoretical concepts, the analytic strategy will be what Yin (2009) addresses as relying on theoretical proposition. Consequently, this means that theoretical propositions will guide the analysis (Yin, 2009). The analysis will further use the research questions as the guidance and it will start by assemble key events in chronological order. Thus, the explanation building technique and time series analysis were taken into consideration for the analysis.

4.9 Quality Criteria

Validity and reliability are argued to be the most important quality criteria while establishing and assessing the quality of a qualitative study (Bryman and Bell, 2011; Ghauri and Grønhaug, 2005). Validity refers to ensuring that the measurement
instrument measures what is intended. Reliability is a quality criterion that concerns the stability of the measurement instrument (Bryman and Bell, 2011). Further, in order to establish the reliability of a qualitative study the researcher needs to document the procedure and also document as many steps of it as possible (Creswell, 2009). This is especially important while conducting a case study, since regardless of its many advantages, the validity and reliability could be questioned (Riege, 2003).

4.9.1 Content validity
Content validity refers to the simplest mean to test the validity. In situations when a new measurement is developed, it is necessary to establish the content validity. Content validity helps the researcher to ensure that the measure reflects the concept under investigation. This can be established by letting people with knowledge or expertise evaluate if the measures reflect the concept (Bryman and Bell, 2011). Further, this kind of validity is of high importance since the measure aims to find “hidden” information that the respondent is not necessarily aware of (Jacobsen, 2002).

The content validity for this thesis was established by letting a senior lecturer at Linnaeus University, a tutor of the Linnaeus University and an associate professor of Leeds University in marketing give feedback on and recommendation for the questionnaires. This ensured that the measurement construct components were relevant and generated information, which could be applied to the investigated concepts. Further, a pretest was conducted on persons that belonged to the sample frame of brand loyal customers and employees. This gave a possibility to reconstruct the construct component so that it reflected the investigated concept and thus identify any potential flaws with the questionnaires before the gathering of data began.

4.9.2 Construct validity
According to Bryman and Bell (2011) some authors mean that the researcher should try to estimate the construct validity of a measure. This means that the researcher is encouraged to deduce hypothesis from a theory that is relevant to the actual concept (Bryman and Bell, 2011). Construct validity is used to estimate how well the instrument actually is measuring the underlying constructs that it is intended to measure (Jha, 2008). It can be a problem to establish the construct validity in a case study since it can be difficult to define the investigated construct and thus build the conclusions on the researcher’s personal impressions (Gray, 2009). To maximize the
construct validity of a case study the concepts need to be clearly operationalized. Further, a case study should use “multiple source of evidence”, which refers to multiple measures of the same concept. This will provide the researcher with rich information from the use of different measures, which concerns the same concept. The researcher should also establish a chain of evidence during the data collection process and finally let key informants evaluate a draft of the gathered data (Gray, 2009; Riege, 2003). Moreover, what separates a case study from other qualitative research methodologies is that in a case study the researcher has close contact with the organization and the people within who are being examined. Thus, to establish construct validity the researcher must desist from subjective judgments during the data collection and research design (Riege, 2003).

The construct validity for this thesis was established first and foremost through the operationalization of the investigated concepts. This ensured that the data collection instruments reflected the underlying constructs they were suppose to measure. Secondly, the multiple source of evidence was taken into consideration in that sense that the questions for the managers and for the employees were based upon the same operationalization and thereby the same concept. This provided the authors with rich information from two different perspectives. Further, a tutor at Linnaeus University with special knowledge within the field of branding examined a draft of the gathered data. This allowed the researchers in an early stage of the data collection, to get feedback regarding if the non-subjective judgment has been taken into consideration. However, since the authors relied on the questionnaires that have its foundation on theoretical constructs, the risk of build the research on subjective judgments was considered held to its minimum.

4.9.3 External validity
External validity refers to transferability, which means the degree to which the results and findings can be generalized (Riege, 2003). Separated from internal validity, external validity represents a problem for researchers since they tend to employ case studies and small samples (Bryman and Bell, 2011).

Generalizing has become an important criterion not only for the quantitative research but for the qualitative research as well. However, general conclusion generated from a case study could be difficult to achieve (Gray, 2009; Bryman and Bell, 2011). Yin
(2012) argues that samples from case studies cannot generate statistical generalization for the whole populations and most importantly; it is not its intention. In contrast to statistical generalization, which is the approach for a quantitative study, analytic generalizations are applied to a qualitative approach. Analytic generalizations aim to create a reasoning that might be applied in other situations and consist of a two-step process. The first step shows how a study’s findings have contributed to the relationship between theoretical concepts and construct. The second step is to show how the same theoretical propositions can be applied in other situations where the same concepts and constructs might be relevant (Yin, 2012). This allows particular findings to be generalized on some broader theory (Riege, 2003).

The result of this thesis due to the strategy of a single case study cannot be generalized for the whole population. For that reason this thesis emphasizes with Yin’s (2012) argumentation that analytic generalizations should be applied. This would further bring sophistication to the investigated relationship, thus potentially provide empirical evidence of the relationship between theoretical concepts and construct. Moreover, despite one case study on BMW, other organizations with similar conditions could apply the same theoretical proposition and thus allow particular findings to be generalized to some theoretical extent.

4.9.4 Reliability
Reliability refers to the extent to which studies can be replicated (LeCompte and Goetz, 1982). Reliability could further be explained as the consistency of a measure of a concept (Bryman and Bell, 2011). Reliability tells if the results of a specific study would be the same if the study was repeated, or if the study is affected by random or temporary conditions. The concept is often used when explaining if the measurements are consistent (Bryman and Bell, 2005).

The only way to achieve a strong reliability is according to Holme and Solvang (1997) that the researcher is open to the possibility that some systematic or random errors might have occurred in the study. This should be considered in the planning phase as well as in the execution of the research (Holme and Solvang, 1997). Furthermore, if a case study should reach a high level of reliability the researcher must critically use document procedures, which involves data collection instrument and further the procedures for using these instruments (Gray, 2009). However, even if
the researcher ensures that other researchers can follow the precise interview techniques and procedures, other researches could face the fact that the results differ. Nonetheless, different result does not necessarily have to be negative, since it also could provide additional valuable source of information (Riege, 2003). Further, the enhancement of absolute validity and reliability is impossible for any research approach. However, there are some techniques to follow to increase the reliability. In addition to the use of protocols and procedures for using data collection instrument, the researcher should record the data collection processes, to enable reliable conclusions to be confirmed by other researchers. It is further important to clearly identify the theoretical concept being investigated to establish that the findings could be related to the concerning concepts. And finally, the methodological decisions should be discussed with multiple researchers (LeCompte and Goetz, 1982).

The reliability of this thesis was established through the use of interview guides for all conducted interviews. Other researchers in other situations can easily use these interview guides where the same concepts are to be investigated. This research was conducted through multiple interviews within three different segments of an organization. The data collection procedure has been described in the methodological chapter and the collected data was handled and presented in the empirical chapter in accordance with Miles and Hubermans (1984) three flows of activity. The theoretical concepts have been clearly identified in the literature review, and have been set in the context for this thesis through the operationalization, which enables other researchers to relate the findings to the concepts of this thesis.

The research can be repeated at a later point in time and does not require the same case to be sampled. Other researchers can use the operationalization in order to make the concepts measurable in their specific context. More research regarding the relationship between employee branding and brand loyalty, with the same methodological procedure, would bring more sophistication to the relationship.

The methodological decisions have been discussed with both the tutor of this thesis and with the examiner during the seminars. Further, the authors have attended three different methodology workshops during the process where Dr. Soniya Billore has given her feedback on the methodological decisions. Different opponents have also
given their feedback on the thesis, including the methodology chapter, during the seminars.

4.9.5 Source criticism

Source criticism is used in research to evaluate the level of reliability for the sources used in the research. Source criticism further refers to the origin of our knowledge, which means that the sources, which are used in the research, are what the knowledge is built upon. Thurén (2005) presents four criteria as a guideline for establishing that the sources are reliable and contains information applicable for the aim of the study.

First, the source must be *authentic*, which means that there should not be any reasons to question the authenticity of the source. Secondly, the source must be *time-related*. Consequently, the source should be up-to-date for the context being investigated. Further, the source should be *independent*, and hence be known as the primary source. Finally, the source must show *tendency of freedom*, which means that there should not be any reason to suspect that the source have distorted information, due to political, economical, or other personal interests. (Thurén, 2005)

This thesis relied on a conceptual framework performed by Miles and Mangold (2004). Thus, it implies that this thesis had its foundation on information that could be applied and relevant for that framework. However, to establish the level of reliability for that source, all four criteria’s by Thurén, (2005) was taken into consideration. First, since Miles and Mangold could be seen as the pioneers within the field of employee branding, their statements were considered as *authentic*. Secondly, since the conceptual framework of 2004, more research has been done and the latest article within the field of employee branding was published in 2011, which ensures that the source is *time-related* and hence up-to-date. The source was further considered as *independent* due to the fact that it has 94 citations, which makes it the frequently most cited articles within employee branding and thereby known as the primary source. Finally, there was no reason to suspect that the framework conceptualized by Miles and Mangold (2004) has distorted information or that the information was written for another purpose other than for the interest of business research. Hence, it was clear that the source shows *tendency of freedom*. 
4.10 Chapter summary

Table 4. Summary of methodological choices

| Research approach       |  • Abduction  
|                        |  • Qualitative  
| Research design         |  • Exploratory research design  
| Data sources            |  • Primary  
|                        |  • Secondary  
| Research strategy       |  • Case study  
|                        |  • Single embedded  
| Data collection method  |  • Semi-structured interviews  
| Sampling                |  • Single case study  
|                        |  • Three segments  
|                        |  • Purposive sample selection  
| Data analysis           |  • Data reduction  
|                        |  • Data display  
|                        |  • Conclusion drawing and verification  
|                        |  • Rely on theoretical propositions  
|                        |  • Explanation building  
| Quality criteria        |  • Validity  
|                        |  - Content validity  
|                        |  - Construct validity  
|                        |  - External validity  
|                        |  • Reliability  
|                        |  • Source criticism  

5. Empirical investigation

This empirical investigation consists of secondary data collected from BMW's annual report from the year of 2012. After that information is presented, the primary data based on interviews from three segments of respondents are presented; first from the managers of BMW, secondly from employees at the BMW reseller Paulssons Bil, and lastly from customers of Paulssons Bil. This implies that all over fluent data were reduced and is thereby not presented in the following chapter.

5.1 Secondary data from the annual report of 2012

The mission, vision and value statement was first identified through the annual report of BMW from the year of 2012. Those statements are reaching to year of 2020 and are described as followed:

Mission statement: “The BMW Group is the world’s leading provider of premium products and premium service for individual mobility”. (Annual report, 2012, pp 3)

Vision statement: “The aim is to prepare the BMW Group for the future, as it faces a wide range of different challenges in a changing environment for individual mobility. This will be achieved with measures of growth, shaping the future, profitability and access to technological customers”. (Annual report, 2012, pp 15)

Values statement: “At BMW Group, we all share a passion for mobility. It is our common purpose to make individual mobility available for the future, as the demands on cars continue to evolve. We are driving and shaping this technological shift towards sustainable mobility. It will require all of our powers of innovation in the development of new products and attractive mobility service, as well as constant review of our structures and processes and how we work together”. (Annual report, 2012, pp 15)

5.2 Data collected from the management

The following information derives from a discussion between the Information
Manager, the Training Cluster Manager and the manager for brand education for BMW. The interview questions that resulted in the following information can be found in Appendix 1 - interview guide managers.

The enhancement of the brand image of BMW

First of all, most companies have a goal that is based on their willingness to make a successful business, and this is also the situation for BMW. BMW is a company that is represented in many countries around the world. Thus, the Scandinavian situation is special, due to the Nordic head office. What BMW wants is basically to offer individual mobility that is sustainable today, as well as in the future. It is of great importance for BMW to keep up with the market. Therefore sustainability is a key word for the organization and is therefore currently focused on achieving.

Joy is another vital keyword for BMW. Many of their customers are people who love to drive their cars and who do not only see it as a transport solution. BMW Groups slogan is “When you love to drive” and this is based on the key concept of joy and is recurring in BMW’s ads and commercials. Joy is considered to be a cornerstone for BMW and is therefore represented in every activity of the organization.

An important factor for BMW is, as mentioned above, to deliver individual mobility to their customers. You cannot know for sure what the future holds and therefore BMW has to be able to think outside the box to maintain the individual mobility aspect. According to the managers, BMW therefore tries to always be one step ahead, to make sure to follow the market’s development. Further, according to the managers, this implies that BMW has to continuously be innovative and challenging for the competitors as well for the customers. They emphasize that the employees therefore need to have a wide range of knowledge about the products they are selling to satisfy different needs and wants from different customers. BMW has three brands that all play different roles for the organization: BMW, Mini and Rolce Royce. The three of them have their own characters, but similar is that they are all premium brands. They still have the key words represented in their brands. BMW’s cars are directed to people who enjoy driving. The customers are often people who appreciate individuality and personal choices.

Communicating the desired brand image
To ensure that every employee of BMW reflects the brand’s values, the organization finds it vital to educate the employees in brand behavior. Thus, all brand trainers for BMW are sent to the general agent in Germany for brand education. This enables BMW to educate a consistent brand behavior to all their resellers’ employees. Further during the training events for the employees, the brand values and brand behavior of BMW is discussed. It is important for BMW that the persons working with the brand also are aware of the brand’s values. These events are always arranged in line with what the event aims to focus on. The environments in which the events are held are extremely important and must be fitting for the topic of the specific event. It is not only the informative aspect of the education that is important, but the feeling that the event creates in terms of for example the visual experiences. BMW is often appreciated for their products' designs and hence, this focus should be reflected at the training events. Therefore, most of the meetings are held at modern locations and BMW puts a large focus on the design in order to create the most attractive atmosphere that goes in line with the brand. That is achieved by ensuring the locations to be exclusive when it comes to interior designs as well as the food that is served. Also, the behaviors of the trainers and staff that are present in the training events or fairs are very important. They get directions regarding for example the dress code and how they should behave to contribute to the feeling that the management wants to project to the ones participating in the events. Hence, this is an aspect that the management of BMW Group puts a strong focus on, to in an effective way project their desired behavior to the employees. This since the reason behind the brand training events is to optimize employee brand behavior to increase the brand related behavior.

In addition to the training events BMW also provide the employees with written documents, called retail standards, which describe how the employees should behave to be able to meet the goals of the organization. For example, the managers emphasize that one of the goals for BMW is to ensure customer satisfaction. The retail standards could also include sales goals and other areas that are important for achieving the goals of the organization.

The employees further receive certifications from participating in different training events, such as product, brand and sales training. The certifications are written documents that visualize the employee’s expertise and competence gained through the
different educations within the objectives.

The management gains customer feedback through data software programs that continuously monitor social media. This information is most of the time not of major importance since BMW is discussed frequently in social media in manners that does not concern organizational activities to a larger extent. However, BMW are carefully investigating how their brand is discussed in social media, to be able to get a clearer picture of how the brand is perceived in general.

The feedback is also monitored on every reseller’s website, where customers can rate the reseller’s performance. This monitoring of customer feedback makes it possible for BMW to take actions if the feedback provides information regarding if for example resellers’ employees have treated customers badly. These actions can be directed towards the specific customer, where BMW can offer solutions that will satisfy the customer, but also towards the reseller. The managers claim that all the comments are for real, and BMW Group never “close” any comments down. There is also a net based “CSI” survey running continuously where customers are asked, by e-mail, to provide BMW with feedback about the reseller. The e-mail is sent to the customers in different situations. It could for example be after a purchase or if the customer has done service of his cars at the reseller. The managers claim that customers tend to appreciate these e-mails, since the organization’s customers tend to be very interested in the brand and the products, and thereby want to share their feedback about their treatment.

*Coherent values*

According to the Information Manager and Training Cluster Manager it is vital for BMW that every part of the organization works with the same values in mind and this is why BMW strongly focus on brand education, both when it comes to technical expertise and knowledge about BMW as a brand. Regardless of if the employees work with technical service or customer service, the same messages should be expressed to the customers. It must be coherent. According to the managers, this implies that the brand values that are emphasized within the organization also reflect the brand values that are communicated externally. The managers argue that all
communication affects the perception about BMW as a brand and that is why all communication should be coherent.

BMW has restrictions for how to behave when it comes to public relations, according to the Information Manager. The main purpose with the restrictions is to ensure that all communication and activities goes in line with the brand. This can affect communication at for example press releases, product releases, and communication with media.

The behavior of the employees of BMW

When interacting with a customer a BMW employee should according to the managers first of all be helpful and friendly. The customer is visiting the reseller for a reason. They might want to get information about the products, come in contact with a sales person or maybe sign a contract. Regardless of which reason the customer is there for, the employee should always make sure to pay attention to their presence. The employees should always greet the customers and make them feel welcome. It is also important that the employees do a requirement analysis of the customer, through answering any questions the customer might have and by that provide the customer with an solution that meets the customer’s wants and needs. It is of great importance that the customer feels that he is noticed and listened to and further that the employee acts in a professional way at all times.

Since the product experience is very important for BMW, there are now plans on educating persons who will work as so called brand specialists. These persons will work as experts on the products and be available for customers during their visit in the reseller’s store. It is important for BMW to signal professionalism and knowledge and this person would strengthen this by interacting with the customers in the stores. The brand specialist might also be able to put an extra focus on the joy and lifestyle aspect of BMW when interacting with the customers. Since many of the BMW customers are perceived to see BMW as a brand that contributes to a specific lifestyle, this might be an important aspect to highlight. Hence, this is something that BMW plans for the future.

The behavior of the managers of BMW
The managers of BMW emphasize that their behavior lays the foundation of how the rest of the organization behave. Thus, to maximize the employee behavior, the managers of BMW find it of great importance that their behavior also is in accordance with the requirements they put on the employees. The employees have a requirement that they should be available for the customers at all times during the working day. The managers explained that they found it important to be reflecting those requirements themselves as well. Hence, the managers do that e.g. by ensuring that every e-mail that they receive get answered within 24 hours. This to make themselves available for any questions from the employees at all times. The managers emphasize that BMW is a *premium brand* and thus, find it important to act *professional* and thereby treat employees, competitors and other people or organizations with respect.

Further, as managers of BMW they are also aware that their behavior even after the working hours, contributes to peoples’ perception about BMW as a brand. The managers therefore make sure that they act in accordance with the brand values even after work hours in that sense that they for example always respect people in the traffic and act responsible while driving. If the managers should act disrespectful and unprofessional and thereby act against BMW’s brand values, they would face a warning or even the consequence of losing their jobs. Hence, the behavior of the managers at BMW is considered extremely important.

The identity of BMW is of great importance for the organization. There should be a match between the identity of the brand and everyone who works with it. This is according to the managers a vital key for maintaining the strength of BMW as a brand. It is important that the image is projected through each and every communication activity from BMW Group, both internally and externally. BMW’s ambition is that everyone who works with the brand are feeling passionate about it. They want them to feel a connection between the BMW and themselves. They want every employee working with BMW to always try to put some extra effort into everything they do. This is what will make the customers feel a strong *trust* and sense of *belonging* towards BMW. The training events aim to create this sort of ambition within the mind of the employees participating. The training events further aim to teach the participants how to meet a customer, how to make the customer feel well treated and how to nurture the relationship in the future. These are important elements for BMW, since they put a strong focus on stable relationships between the brand and
the customers. This is mainly achieved via the reseller's employees, since they are the most frequent connection between the BMW customer and the brand.

Overall, it is extremely important for BMW that the persons that meet the customers feel strongly about BMW as a brand, to in a good way be able to project the image that BMW stands for to the customers.

5.3 Data collected from employees

This empirical investigation was based on five semi-structured interviews with employees at Paulssons Bil in Helsingborg, Sweden. The interview guide for this empirical investigation can be found in Appendix 2 – interview guide employees.

The employees that were interviewed described BMW in characteristics such as: quality, professionalism, ambition, premium, innovative, lifestyle, and joy. According to one employee a successful BMW employee must have a combination of passion for the brand and for cars as products. The employees all agreed that customer service is an extremely important factor for satisfying customer needs. One employee stated that if he found another employee behaving in a way that was not suitable for a BMW employee, he would not hesitate to confront this person. According to him it is extremely important that the employees act in line with BMW as a brand. Two employees claimed that they found it to be of great importance that every single customer gets a feeling of being special and unique during their visit in the store and in the service they receive.

One of the employees stated: "BMW is the world's best car brand and it should therefore have the world's best employees.” The same employee had earlier during his career worked with other car brands and according to him the BMW customers often had a more personal relationship towards BMW as a brand. Therefore, he claimed that it is extremely important that the employees are friendly, professional and contribute to maintaining this strong personal connection with the customer. He explained that the employees must have a wide knowledge about BMW as a brand as well as the products. He also said that the relationship with the customer is important regardless of if the customer is about to buy a car in the closest future or not. The relationship is according to him important for making the customer trust the employees. All of the
employees that were asked mentioned that they put a strong focus on a friendly treatment that expressed joy, trustworthiness, and professionalism. All employees claimed that they found it important to treat coworkers, customers and others with respect. They further agreed that the contact with BMW is managed well. They perceive them to be extremely professional with a wide knowledge about and passion for BMW.

The employees at Paulssons Bil have all been educated in knowledge about BMW as a brand. The training in brand behavior and sales is mandatory for every employee at the reseller. One of the respondents explained that the training process consists of several steps, with different focus, and that all employees did not have to be educated in every focus. But all employees have to be educated in the brand and sales. The employees that were interviewed in this investigation all agreed that these training events had been a positive experience. The employees agreed that BMW as a brand is well represented in every activity within the company. The training events are built upon the brand’s values and give according to the employees the participants a feeling of being the brand when leaving the event. All employees in this investigation have received certifications from BMW, since they all have been educated.

According to the employees it is characteristic for BMW that every single aspect of the activities are thought through. During the training events the whole experience is breathing BMW. One employee described an experience she had gotten from a training event of BMW. She explained that almost every minute of the training experience was represented by BMW. Even the art on the walls of the hotel where the participants stayed had BMW themes, and the key to the hotel rooms had the BMW logotype on them. The food was considered exclusive. According to her, everything was BMW branded and she found this both impressive and fascinating. She felt like she was BMW when leaving the event.

All employees have experienced the brand trainers to be professional. One employee expressed the importance of the trainer’s behavior. If the trainer’s behavior is not representative for BMW, the experience for the participants will not be as good. All the respondents agreed that every trainer they have met had represented BMW in a good way. Further, they described the trainers as very professional, friendly,
enthusiastic, and with a wide knowledge about BMW and the products.

The retail standards that the employees get from BMW help the employees to express BMW as a brand to the customers. The standards consist of e.g. how the cars should be lined up within and outside the store, and how the employees should behave in their interaction with the customers. All BMW resellers are required to maintain the retail standards to be allowed to be a BMW reseller. The employees further explained that they found the retail standards very important for their business. They could absolutely see and understand that these standards played an important role for BMW as a brand. According to the employees it is important that the customers know what they can expect when visiting a BMW reseller. The consistency in the reseller stores creates, according to one employee, a feeling of familiarity in the customers' minds. He further considered the retail standards to be a good way to clarify to the employees what BMW want to signal with their brand. What was considered as as a negative aspect of the retail standards was that it is expensive, since the reseller is required to only buy products to maintain the retail standards from suppliers that BMW has chosen. Apart from that, the employees appreciated the standards and followed them to the letter.

All of the employees claimed to consider the characteristics of BMW in their everyday work. Several employees explained during the interviews how they saw BMW as very good at creating a feeling of belonging towards the brand. The main reason for why BMW succeeds with this was according to the employees their brand consistency. The brand is always expressed as an exclusive premium brand and the managers always act professional. One employee said that BMW do not miss out on anything, everything is well thought through.

One employee found managers at BMW to be very responsive in the contact between them and the reseller. The employee explained that it is an ongoing dialogue between the two parties. The dialogues could for example be based upon what employees think about product packaging and what campaigns that are successful. The employee further explained the gratefulness she had experienced from BMW of such dialogues, since BMW do not have the same contact with the customers. She expressed that
BMW work close to their resellers and shows their interest in the employees, which was appreciated by the employees.

All employees claimed that BMW is a sustainable and innovative company. Further, the employees agreed that BMW is a company that strives to be one step ahead of every other car brand. They mentioned that BMW's ambition is to be the leading car brand within the fields of e.g. technical quality and design. According to the employees at Paulssons Bil, BMW wants to and succeeds to deliver innovative solutions for their customers. They manage to think outside the box and that is one key to why they are such a successful business. They want to be the world's strongest car brand. One employee claimed that it was important for all employees to always act in accordance with the brand and represent BMW, even on his spare time. The employees should always be representative for BMW as a brand.

The employees receive customer feedback mostly from the reseller’s website. Customers of the reseller can comment and give their feedback regarding the reseller’s service and sales performance, where they can “rate” on a scale of 1-5 stars. The feedback from the reseller’s website is collected daily by the employees and if there occurs to be any major dissatisfactions from customers, BMW is required to take care of these cases within 24 hours. Customers are often asked to fill in a feedback document after having purchased a car. These documents are also something that the employees as well as BMW can use to get a grip of the customers’ experiences.

Regarding BMW’s external communication, one employee stated that the advertising was too focused on the products. This employee thought that the advertising could be more focused on the experience of driving a BMW car and more about the lifestyle you get with a BMW car. However, he thought that the advertising were in line with the brand and represented the same values as the internal communications. The other employees claimed that they found that BMW’s external communication goes in line with all the internal communication. Several of them mentioned several times during the interview that they thought BMW were extremely good at delivering their organizational values.
According to the employees they plan their activities, e.g. sales promotions and campaigns, within the limitation of what BMW requires. One employee explained this by saying: “We work freely, but within the limits of BMW”.

5.4 Data collected from customers

This empirical investigation was based on eight semi-structured interviews. All customers in this empirical investigation had owned more than one BMW from the same reseller and thus they fulfilled the requirements from the sample frame.

Image of BMW

Some similarities could be found regarding how the customers perceived BMW as a brand. When describing BMW the customers commonly used the following characteristics: Quality, premium brand, entertaining/fun driving experience, comfort, modern, joyfulness, trust, innovation, luxury and exclusiveness.

The interviews revealed that all customers feel strongly for BMW as a brand. Two customers emphasized that they could not picture themselves driving another car than a BMW. This because BMW has a personal meaning for them and that they could identify themselves with the brand. Another customer stated that he holds the products of BMW very dearly and gets emotionally affected if the car would be damaged. It was common for all customers that the quality of the product was the first reason why BMW is special for them. However, the majority of the customers also emphasized that the behavior of the employees of BMW differs from competitors. They claimed that the employees at BMW are there for them, and to find a solution best suited to meet their wants and needs. The customers explained that the employees have the same behavior, in terms of professionalism, friendliness, helpful, regardless of their intentions. Whether it concerns after sales service or service during a purchase, the customers had experienced the same sort of treatment.

Behavior of employees

The customer strongly focused on describing the trust they felt towards BMW, both
as a brand and towards the products and services. Trust was frequently discussed and all the customers felt a strong trust towards the employees they had been in contact with. The customers seemed to agree that the employees that they had been in contact with showed a wide knowledge regarding both the products and the brand. They also felt satisfied with the personal treatment they had experienced when interacting with employees. Trust, knowledge, professionalism, and friendliness were common descriptions the respondents used when expressing their perception as well as their expectations of the employees.

Further, the customers felt that the employees were engaged in the customers’ specific needs and interests, and that the employees always could answer any question that might arise. The customers further had experienced that the employees strongly focus on not trying to dupe them into buying something they would regret. They appreciated the employees’ way of interacting with them on a personal, but still professional level and that they always tried to provide an appropriate solution for their needs. One of the customers further explained that the employees were always well dressed, which according to him created a feeling of them being professional and thus match BMW as a brand.

The majority of the customers emphasized that the employees behaved in accordance with how they perceived BMW as a brand. The majority of the customers also argued that this could contribute to strengthen their feelings towards BMW. One of the customers explained this by saying: ”According to me, the employees are BMW”. The customers argued that the perceptions gained towards BMW have its foundation in the quality of the product, and the treatment the customers had received from the employees. The majority of the customers further argued that the treatment received from the employees played an important role in whether the customers will repurchase from the same reseller, but that it was not likely to make them switch to another brand. One customer exemplified this by saying that if he would receive negative treatment from every single employee that he came in contact with, maybe his trust towards BMW as a brand would decrease and further the willingness to repurchase from BMW will be affected negatively. If this was the case, he would probably switch to another car brand, but he did not find a scenario like this very likely to happen. This since the customer emphasized that the treatment from the employees at BMW had been of high quality. If the employees behave in a way that
goes in line with how the customers perceive BMW as a brand, the majority of the customers argued that it is likely that the positive perception they have towards BMW would increase.

The customers agreed that the behavior from the employees had an impact on how they talked about the brand to others. One customer explain that if the treatment he receive from the interaction with the employees was negative, he would without any doubt talk negatively about the employees to others and hence not recommend others to purchase from that reseller. However, a negative treatment from the employees would not have any significant impact on the recommendations the customer would provide others regarding BMW as a brand, but only which reseller they should avoid to purchase from. The customers emphasized that they would likewise talk positively about the brand if the employees’ behavior met their expectations, but also in terms of where to purchase their products of BMW.

The customers further agreed that they used to get the same sort of treatment from every employee that they had been in contact with. Several of them claimed that they had experienced that the employees seemed to strive for the same goal, since the treatment are the same from every employee at all times. They seemed to perceive that the employees matched the brand, which made them feel a stronger trust towards BMW. One customer stated that this indicated that BMW was perceived as “an honest organization”. Further, the majority of the customers argued that a consistent behavior from the employees contributes to that the customers did not make it a priority to always buy from only one employee, since they would receive the same treatment from any employee.
6 Analysis

In this chapter the authors present an interpretation between the empirical findings and theoretical concepts. The analysis starts with a data display in a more compact form in connection to the theoretical propositions. The summaries further lay as a foundation for the following analysis chapters, which are guided by the research questions. The analysis finally allows conclusions and verifications to be drawn.

6.1 Data display

Table 5. The managers of BMW

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theoretical concept</th>
<th>Measures</th>
<th>Empirical findings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The desired brand images of the</td>
<td>Mission, vision and values</td>
<td>Key words: Joy, sustainability, innovation and premium.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>organization</td>
<td></td>
<td>Desired brand image through employee behavior: Joy, professionalism, friendliness, helpfulness and knowledge.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informal internal messages</td>
<td>Coworker influence</td>
<td>The managers are aware that their behavior lays the foundation for the whole organization’s behavior and are thus acting in accordance with the brand image.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informal internal messages</td>
<td>Organizational culture</td>
<td>The culture at BMW is founded in behavior of joy, professionalism and respect.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informal internal messages</td>
<td>Influence of organizational leadership</td>
<td>The managers act in accordance with the brand image during and after</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Source of Communication</td>
<td>Message Type</td>
<td>Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formal internal messages</td>
<td>Written documents</td>
<td>Retail standards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formal internal messages</td>
<td>Training events</td>
<td>The training events go in line with the desired brand image of the organization.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informal external messages</td>
<td>Word of mouth</td>
<td>Identify customer feedback through data software program and through rating systems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informal external messages</td>
<td>Customer feedback</td>
<td>The managers find it of importance to identify word of mouth communication about the organization, and provide the concerned employees with the feedback.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formal external messages</td>
<td>Advertising</td>
<td>The managers emphasize that the external and internal communication is coherent.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formal external messages</td>
<td>Public relations</td>
<td>Restrictions about behavior for activities that will be showed in media.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychological contract</td>
<td>Promise keeping, lead by example</td>
<td>To maximize employee behavior, the managers reflect the requirements they put on their employees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychological contract</td>
<td>Mediation by managers</td>
<td>The managers find themselves as an important mediator to set standards for employee behavior.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 6. The employees of BMW

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theoretical concept</th>
<th>Measures</th>
<th>Empirical findings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Informal internal messages</td>
<td>Coworker influence</td>
<td>The employees are influenced by the behavior of their coworkers and managers. They further find it important that all employees reflect BMW as a brand.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informal internal messages</td>
<td>Organizational culture</td>
<td>The employees enshrine the organizational culture, and feel that they are a part of the brand. Joy, professionalism and respect are what BMW is all about.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informal messages</td>
<td>Organizational leadership</td>
<td>The employees perceive that the managers are professional, friendly responsive and have a wide range of knowledge.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formal internal messages</td>
<td>Written documents</td>
<td>The retail standards contribute to that the customers know what to expect from the reseller. The retail standards also contribute to clarifying for the employees what BMW want to signal with their brand.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formal internal messages</td>
<td>Training sessions</td>
<td>The training events generates a feeling of “being the brand”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informal external messages</td>
<td>Customer feedback</td>
<td>The employees receive customer feedback through the managers data software programs and through rating systems.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formal external messages</td>
<td>Advertising, public relations</td>
<td>The majority of the employees perceive that the external and internal messages are coherent</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Psychological contract

Promise keeping, lead by example

The employees perceive through different sources of messages that BMW are keeping their promises (coherent messages) and that managers lead by example.

Psychological contract

Mediation by managers

The employees perceive that managers, through their behavior, managing to mediate brand behavior.

Employees knowledge of the desired brand image

Informal internal, formal internal, informal external, formal external messages.

The only source of messages that differed to some extent from the brand image was the external messages of advertising. However, this was not agreed upon by all employees.

Employee brand image

Desired brand image

Identified keywords: Premium, innovative, lifestyle, joy, and ambition, sustainable.

Employee brand image

Behavior

Professionalism, friendly treatment, trustworthiness knowledge shown in products and in customer wants and needs.

Table 7. Brand loyal customers of BMW

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theoretical concept</th>
<th>Measures</th>
<th>Empirical findings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Perceived behavior from employees</td>
<td>Perceived image project by employees</td>
<td>Professionalism, trust friendliness, knowledge and helpfulness.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction</td>
<td>Overall quality</td>
<td>Satisfied with the treatment from employees and the quality of the product and services.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction</td>
<td>Confirmation of expectation</td>
<td>The customers experience that they get the same treatment from every employee in each contact.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction</td>
<td>Repurchase intention</td>
<td>The majority of the customers emphasize that</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction</td>
<td>Positive word of mouth</td>
<td>All customers argued that employee behavior contribute to how they talk about BMW as a brand.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commitment</td>
<td>Emotional attachment</td>
<td>All customers were emotionally attached to BMW. The characteristics according to the customers contributed to the attachment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commitment</td>
<td>Affective commitment</td>
<td>Two customers claimed that they could not picture themselves driving another car than BMW.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commitment</td>
<td>Identification to the brand</td>
<td>Customers claimed that they could identify themselves with the characteristics they associate with BMW as a brand.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identification</td>
<td>Image delivered by employees</td>
<td>“According to me, the employees are BMW”, the employees behave in line with how the customers perceive the brand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust</td>
<td>Promise keeping</td>
<td>Customers argued that employee behavior did not differ from time to time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust</td>
<td>Confirmation of expectations</td>
<td>Customers claimed that they could purchase from every employee because of consistent behavior.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6.2 Analysis Employee branding process

*The desired brand image*

The mission statement is consistent with how the managers that were interviewed for this investigation expressed BMW's mission. They described BMW as a *premium brand* that strives to offer *individual mobility* to the customer. The managers further described BMW as a *sustainable* brand and this can be found in the vision statement.
as well as in the value statement. According to the managers, BMW should provide *individual mobility* today as well as in the future, and this is something that the vision statement describes as well. The managers strongly focus on *individual mobility* and *sustainability* when describing BMW’s mission, vision and values, and these keywords are well represented in the statements. This indicates that the managers have a strong connection to BMW's mission, vision and values and that they use these in their communication while projecting the brand image to others.

An organization’s desired brand image could be explained as the image that the organization wants their customers to experience (Miles and Mangold, 2007b). Further, a company’s mission and values are cornerstones in the desired brand image and provides the foundation for how it should be defined (Miles and Mangold, 2005). The desired brand image of BMW could be defined through the following characteristics: *joy*, *sustainability*, *innovative*, and *premium*. These characteristics are based upon BMW’s mission and values statements from the annual report from the year of 2012. The characteristics could also be connected to BMW’s vision statement, which is explained as the desired future for an organization (Mirvis et al., 2010). These characteristics lay the foundation for BMW’s desired brand image. However, to ensure that the employee brand image contains those characteristics, the managers want the employees to project a consistent behavior that includes *joy*, *professionalism*, *friendliness*, *helpfulness*, and *knowledge*. *Joy* is a key word that is frequently communicated together with the brand, and also a part of BMW’s slogan. Joy could be seen as the essence of the organization and the brand, further it should impregnate all the activities of the organization. This characteristic is not stated in the organization’s mission and vision, but the empirical investigation showed that managers, employees, and customers considered *joy* to be one of the most important characteristics of BMW. This implies that the feeling of *joy* should also be showed in the employees’ behavior. Hence, *joy* should be reflected in every activity within the organization.

Each characteristic has its basis from the keywords that shape the desired brand image of BMW. Thus, it implies that in order to project an image of the brand being a *premium brand*, the employees are expected to behave *professionally* in a way that will make every customer to get a feeling of being special and unique. The employees’ behavior of being *friendly* and *helpful* could be interpreted as
characteristics to project sustainability, since the employees are expected to always care about the relationship with the customer. The relationship aspect is of great importance for BMW, since they are keen to keep their customers loyal to the brand even in the future. This could indicate that every customer is important, and through always behaving in a friendly and helpful way, the employees provide the customers with the service they require. Hence, they ensure that the customer needs and wants will be satisfied, and thereby achieve sustainability. Finally, employees’ behavior of showing a wide range of knowledge could be interpreted as characteristics of innovation. The employees are expected to do a requirement analysis of every customer and thereby provide the customer with the most appropriate solution for each customer’s needs and wants, hence provide customers with innovative solutions.

Employees’ ability to deliver the desired brand image is dependent on how the organization projects the image to the employees and how quickly employees adapt the brand image (Miles and Mangold, 2004). Since the same characteristics were mentioned in all the interviews, it could indicate that BMW is consistently projecting the image to the employees. Through these characteristics, the employees can adapt the desired brand image and further project the brand image to customers.

**Sources of messages**

*Informal internal messages*

The organizational culture influences employees in their profession and ability to deliver the desired brand image, as a part of the informal internal messages (Miles and Mangold, 2004). Joy is according to the empirical investigation a characteristic that reflects the culture of BMW. That is the core of the organization and something that every activity is built upon. Professionalism is according to the empirical investigation for the managers also something that BMW’s organizational culture reflects. The managers claimed that the organization treats employees, customers, and competitors with respect. This could be seen as BMW’s different standards of behaviors, norms, and values that according to Miles and Mangold (2004) send messages to employees how they should work to reach organizational goals. Boyd and Sutherland (2006) further argue that this could enable employees to know what behavior that is required from them. The empirical investigation for the employees showed professionalism as an important part of the desired brand image and the
organizational culture has also influenced their behavior. The employees that were interviewed claimed that they always treat others with respect, both customers and coworkers. The informal internal messages also consist if interactions and observations of coworkers, supervisors, and others that works for the organization (Miles and Mangold, 2004). Hartline, Maxham and McKee (2000) argue this to be important since it enables employees to share brand values. The empirical investigation with the employees showed that the respondents perceived the managers at BMW to be professional, treat others with respect and also being responsive towards the employees. This could be interpreted as an important part of the socialization aspect, which enables employees to understand brand values, bond with employees and managers, and behave in accordance with the brand values (De Chernatony et al., 2006).

The empirical investigation also showed that the influence of organizational leadership influence employees in their ability to project the desired brand image, where the socialization aspect and observations of managers and leaders are argued to be important (Miles and Mangold, 2004; De Chernatony et al., 2006). First, the managers of BMW revealed during the empirical investigation that they are aware of that their behavior set the standards and influence employee behavior. Therefore, the managers claimed to act in accordance with the brand at all times, even after working hours. The managers further claimed that a behavior that is not in accordance with the brand could result in warnings from the organization. The empirical investigation for employees showed that the employees tend to think about how they behave, even after working hours, to represent BMW as a brand. The influence of organizational leadership could therefore be seen as a contributor for this behavior. The employees perceived managers of the organization to be very professional and to always represent BMW in their behavior. This was strengthened up during the empirical investigation with the customers of the organization, where several customers claimed that the behavior form employees is consistent and professional, which is important for their trust towards BMW.

Formal internal messages

The formal internal messages could according to Miles and Mangold (2004) contribute to employees’ knowledge about and motivation to project the desired brand
image. These types of messages derive from the human resource management and public relations (Miles and Mangold, 2004). Henkel et al. (2007) further argue that there should be written documents, which helps employees understand brand related behavior, and training sessions (Henkel et al., 2007). The empirical investigation for the managers revealed that BMW has so called “retail standards”, that are sent to the different resellers of the organization, Paulssons Bil included. The retail standards could for example consist of information regarding customer promises and different sales goals. These retail standards are interpreted as written documents, which is argued by Henkel et al. (2007) to help employees to understand brand related behavior. The empirical investigation with employees revealed that the retail standards are documents that every employee has taken part of. According to the employees at Paulssons Bil, these standards help them to express BMW as a brand to the customers. Further, the retail standards are created by BMW to strengthen the image of the brand and since the employees considered this as important, it can be interpreted that the documents contribute to the employees’ knowledge about and willingness to project BMW’s brand image. One of the employees further explained that he found the retail standards useful when expressing to the employees what the brand wants to achieve. This is something that strengthens up this interpretation even more.

The public relations could be interpreted to contribute to employees’ willingness and motivation to project the desired brand image. As mentioned earlier, public relation in the context of employee branding is public relations directed towards employees (Miles and Mangold, 2004). The empirical investigation for employees revealed that BMW, for example during training events occasions, manage to make the brand impregnating the whole event. The empirical investigation revealed occasions where BMW had managed to “brand” a whole hotel. One employee expressed that the hotel rooms were decorated with BMW art and the key to the room included the BMW logotype. This, together with the fact that employees express BMW to be extremely good at creating a feeling of belonging, could be interpreted to motivate employees to express these feelings and the desired brand image. One employee clearly stated that, after these events, she felt like she was BMW. Thus, these activities could be BMW’s public relations directed to employees, as an attempt to motivate employees and to make them feel as a part of the brand and belong to the organization. The empirical
investigation for managers revealed that BMW finds it very important that every activity within the organization reflects the brand. They argued that this was the reason for why BMW puts effort in making the atmosphere, the locations, the food, and the design to go in line with what the brand stands for. It could also be interpreted that the public relations contribute to employees knowledge of the desired brand image, as employees state that they find trainers and managers of BMW to act in accordance with the brand and further very friendly and professional.

**Informal external messages**

The informal external messages derive from customer feedback and word of mouth communication, and could affect employees’ psychological contracts (Miles and Mangold, 2004). It is further argued that it is important that the informal external messages are consistent with the brand values (Miles and Mangold, 2004). BMW identifies word of mouth through several channels. There are data software programs that continuously monitor social medias. The empirical investigation for managers revealed that most of the information collected through the software does not concern organizational activities. However, if the information concerns organizational activities that are not in line with the brand values, BMW can take actions towards the information. The actions could, according to the empirical investigation, be directed towards specific resellers and specific customers. This could indicate that BMW is aware that word of mouth could influence employees’ psychological contract to the organization. It could also be an indicator to the fact that the organization wants the informal external messages to be consistent with the brand values, which is argued by Miles and Mangold (2004) to be important in order to not break employees’ psychological contracts.

**Formal external messages**

The formal external messages can contribute to employees' understanding of the organization's brand image (Miles and Mangold, 2004). According to the employees the external communication from BMW goes in line with the internal. Thus, one of the employees argued that the external communication should focus more on the aspect of the *lifestyle* that comes with buying a BMW. The employee thought that the advertising is mainly focusing on the specific products and would like to see a more lifestyle focused external communication. This employee considered BMW to be a
brand that stands for more than just the products. Hence, it is clear that the employees reflect what is communicated externally and that it is important for the employees that the internal and external communications are coherent. This indicates that the employees has a great understanding of what BMW as a brand stands for, which according to Maxwell and Knox (2009) is important to enhance employee behavior.

The managers from BMW further described BMW as a brand that creates a lifestyle. Since BMW seems to focus on educating the employees in seeing BMW as a brand that creates a lifestyle for the customer, this needs to be focused on in their external communication as well. Thus, only one employee mentioned that there was a lack of lifestyle focus in BMW's external communication. The rest of the employees agreed that the communication internally and externally was coherent. This allows the employees, through their behavior, strengthen the brand values that are communicated externally (De Chernatony and Harris, 2001). The employees mentioned that every aspect of the brand was extremely well thought through. The fact that the employees overall found the external and internal communication cohesive can, according to Miles and Mangold (2004), show that they have a good understanding about BMW’s brand image. The consistency with internal and external communication could prevent a feeling of duplicity and hence avoid the employees to project an inconsistent brand image (Miles and Mangold, 2004)

The customers overall described BMW as a brand in the same terms as the managers and the employees did, this indicates that the brand image is perceived the same in the three segments. Since the customer's perception of BMW probably is a combination between external communication and the perception of employees' behavior, which is formed through BMW's internal communication, it is reasonable to state that the communication externally and internally are coherent. According to Miles and Mangold (2004) this scenario helps minimizing the risk that employees feel confused about how they should behave. That BMW seems to project the same values internally and externally indicates that the employees find it easier to know what the organization stands for, and how they should behave in accordance with these values. Considering that the customers described the employees with similar characteristics as the desired brand image of the organization, and that the internal and external communications are coherent, it could imply that the behavior of the employees reflects the expectations that are communicated externally. This, according to Gotsi
and Wilson (2001), is important to prevent that the reputation of the organization will be damaged.

Psychological contract

The upholding of psychological contract between the organization and its employees is important for enabling employees to understand, and keeping them motivated to project the desired brand image of the organization (Miles and Mangold, 2005). The different sources of messages that BMW are using to communicate its desired brand image to the employees have its foundation in the mission, vision and value statements. Since the employees perceive that the internal and external communication is coherent it could be argued that this contributes to the employees knowledge and understanding of the desired brand image of BMW. Further the managers at BMW are aware that in order to maximize the employee behavior, their behavior must be in accordance with the requirements they put on their employees. In order to enforce motivation through the employees, the managers need to find appropriate ways to relate to the employees (McDermott et al., 2013). Since the employees perceive that the managers through their behavior are reflecting the expected behavior of the employees, in terms of professionalism, helpfulness, friendliness, and knowledge, it could be interpreted that the managers of BMW has succeeded to relate to the employees. The employees further stated that the management successfully mediate brand behavior and give the employees a feeling of “being the brand”. This could, together with the coherent communication, be a result of that employees perceive the psychological contract to be upheld and thus be the reason for their motivation and willingness to project the desired brand image to customers.

Employees’ knowledge of the desired brand image

The various sources of messages contribute to employee’s knowledge of the desired brand image. It is important that the internal and external messages are coherent to prevent employees to perceived duplicity of the organization’s desired brand image (Miles et al., 2011; Miles and Mangold, 2004). The empirical investigation revealed that employees reflect every messages that BMW projects. Thus, it should be
mentioned that one employee perceived that the external messages of advertising did signal a different messages to some extent compared to the other sources of messages. However, it should also be mentioned that despite some duplicity that this might lead to, it did not affect employees’ perception about the brand image. This could indicate that the external messages of advertising do not to the same extent contribute to the employees’ understanding and knowledge about the desired brand image in comparison to the other sources of messages. Further, since the majority of the employees perceived that the internal and external messages were coherent, it could imply that BMW manage well to project the desired brand image to the employees and that the employees have adopted the brand image. This could show that BMW and the employees are communicating as one unit, which according to De Chernatony et al. (2006) is what the success of an organization depends on. It might be more likely to find this scenario more relevant, since the majority of the employees mentioned that they found the external and internal messages coherent.

Employee brand image

The employee brand image refers to the image the employees are about to project (Mile and Mangold, 2004). Employees’ knowledge about the brand image and their upheld psychological contract with the organization, have a major influence on the employees’ ability to deliver the desired brand image of the organization (Miles et al., 2011). The employee brand image of BMW is reflecting the desired brand image of the organization. This implies that the characteristics of professionalism, friendliness, helpfulness and knowledge, which stem from the identified characteristics of BMW’s desired brand image, are successfully implemented and communicated through the various sources of messages. The formal internal messages of BMW contribute to a large extent towards the employees’ knowledge and motivation to project the desired brand image. This since the empirical data collected from the employees are revealing that employees have a feeling of “being the brand“ after a training event.

The successful implementation of the desired brand image could have its explanation through the organization’s ambition to preserve the brand as a whole and hence, see their employees as the “living brand” of the organization. However, the formal messages could most likely not generate a feeling of “being the brand” among the employees if the managers are not projecting the expected and desired brand image of
BMW. Thus, it could be argued that the managers of BMW act in accordance to Boyd and Sutherland’s (2006) statements, which argue that in order to motivate the employees to deliver the customer service the organization desires, and ensure that the brand image is not compromised, the management must “walk the talk” and thereby lead by example (Boyd and Sutherland, 2006). The managers of BMW are aware that their behavior lays the foundation for the behavior of employees, and are keeping that in mind during, as well as after working hours. The empirical findings revealed that the managers and the employees all understand that BMW as a brand is valuable and that they understand that they contribute to the success of the organization, which according to Boyd and Sutherland (2006) is a key criteria of employee branding. Secondly, the employees are aware that their behavior lays the foundation of how BMW is perceived externally, since every employee knows how an employee at BMW should behave. This, in addition to the employees’ awareness of the brand values is according to Henkel et al. (2007) vital for the organization to enhance. This implies that the employees are committed to enact the brand values, which contributes to the success of the organization (De Chernatony, 2006)

It could be interpreted that the culture at BMW is deeply rooted within the organization, and thus affect the managers as well as the employees’ behavior. It could further be stated that the culture at BMW contributes to employees’ motivation and understanding of the organization’s desired brand image, since every employee knows what behavior that is appropriate for BMW. This could be the consequence of coworker influence in the sense that the managers of BMW manage well to ensure that the employees know and understand how to behave in accordance with the brand (De Chernatony et al., 2006) and thus increase employees’ commitment towards the brand (Hartline et al., 2000). The informal external messages in terms of customer feedback are something that BMW as well as Paulssons Bil are taking very seriously. BMW ensure that customer feedback through data software programs reach the concerned reseller. In addition to this, the resellers are on a daily basis tracking customer feedback through rating systems. This enables BMW as well as the employees to continuously improve employee behavior and hence, contribute to the employee’s knowledge of desired brand image of the organization (Miles and Mangold, 2004). Finally, the formal external messages are something that the employees reflect. As already mentioned, advertising was the only source of messages
that tend to differ to some extent in comparison to the others. However, since it did not affect the employees’ perception of BMW as a brand it could be stated that the formal external messages do not to a major extent affect employees’ knowledge or motivation to project the desired brand image of BMW. This could further imply that the internal messages as well as the informal external messages are the most important sources of messages to ensure that employees understand and are being motivated to project the desired brand image of BMW. The majority of the employees perceived that BMW is communicating as one unit. This could finally imply that BMW’s use of consistent messages could be the result of employees’ knowledge of the desired brand image and the upholding of the psychological contract, which could contribute to employees’ ability to project the desired brand image of BMW.

6.3 Analysis brand loyalty in the context of employee branding

The customers perceived that the employees projected an image of professionalism, trustworthiness, friendliness, knowledge and helpfulness. These characteristics go in line with the desired brand image of BMW (see Table 5 – The managers of BMW), which indicates that the employee branding of BMW is successfully managed. This further implies that the relationship between the employee branding of BMW and brand loyalty can be explored.

According to Mittal and Kamakura (2001) the outcome of a satisfied customer could be the intention to repurchase the brand. Thus, it can be interpreted that customer satisfaction can be a factor that increases a customer's loyalty to a brand. In this empirical investigation it has become clear that BMW’s customers feel a strong satisfaction towards the brand, not only with the products, but also with the treatment they have experienced during their visits at the reseller. The customers experienced that they had got the same sort of treatment during every visit and that they perceived the employees to strive for the same goals. The customers used the same description for their perception as for their expectations on the employee behavior, which indicates that the customer experiences that the employees’ behavior meets their expectations. Confirmation of expectations sends favorable signals and makes customers buy the brand with more comfort (Kim et al., 2008) and an outcome could be satisfaction towards the brand (Bloemer and Kasper, 1995). This could indicate that this confirmation of expectations regarding the behavior from employees, affects
customers’ satisfaction. Further, the majority of the customers agreed that the positive behavior in terms of projected image by the employees could contribute to their willingness to repurchase from the reseller. This could be an indicator that the image projected by employees also is important for customers’ repurchase intentions, which according to Mittal and Kamakura (2001) could be an outcome of a satisfied customer. One reason why the customers had chosen to stay loyal to the reseller seemed to be the positive experiences that they had perceived from their interactions with the employees.

According to Wangenheim and Bayón (2007) a satisfied customer further has a tendency to recommend and talk favorable about the brand to others. All the customers in this investigation agreed that the employees’ behavior contributed to how they talked about BMW as a brand to others. If they experience a behavior from the employees that meets their expectations, they stated that they would recommend the brand to others. If the customer considered the employees' behavior to be bad, and thus deviate from their expectations, the customers were likely to talk negatively about the reseller. Thus, a scenario like that would probably not make them chose to purchase another car brand. It could lead to them switching to a reseller competitor, but they would most likely continue to buy from BMW, due to the strong commitment they felt towards the brand.

According to Hee et al. (2012) brand loyalty is dependent on whether the customers can identify themselves with the brand or not. This is something that became clear during the empirical investigation. Several of the customers that were interviewed claimed that they felt a strong emotional attachment towards BMW as a brand. Two of the customers even stated that they could not picture themselves driving another car than a BMW. They also claimed that the employees' behavior contributed to this attachment, through projecting a behavior that goes in line with how they perceive the brand. The customers seemed to put value in the fact that a BMW matched their personality and their lifestyle, which indicates that they tend to identify themselves with the brand. The employees' role in this identification can be interpreted as based on that they, according to the customers, behave in line with how the customers perceived the brand. One customer also stated: “According to me, the employees are BMW”. Hence, there are indications that the employees' behavior has a major
influence to strengthen the customers' identification to the brand. Thus, it could be stated that the customers can identify themselves with the image projected by employees, which according to Kabiraj and Shanmugan (2011) could contribute to customer’s identification towards the brand. The identification could be an indicator that the image projected by employees further influences customers’ affective commitment towards BMW. The affected committed customers, according to Iglesias et al. (2011), identify themselves with the brand and thereby become emotionally attached (Iglesias et al., 2011).

A strong trust towards a brand can according to Nawaz and Usman (2011) and Hee et al. (2012) lead to a customer's loyalty towards a brand. The customers in this investigation all had experienced that the employees' behavior did not differ from time to time. They further experienced that the employees acted in accordance with how the customers perceived BMW as a brand. This was according to the customers something that contributed to a feeling of trust towards the reseller as well as BMW as a brand. The lack of disappointments when visiting the reseller had according to the customers led to a strong feeling of trust. One respondent further explained BMW as “an honest organization”, which could be a result of the consistent behavior from the employees. It could therefore be stated that the employee branding of BMW contributes to a consistent employee behavior, which in turn positively influence the customers’ perception of that employees through their behavior are keeping the promises and expectations from the customers. On the basis of previous argumentation it could further be stated that the behavior of the employees contributes to customers’ trust towards BMW as a brand (Delgado-Ballester and Munuera-Alemán, 2005; Kim et al., 2008).

The empirical investigation indicates that the behavior of the employees could contribute to customers feeling of trust, commitment, identification and satisfaction towards BMW as a brand. This indicated that behavior from employees affects the behavioral aspect of brand loyalty, which according to Jacoby and Kyner (1973) results in that customers can chose a brand as their optimal choice. The fact that some customers claimed to not be able to picture themselves driving another car could indicate that they consider BMW being their optimal choice of car brand. Further, it could be interpreted that employee behavior affects the attitudinal aspect of brand
loyalty as well. The attitude components concern customers’ attitudes towards the brand they are loyal to (Jacoby, 1971), and include unique values associated with the brand (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001). The customers claimed in the empirical investigation that the employees were treating them on a personal, but still professional, level and that resulted in that they felt trust for the employees. This indicated that the personal treatment could be the unique values that the customers associate with BMW. The fact that customers perceived the employees to treat them on a personal level could be interpreted to be one of the reasons for why the customers also felt a strong emotional attachment towards BMW.

However, the customers agreed that a negative behavior from the employees would not likely lead to that they chose to switch to a competing car brand. They would probably only switch to a competing reseller. Their feelings towards BMW as a brand seemed to be strong enough to survive negative treatment from the employees. Thus, one customer claimed that if the treatment was bad at each and every reseller he would visit, this experience might in the long run affect his feelings towards BMW as a brand. However, this customer did not find a scenario like this likely to happen, since he had experienced a very positive treatment from the employees.
7. Conclusion

Due to the collected empirical investigations it is clear that BMW's employee branding can strengthen customers' loyalty towards the brand. However, it is not likely to negatively affect this loyalty towards BMW as a brand because of the strong emotional attachment the customers’ felt.

The investigation reveals that the internal as well as the informal external sources of messages to a larger extent influence employees' ability to project the desired brand image in comparison to the formal external sources of messages. The internal sources of messages contribute to employees' feeling of belonging to BMW and hence, it makes them keen to project the desired brand image to customers. These messages affect the employees so strongly that it contributes to the upholding of the psychological contracts and hence, it strengthens the employees' motivation and willingness to project the desired brand image.

Since the customers believe the employees to be a part of their perception of the brand, and that the employees project characteristics that the customers can identify themselves with, this contributes to that the customers experience identification and commitment towards BMW. The fact that the customers could identify themselves with the characteristics, thus the image that employees project, they have expectations regarding the treatment from employees. The empirical investigation reveals that customers believe that the employees meet these expectations and that this contributed to the customers’ satisfaction towards BMW. Further, the empirical investigation revealed that customers receive the same treatment and perceive the same behavior and characteristics projected from every employee, and thereby, contribute to the customers trust for the organization. Thus, employee branding do affect customers’ trust to the brand, achieved through the coherent behavior that employee branding results in. Consequently, through consistently communicating the desired brand image to the employees, BMW has developed an employee brand which positively influence customers satisfaction, commitment, trust and identification towards the brand, and thus revealed the relationship between its
employee branding and brand loyalty.

### 7.1 Limitations

The findings in this thesis was limited to the relationship between one organization’s employee branding and brand loyalty. Considering this, it might imply that the findings mainly could be applicable for BMW only. Further, since a qualitative research approach induces a rather small sample size, the ability to do generalizations beyond this case could be difficult (Bryman and Bell, 2011). However, in accordance with Yin’s (2012) argumentation, the intentions with the findings of a case study are not to make any statistical generalization. Thus, in accordance with the aim of an analytic generalization, the findings of this thesis could be applied in situations where the same theoretical concepts and construct could be relevant.

The findings of this thesis further rely on empirical data generated from people that belong to a world known organization. This could imply that the respondents’ answers might suffer from some biases, in terms of that the answers might be angled for advantage of the organization, which could have affected the result, and hence should be seen as a limitation. However, since the empirical investigation has shown similar answers between managers, employees and customers, it is not likely to suspect this sort of bias to have occurred.
8. Research implications

This chapter provides managerial implications, based on the findings of this thesis. It further provides theoretical insights and directions for further research.

8.1 Managerial implications

The empirical investigation provided empirical evidence of how BMW manages the process of employee branding, and how the process contributes to employees’ ability to project the desired brand image of the organization. The empirical investigation further provides evidence that there is a relationship between employee branding of BMW and brand loyalty. Employee branding activities contribute to customers’ satisfaction, commitment, identification, and trust towards the brand. Making employee branding a business objective could therefore lead to sustainable competitive advantage generated through brand loyal customers.

This thesis could work as a guide to manage employee branding within the car industry. The findings provide information of how BMW is managing the different employee branding activities, which in this thesis is proven to be successfully implemented, and could thus be used by other organizations to generate equivalent advantages.

The findings of this thesis could be seen as important for the retail sector. The findings suggest that it is of great importance for specific resellers to manage employee branding activities since it generates not only brand loyal customers, but also loyal customers to the specific reseller. This statement is supported by the empirical investigation for the brand loyal customers of BMW, where they claimed that customers were likely to switch reseller if employees behave deviant from the brand image of the organization. Thus, poorly executed employee branding would not likely, according to the empirical investigation, destroy the loyalty towards the brand, but that the customers would switch to another reseller and the concerned reseller could thereby lose incomes generated by sales.
8.2 Theoretical insight

The findings of this thesis bring sophistication to the conceptualization of the employee branding process conducted by Miles and Mangold (2004). The result of this thesis indicates that it is the internal and the informal external sources of messages that to a larger extent contribute to BMW’s employees’ ability to deliver the desired brand image of the organization, and the upholding of the psychological contract.

The findings further explore the relationship between an organization’s employee branding and brand loyalty. The empirical investigation provides evidence of how employee branding activities influence customers’ satisfaction, commitment, trust, and identification towards the brand. By applying analytic generalization recommended by Yin (2012), the findings could be generalized to some broader theory. This implies that this thesis revealed how employee branding and brand loyalty is related, and thus shown the relationship between theoretical concepts and construct, which according to Riege (2003) allows particular findings to be generalized.

Finally, this thesis has through its findings generated additional information for the concept of employee branding, and thus proposed an added result of its potential outcome. This thesis has therefore provided the field of employee branding with what according to Riege (2003) could be seen as additional valuable sources of information.

8.3 Direction for further research

On the basis of the findings, the authors recommend other researchers to conduct a multiple case study within a specific industry or market. Multiple case study research would bring more clarity to the relationship and reveal if it is dependent on a specific context. Further, other researchers could conduct quantitative research to make statistical inferences between the two concepts to make statistical generalizations between the concepts of employee branding and brand loyalty. More research would generate further evidence of how and in which context employee branding and brand loyalty could be related. Thus, it could bring clarity in the relationship as well as guide organizations to achieve sustainable competitive advantage in terms of brand loyalty through employee branding.
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Appendix 1 - Interview guide Managers

Questionnaire for BMW, Swedish Management

Start by asking about the person's exact position in the company.

About the BMW brand:

- What are BMW's missions? (Mission, vision and values) (Desired brand image)
- What are BMW's values? (Mission, vision and values) (Desired brand image)
- What is BMW's vision? (Mission, vision and values) (Desired brand image)
- To what extent do you consider those in your everyday work?
- How do you wish your employees to project BMW as a brand? Which characteristics? (Desired brand image)

About the interaction with employees:

- What tools do you use to communicate the desired brand image when you interact with your employees? How do you communicate in your interaction with the employees, in order to communicate the missions and values? (Messages) (Lead by example) (Coworker influence)
- How does the organization/management ensure that employees understand the mission and values? (Messages) (What tool)
- How do you ensure that employee’s behavior is in accordance/in line with the organizations mission and values? (Formal internal messages)
- What are you looking for in an employee to ensure that he/she behaves in accordance with the brand mission and values? Which characteristics do you find favorable? Why? (Formal internal messages) (Desired brand image)
- How do you communicate externally to reflect the mission and values? (External messages, informal and formal)
- Are there any differences between how the missions and values are communicated externally with how they are communicated internally? Give example. (External messages, informal and formal) (Messages)
• How does the organization ensure that the internal and external communication reflects the same brand image (mission and values)? (External messages, informal and formal) (Messages)

• How do you motivate your employees, on a daily basis, to project the organizations missions and values (brand image) to the customers? (Motivation) (Employee branding process) (Psychological contracts)

• Do you arrange educational meetings for your employees? How are they arranged? What is the purpose of these events? (Motivation) (Messages, Formal and Informal internal messages)

• In what way do you feel that it is important that you as a manager behave in accordance with BMW's mission and values? (Promise keeping, lead by example, mediation by managers) (culture, coworker influence, influence by managers)

• **How do you behave? How do you ensure that your behavior is in accordance to the desired brand image? (based on the question above)**

• Do you have written documents that describe how employees should behave? (Promise keeping, motivation, and mediation by managers) (Messages)

• Do you think these documents influence the behavior of the organizations employees? (Lead by example, promise keeping) (Messages)

To sum up

• What else, apart from the mission, vision, and values, contributes to employee branding activities?
Appendix 2 – Interview guide Employees

Questionnaire for BMW, employees

Start by asking about the person’s *exact* position in the company.

About the BMW brand:

- What are BMW’s missions? (Mission, vision and values) (Desired brand image)
- What are BMW’s values? (Mission, vision and values) (Desired brand image)
- What is BMW’s vision? (Mission, vision and values) (Desired brand image)
- To what extent do you consider those in your everyday work?
- How do you interpret BMW’s desired brand image?
- How do you think that BMW want you to behave in the interaction with customers? Which characteristics? (Desired brand image)
- How are BMW communicating those characteristics to you? (Messages) (Lead by example) (Coworker influence) (Organizational culture)

About the knowledge and motivation

- How does your co-workers contribute to your knowledge about the desired brand image? (Informal internal messages)
- How does managers’ behavior contribute to your knowledge about the desired brand image? (Informal internal messages) (Lead by example)
- How does the management motivate you to project the desired brand image? Please elaborate. (Lead by example) (Formal internal messages)
- How does the educational sessions contribute to your knowledge about the desired brand image? (Formal internal messages)
- How does the educational sessions contribute to your motivation of projecting the desired brand image? (Formal internal messages)
- In what way does the written documents you receive from the head-office contributes to your knowledge about the desired brand image? (Formal internal messages) (Psychological contract) (Employees knowledge of the desired brand image)
• In what way does the written documents you receive from the head-office contribute to your motivation to project the desired brand image?

• Do you feel that BMW (as an employer) keep their promises to you as an employee? Please elaborate. (Promise keeping) (Promise delivery) (Formal internal messages) (Psychological contracts)

• How do you think that your organization handles customer feedback? (Psychological contracts) (Knowledge about the desired brand image) (Promise keeping)

• How does external activities e.g. public relations and advertising, contribute to your knowledge about the desired brand image? (Formal external messages)

• How does external activities e.g. public relations and advertising contribute to your motivation to project the desired brand image? (Formal external messages)

• How do you perceive the desired brand image? (Desired brand image) (Employee brand image)

• How do you behave to ensure that you reflect the desired brand image? (Behavior) (Employee brand image)
Appendix 3- Interview guide Customers

1. How do you perceive BMW as a brand?

2. What characteristics do you associate with BMW?

3. In what way do you find employees contribute to the previous mentioned characteristics?

Brand loyalty

Satisfaction

4. Have you own more than one car? (Repurchase intentions)

5. How does employees’ behavior contribute to your willingness to purchase products from BMW frequently? (Repurchase intention) (Overall quality)

6. Do you perceive that you get the same treatment from different employees? Explain (Confirmation of expectations) (Trust-Promise keeping)

8. Can the treatment from the employees contribute to that you will talk positively or negatively about BMW as a brand? Please elaborate? (WOM)

9. What expectations do you have on the employees when you are about to purchase a BMW? (Confirmation of expectations)

Commitment

10. What is it about BMW as a brand that make it so special? (Emotional attachment)

11. Do you think that employees’ behavior can enhance or destroy the feelings you have gained towards BMW as a brand? Please elaborate. (Affective commitment)

12. Can employees’ behavior make you switch to a competitor? Please elaborate. (Employee behavior and emotional attachment)

13. Have you purchased all of your cars from the same sales person? (Commitment)

14. Have you purchased all of your cars from the same reseller? (Commitment)
Affective commitment identification

15. what is it about BMW that make it special for you? Please elaborate
   (Identification)

16. In what way can the employee behavior enhance or destroy this personal meaning
    for you? (Employee behavior)

17. Do you find it important that the employees understand that BMW for you is more
    then just a car? Please elaborate (Employees behavior, Identification)

Trust:

18. Do you trust BMW as a brand? Please explain (Promise delivery)

19. In what way can the employees affect your trust towards the brand? (Promise keeping)
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