SALES MANAGER PERCEPTIONS OF EMPLOYER BRANDING STRATEGIES FOR ENTRY-LEVEL SALESPERSON RECRUITMENT IN SELECT BUSINESS-TO-BUSINESS COMPANIES

A Dissertation in
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by

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ABSTRACT

In today’s competitive business environment, salespeople are in high demand. This demand for salespeople creates a buyers’ market, and as such provides the future sales professional with numerous employment opportunities. With more sales positions to fill than potential candidates, sales managers need to enhance their recruitment efforts to increase their chances of attracting top sales talent. To differentiate from the competition and become a company where salespeople are attracted to and ultimately consider as a place to work, sales organizations must establish and convey an employer brand. Defined as “the package of functional, economic, and psychological benefits provided by employment, and identified with the employing company” (Ambler & Barrow, 1996, p. 187), the employer brand is simply the company’s reputation as an employer.

The purpose of this study was to explore sales manager perceptions of employer branding strategies B2B companies use for the external recruitment of entry-level salespeople. To explore these issues, a grounded theory qualitative data analysis approach was chosen. Ten sales managers from B2B companies who engaged in the external recruitment of entry-level salespeople for their organization were interviewed for this research study. The interviews were subsequently transcribed and coded, using a three-phased coding process that resulted in the construction of themes. Secondary data was also analyzed and coded for this grounded theory study. A theoretical grounded theory framework was developed for a better understanding of employer branding’s role in recruitment. The study results revealed that building a solid employer reputation by creating value for current and potential employees attracts job applicants to fill sales positions, and retains ideal employees as well. The findings suggest that leveraging employer branding for recruitment is far better for attracting a large pool of candidates than relying on the corporate brand. However, neither employer branding nor leveraging the corporate brand appears to be producing the best quality salesperson applicants. The findings did suggest
that employers could improve recruitment efforts to attract better quality candidates by engaging in, or increasing campus recruiting. The findings indicate that if companies increase their efforts to build a strong employer brand and target college campuses with their employer branding messages, they will attract a sufficient number of quality salesperson candidates, building a foundation for successful entry-level salesperson recruitment.
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Chapter 1

Introduction

For many companies, sales are what drive their business. In the business-to-business (B2B) industry, salespeople are vital for building important business relationships, and are the primary link between the customer and the company. B2B selling is different from selling to the consumer, as businesses are targeting their efforts to other businesses rather than to the final consumer. B2B salespeople must market their product or service to other business, with the goal of providing value for the business customer, building relationships with them, and capturing value from the business customer in return (Kotler & Armstrong, 2012). A critical component for business success is getting the right salesperson for the job. Recent statistics by the U.S. Department of Labor (2015) estimate sales positions will continue to grow, projecting 5% growth from 2014 to 2024, which is as fast as the average for all occupations.

Most of the research on the sales profession describes the negative perceptions of selling and of a sales career (Karakaya, Quigley, Bingham, Hari, & Nasir, 2014; Mich, Conners, & Feldman, 2014; Sojka, Gupta, & Hartman, 2000; Waldeck, Pullins, & Houlette, 2010). However, current research suggests there has been improvement in post-secondary student perceptions of the sales profession (Bristow, Gulati, & Amyx, 2006). A survey on Careerbuilder.com in 2006 identified sales as one of the top four promising careers for college graduates (Shaw, 2007). The change to a more positive perception of selling as a career has also been recognized by university officials, students, and employers, who are beginning to see selling as an integral part of the business world (Bristow et al., 2006). Professional Sales Curriculums are being developed at universities with business schools where students are taken through the B2B sales process. Based
on the 1999 American Marketing Association’s Faculty Consortium on Professional Selling and Sales Management, recommended methods for teaching personal selling in the new millennium included: on campus field experiences, mentors, career shadowing, role-play, and role-plays involving sales experts. These methods have become the foundation for professional sales programs, prompting students to begin seeing professional sales as a challenging career opportunity (Bristow et al., 2006; Inks, Schetzle, & Avila, 2011).

Although the perceptions of the sales industry are becoming more positive, selling is not yet considered a noble profession. According to the U.S. Department of Labor (2015), more than 778,000 new sales jobs will need to be filled in the next 8 years. To fill the increasing number of sales positions, organizations need to find ways to recruit wisely. Understanding how and why employer branding practices affect salesperson recruitment will be vital for recruiters looking to gain competitive advantage over firms competing for the same sales talent. Employer branding is defined as “the package of functional, economic, and psychological benefits provided by employment, and identified with the employing company” (Ambler & Barrow, 1996, p. 187).

Simply stated, employer branding is how the current employees feel about the company they are working for. Employers then use that information for recruiting potential employees to their company. The employer branding strategy of using current employee testimonials to attract potential candidates is invaluable for recruiting salespeople.

**Statement of the Problem**

Although the effects of employer branding on recruitment efforts have been explored, the literature falls short of investigating employer branding to specifically enhance salesperson recruitment efforts. Recruitment can take place either internal or external of the company. While internal recruitment draws from those employees currently working at the firm; external
recruitment may be defined as bringing a job opening to the attention of potential job candidates outside of the company, influencing them to apply, affecting whether they remain interested in the position until they are offered the job, and influencing them to accept the job offer (Breaugh, 2008). External B2B salesperson recruitment will be the focus of this study.

It is no longer enough for salesperson recruiters simply to do what has been done in the past to externally recruit potential candidates for entry-level sales positions. In today’s tough labor market, with more sales positions to fill than potential candidates, generic recruitment methods are passé. Things like social media and other digital platforms, once all the rage for making connections with candidates, are now being utilized in most salesforce recruitment efforts. While the recruitment methods continue to change over time, the new methods spread throughout the industry and quickly become the norm. To differentiate from the competition and become a company where salespeople are attracted to and ultimately consider as a place to work, sales organizations must establish and convey an employer brand. Potential employees want to know about the companies where they intend to work. In other words, candidates want to establish relationships with prospective companies before they decide to work for them. Marketers, in particular, know that establishing relationships is paramount for attracting customers to specific brands. To gain competitive advantage for attracting top-notch salespeople, organizations need to understand how creating value for your brand up front, will attract the “right” candidates to fill their sales positions. If sales organizations utilize employer branding, the benefits will be realized by both the potential candidates and the salesperson recruiters who need to make that all-important decision of fit for the organization. Ultimately, recruitment efforts will be about attracting and recruiting the best salesperson for the job, one who will stay at and grow with the company. Employer branding will affect those salesperson recruitment efforts and increase a company’s chances of attracting quality salespeople to fill their jobs.
Marketing is the key to effectively communicating value regardless of what you are trying to sell. The marketing function helps communicate the product or service offering to the consumer. In the broader sense, marketing is creating value for consumers, building relationships with them, and capturing value from them in return (Kotler & Armstrong, 2012). Although practitioners are most familiar with marketing products to consumers, marketing can be an effective way to recruit a company to potential employees as well. Whether trying to convey the value of a product or service, or the value of a company to a prospective employee, the concept of marketing is still the same. Employer branding provides the strategy to market a company to prospective employees. Because of the negative perceptions and inherent uncertainty of the sales profession, conveying the positive attributes of the company as a potential employer to prospective candidates becomes increasingly important. Understanding what employer branding means for effective recruitment of salespeople is critical for B2B sales organizations to attract and hire the right person for the job the first time. Employer branding is not meant to replace the traditional role of the recruiter within organizations, but rather to enhance the fundamental recruitment strategy.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the study was to explore sales manager perceptions of the processes B2B companies use to construct their employer branding messages for the external recruitment of entry-level salespeople. A brand, by definition, is the name, term, sign, or design, or a combination of them, intended to identify the goods or services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competitors (Kotler & Armstrong, 2012). Branding, the strategy of developing the brand, may be used to identify a company in terms of the goods or services it sells, the employment experience, and the company image. Each specific type of
branding relates to its own individual target group. While product branding is aimed specifically at the customer, corporate branding is directed towards shaping any outsider’s view of the company. Employer branding, on the other hand, refers to “current and potential employees as branding targets” (Edwards, 2009, p. 6). For the purposes of this study, employer branding is being explored. As previously stated, employer branding is defined as “the package of functional, economic, and psychological benefits provided by employment, and identified with the employing company” (Ambler & Barrow, 1996, p. 187). Organizations that recruit salespeople should recognize that marketing their brand is a critical component that will help build a successful recruitment effort.

**Research Questions**

Sales organizations that recognize the importance of employer branding and know how to market their company’s brand to potential sales candidates, will greatly benefit in terms of recruiting the right salespeople for their organization. Understanding how to infuse employer branding with current recruitment methods and strategies is critical for recruitment success. Ultimately, the research in this study attempted to identify the critical components of an employer branding program and explore what effect understanding and skillfully managing the employer brand has on company efforts to recruit exemplary entry-level salespeople.

In order to explore the role of employer branding in the external recruitment and selection of entry-level salespeople in B2B companies, the current study sought to answer the following research questions:

1. How do employers decide what is important for potential employees to know about their organization’s employer brand, their reputation as an employer?
2. How do employers who develop their employer brand, use their employer branding message to recruit entry-level salespeople?

3. What effect does skillfully managing the employer brand have on company efforts to recruit exemplary entry-level salespeople?
Chapter 2

Review of the Literature

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a review of the related literature and past research studies relevant to this proposed study of the critical employer branding elements that influence the recruitment of top sales talent in B2B companies. The chapter is divided into four main sections: (a) an overview of branding, (b) the relationship of employer branding and human resource management, (c) the unique characteristics of salesperson recruitment, and (d) employer branding and salesperson recruitment. A chapter summary is also provided.

Overview of Branding

Many organizations consider their brands among the most valuable assets of the firm, with a considerable amount of time and effort spent building and managing these brands (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Kotler & Armstrong, 2012). Understanding the general concept and benefits of branding is critical to comprehending the employer branding concept. Evidence of understanding the benefits of branding dates back to a medieval theologian in the early 1400s who said that consumer benefits from goods and services purchased included three main elements: function, market price, and psychological benefits (Ambler & Barrow, 1996). This definition of branding as an element of marketing that comprises the value that organizations deliver to customers has remained constant throughout modern times. Product branding and corporate branding will also be discussed to better distinguish employer branding and its role within the organization.
Product Branding

A brand is all of the promises and perceptions that an organization wants its customers to feel about its product and service offering. In its simplest form, a product brand is the element of marketing that attaches specific identifiers to the product or service so consumers think of it when deciding to purchase an item in that product category. By definition, the product brand is the name, term, design, or symbol or other feature that distinguishes one seller’s product from those of others (Armstrong & Kotler, 2015). However, product brands are more than just names and symbols, “they are a key element in a company’s relationships with consumers” (Kotler & Armstrong, 2012, p. 243). Built and managed by the marketing department, product brands are powerful assets that add value to the product and are clearly customer-focused (Balmer, 2001). Brands have meaning well beyond a product’s physical attributes, as consumers attach meanings to brands and develop brand relationships (Kotler & Armstrong, 2012). Marketers try to build awareness, knowledge, and interest in the brand to build equity in the brand. Brand equity is the differential effect that knowing the brand name has on a customer response to the product or its marketing (Kotler & Armstrong, 2012). Ultimately, if built and managed well, an organization’s product brand becomes the customer’s brand of choice.

Corporate Branding

Corporate branding, is much broader and more complex than product branding, encompassing both the corporate culture and subcultures of the organization (Balmer, 2001). Defined as the promise between the organization and the key stakeholder groups, corporate branding has invaluable benefits for the organization (Balmer, 1998). An organization’s corporate brand includes the communication of the brand’s values, serves as a means of
differentiation from their competitors, and enhances the esteem and loyalty in which the
organization is held by stakeholder groups (Balmer & Gray, 2003). Although managed by the
chief executive and requiring constant attention from top management, a total commitment of all
staff is also required to deliver the corporate brand promise (Balmer, 2001). Because the very
heart of a brand is a promise between the company and potential and existing customers, all
members of the organization must understand and be willing to deliver on it (Foster, Punjaisri, &
Cheng, 2010). It is important to note that in order for a corporate brand to be successful, it must
meet the needs of all of an organization’s stakeholders, both internal and external of the company.
However, the way in which employees behave has a major impact on how the company is
perceived by their external stakeholders (Foster et al., 2010). Ultimately, corporate brands are
fundamentally different from product brands, utilizing a multi-disciplinary approach; involving
top management in the process; and including all stakeholders, both inside and outside of the
company (Balmer & Gray, 2003).

**Employer Branding**

When branding is used in the area of human resource management to create an image of a
great place to work for potential employees, it is called employer branding (Backhaus & Tikoo,
2004). The employer brand is closely associated with corporate culture, and creates a rather
unclear boundary between employer branding and corporate branding (Ambler & Barrow, 1996).
However, employer branding may distinguishable from product branding and corporate branding
in several ways, namely its focus. While product branding focuses on the customer, and
corporate branding focuses on internal and external stakeholders, employer branding focuses on
potential and current employees as its branding target. Similar to both product branding and
corporate branding, employer branding is also a promise between the organization and potential
and current employees, an important stakeholder group. This concept of employer branding was believed to be coined by Ambler and Barrow (1996) and defined as “the package of functional, economic, and psychological benefits provided by employment, and identified with the employing company” (p. 187). A more modern definition of employer branding, which makes its relationship with human resource management much clearer, is “a targeted long-term strategy to manage the awareness and perception of employees, potential employees, and related stakeholders with regard to a particular firm” (Sullivan, 2004, p. 1). In the same way that a company is able to develop and manage product brands and corporate brands, so too can firms build their employer brands to convey a distinct image to current and potential employees. The benefits the employer brand offers to employees mirrors the benefits a product brand offers to the customer. These benefits include: functional benefits, such as developmental or useful activities for employees; economic benefits like material or monetary rewards; and psychological benefits, such as belonging and purpose (Ambler & Barrow, 1996). However, it is critical that all of a company’s brand positions; product, corporate, and employer, are consistent in order for consumers and potential employees to trust the company and the brand (Ambler & Barrow, 1996a; Foster et al., 2010).

While external marketing encompasses how companies create value and build relationships with their customers, internal marketing has been described as how organizations train and motivate employees to satisfy customers (Armstrong & Kotler, 2015). This focus on employees that internal marketing provides is directly related to the concept of employer branding. Although the literature on employer branding spans more than three decades, it has only just recently begun to gain popularity as a practice within organizations (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Foster et al., 2010). Positioned in the literature as an activity directly affecting a company’s attractiveness to current and potential employees, it can greatly enhance recruitment success. The current theory is that creating a strong employer brand increases the chances of
attracting top new talent to the organization (Näppä, Farshid, & Foster, 2014). The value in employer branding is created by the unique employment experience, which includes elements like advantage over the competition, financial rewards, and intrinsic rewards (Edwards, 2009). Companies treating their employees as valued customers can produce employer branding through positive word of mouth about the company as an employer (Näppä et al., 2014). The employer brand is most useful when applied to high value added service businesses, where higher salaries and fewer employees necessitates deeper employee/employer relationships (Ambler & Barrow, 1996).

Employer branding helps employers create detailed descriptions of their companies to attract individuals looking for jobs. It is no surprise that how job seekers view themselves comes into play when deciding where to work. Individuals tend to want to work for companies that share similar characteristics to their own personalities (Näppä et al., 2014). It should also come as no surprise that companies with favorable images are viewed as places where job seekers want to work because they feel they can evolve with, grow with, and get closer to their ideal self by being part of those organizations (Näppä et al., 2014). Google is a prime example of a company with a favorable image because they have been able to develop a strong employer brand in a very crowded technology market. Their brand image is one of being the premier search-engine provider, with the perception of being a fun and exciting place to work, thus people want to gain employment there.

**Employer Branding and Human Resource Management**

When brand management within an organization is applied to the human resource function it is termed employer branding (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). The human resource department is tasked with “building an image in the minds of the potential labor market that the
In an attempt to understand the relationship between employer branding and human resource management, various research studies were reviewed.

**Overview**

In one of the earliest research studies on employer branding by Ambler and Barrow (1996), the purpose was simply to gain a better understanding of what human resource departments knew about employer branding, to what extent they utilized employer branding, and the significance of employer branding within the organization. The study was conducted using exploratory research in the form of semi-structured depth interviews with human resource managers from 27 companies in a variety of industries (1996). The interview questions covered five main headings: (a) the existence of the Employer Brand, and its components; (b) the importance of the Employer Brand to the company, and its influence over Human Resource policy; (c) positioning of the Employer Brand; (d) measurement of employee relationships; and (e) the main obstacles to developing the company reputation as an employer (Ambler & Barrow, 1996). The interviewers were careful not to introduce the term employer branding, but rather try to pull the term currently used in that organization to describe the firm’s reputation as an employer. The key findings from this research centered on the significance of the employer brand to employers, managing and measuring the employer brand, and obstacles to developing the employer brand. For many respondents the term employer branding was not part of the thinking or the language of that organization, with most associating the term closely with corporate culture. However, once respondents understood the concept and its inherent existence in companies, most grasped the importance of the employer brand if managed well. And although many understood the importance of employer branding, many felt that it was a low
priority need in their organizations. As far as measuring and managing the employer brand, many respondents believed that human resources would be the department best suited for this task because of its close link to the executive committee in the organization. With regard to obstacles to developing the employer brand, many respondents had a somewhat negative perception of employer branding, feeling that it was “artificial and manipulative.” Other obstacles to employer branding include lack of funding and buy-in from top management, as well as a weak human resource infrastructure which includes inconsistent rewards and bonuses for employees (Ambler & Barrow, 1996).

Ultimately, the Ambler and Barrow study illustrated that employer branding does exist in organizations even though its existence may not be linked to the term and managed as such. Human resource managers are aware of the existence of such a concept, but disagree about its importance and who should manage the process. The study also revealed that employer branding was more important where high skills and individual development were an important part of the job. Therefore, professional service firms with employees who need to deliver high value and interact closely with customers stand to gain the most from a deliberate and well-managed employer brand (Ambler & Barrow, 1996).

Building on the work of Ambler and Barrow, Backhaus and Tikoo attempted to clarify the relationship between employer branding and human resource management, and proposed a framework to initiate a scholarly study of employer branding (2004). The researchers of this study note that although organizations are spending resources on and finding value in the practice of employer branding, academic research on the topic is limited (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). Because of the growing popularity of employer branding and the lack of academic research on the topic, Backhaus and Tikoo attempt to further define employer branding relationships and present a framework for scholarly research (2004). Defined in this study as the “process of building an identifiable and unique employer identity,” employer branding builds a concept of the firm that
differentiates it from the competition (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). From a human resource perspective, employer branding encompasses three steps: developing a value proposition for the brand, marketing that value proposition externally to the firm’s target populations, and marketing it internally to current employees and incorporating it into the organizational culture (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). When the employer brand is positioned and marketed well, the firm will reap the benefits of attracting potential employees to the firm as well as retaining current employees.

Incorporating marketing and human resource concepts, a framework for understanding employer branding identifies “brand associations” and “brand loyalty” as two key elements resulting from the process (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). The framework for employer branding in this study is a linear process which asserts that employer branding in external populations begins with feelings, or brand associations, which contribute to thoughts, which contribute to employer attraction. Internally, employer branding begins with organizational identity and culture, which contributes to brand loyalty, which contributes to employee productivity (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). Ideally, this framework may serve as a springboard for scholars to detail for human resource professionals how to most efficiently and effectively combine employer branding with current human resource practices for increased recruitment and retention.

**Developing the Employer Brand for Talent Recruitment and Retention**

Continuing to build on the relationship between employer branding and human resource management and similar to the Backhaus and Tikoo article, Botha, Bussin, and de Swart (2011) focus specifically on talent attraction and retention. The researchers in this study present research for developing an employer branding model that can predict talent attraction and retention (Botha, Bussin, & de Swart, 2011). Using current literature on employer branding as the data for this nonempirical study, the researchers isolated only those elements of employer branding that were
critical in attracting and retaining employees (Botha et al., 2011). A total of 24 research articles were selected and summarized, with linkages between theoretical concepts sought. The key findings suggest that the employer brand is influenced by six key factors: (a) target group needs; (b) a differentiated employer value proposition; (c) the people strategy – delivering on employer brand; (d) brand consistency - corporate, consumer, and employer brand should deliver the same promises; (e) communication of the employer brand; and (f) employer branding metrics (Botha et al., 2011).

Ultimately an operational management model of employer branding was developed to provide managers and human resource professionals with a guide to follow for more effective talent attraction and retention (Botha et al., 2011). This conceptual model will provide validation of employer branding’s role as a useful human resource practice and predictor of employee attraction and retention. The model contributes value by addressing key related building blocks (target group needs, differentiation, people strategy, brand consistency, employer brand communication, and employer branding metrics) that represent an integrated approach “which shapes and influences the total employer brand process” (Botha et al., 2011, p. 10). Although this article was very useful from a practical standpoint in that it developed a model of what firms should use in their employer branding campaigns, the researchers did not conduct primary research, but rather utilized secondary research in the form of prior scholarly articles on employer branding.

Another research study on employer branding by Nappa, Farshid, and Foster (2014) investigated employer branding by taking a more in-depth look at a firm that completely understands the concept. Using the single in-depth case study approach, the researchers attempted to better understand employer branding and how it is used to attract and retain talent by studying FOREX Band AB, a Swedish financial services company ( Näppä et al., 2014). The researchers decision to study one company in-depth (single in-depth case study) to gain a better
understanding of employer branding was based on prior research by “Yin (2009) [that] explains certain conditions under which a single case study should be utilized, including if it is a unique or extreme case, or if having the possibility to observe something that has not been accessible previously” (Näppä et al., 2014, p. 140). The two research questions that emerged for this study were:

1. How can the relationship between corporate branding, internal branding, and employer branding in service industries be described?
2. How can the role of corporate values in delivering the brand promise be described?

(Näppä et al., 2014).

The results of the study indicated that corporate branding, internal branding, and employer branding are not mutually exclusive, but rather work in unison to connect and communicate the core values of the company (Näppä et al., 2014). The research also indicated that corporate values and the brand promise go hand-in-hand and should present the same basic values and perceptions of the company (Näppä et al., 2014). This study presented some very practical implications regarding the use of employer branding strategies for human resource managers looking to recruit and retain top talent. The researchers suggest guidelines for practitioners to follow as they examine their current practices regarding recruitment and retention of top talent which include:

- Establish stated core values: Create consensus among existing employees and integrate these values into employer branding communication efforts
- Create a common goal for corporate, internal, and employer branding
- Use internal branding, a term synonymous with internal marketing where organizations orient and motivate employees to satisfy customer needs (Armstrong & Kotler, 2015), to create brand ambassadors.
• Work with the external employer brand internally: Is what you are communicating externally to attract new employees connected to what existing employees are actually experiencing?

• Work actively with WOM rather than see it only as an external reaction to a stimulus. This is especially important in the age of social media, where what is being talked about (and by whom) can really not be controlled by the employer any longer (Näppä et al., 2014, p.144).

The results of these studies detail how organizations, particularly human resource managers, can build their employer brand to benefit their recruitment and retention efforts. When developing the employer brand it is important for firms to remember that the entire company encompasses the brand, therefore recruitment efforts should reflect an accurate perception of the company. (America’s Job Exchange, 2016). It stands to reason that companies that are able to craft employer brands that are consistent with their workplace customer will attract the most relevant talent (America’s Job Exchange, 2016).

**Promoting the Employer Brand for Talent Recruitment and Retention**

Because of the need for companies to differentiate themselves and promote a unique employment proposition to potential candidates, employer branding will become a key element in the recruitment efforts of organization (Ewing et al., 2002). In the article by Ewing, Pitt, de Bussy, and Berthon (2002), the researchers classify existing approaches to promoting the employment brand by identifying three basic types of employment advertising strategies. It is important to note that an employment brand has personality and should be positioned in the same way as any other brand (Ambler & Barrow, 1996). People tend to be attracted to brands that they perceive to fit their own personality and self-concept. Therefore, it is important that companies
know exactly what types of employees they are looking for and promote their employer brand accordingly. Using a qualitative research approach to better understand how companies distinguish themselves to potential and current employees, the researchers “reviewed marketing and management research literature, surfed corporate websites, and examined print advertisements in major business periodicals” (Ewing et al., 2002, p. 12). Using the “Young & Rubicam Brand Asset Valuator (Y&R BAV) and Berthon et al.’s (1999) notion of branding as serving a reduction function for customer’s”, three categories emerged (as cited in Ewing et al., 2002, p. 13). The three categories for promoting the employer brand are as follows:

1. **Transnational, Inc.: Status & Mobility (global network – big & successful)**
   The brand promises employee stability and mobility, which according to Y&R BAV is esteem. Berthon et al.’s (1999) branding as a reduction notion is that advertising reduces the potential employee’s search costs.

2. **Mission to Mars: Excitement (new experiences)**
   The brand promise according to Y&R BAV is familiarity, or creating awareness. Psychological risks, according to Berthon et al. (1999) may be reduced by this advertising strategy, as potential candidates may be hesitant to work for an organization they or their peers have not heard of.

3. **The ‘Local’ (pub): Identification (source similarity)**
   Using current employees to attract potential employees, the brand promise according to Y&R BAV is a highly relevant employee proposition. Perceived risks, according to Berthon et al. (1999) are reduced by this advertising method (Ewing et al., 2002, pp. 13-14).

All advertising should attempt to differentiate the employer brand from the competitors. Understanding how promoting the employer brand impacts the stakeholders of the company, is critical for managers. Both customers and potential and current employees can be impacted by
employment advertising. Customers may interpret a company’s brand promotion to mean “they want to employ the best people so their products must be great,” while potential and current employees may perceive employment branding efforts to mean “they make great products so it must be rewarding to work there” (Ewing et al., 2002, p. 16).

In addition to traditional advertising, there are a variety of tools for organizations to promote their employer brand to enhance recruitment efforts. According to America’s Job Exchange, employer branding messages can be targeted to specific candidates who will be a match for the organization on social media sites like Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn (2016). Other more innovative ways to promote the employer brand is to encourage employees to blog and tweet on social media (America’s Job Exchange, 2016).

The Unique Characteristics of Salesperson Recruitment

Although every organization views recruitment a little differently, methods are generally the same. Recruitment methods usually consist of posting jobs, screening applicants, forwarding recommended candidates to a hiring manager, and then closing the loop when the position is filled. In the sales industry, knowing how to promote the organization and attract the right people becomes very important as there are much stronger employer/employee and employee/customer relationships at stake. It becomes even more critical for sales organizations to hire individuals who understand and fit into the corporate culture, and also value the brand. Employees who value and understand the brand and all of its promises ‘live and breathe’ the brand and become a valuable asset to the company. Knowing how to promote the firm to attract the right candidates who will fit the corporate culture of the organization will produce the best potential candidates and ultimately the right employees. It is important to distinguish that entry-level salesperson recruitment is the focus of this study.
At the entry-level, potential sales recruits are new to the sales industry, and are typically graduating college students with very little knowledge of a sales career. According to a 2011 recruiting survey by the National Association of Colleges and Employers, “the average cost for recruiting a collegiate hire is approximately $5,054” (Agnihotri et al., 2014, p. 75). It is therefore imperative that employers do not oversell the job, but rather provide potential applicants with a true representation of the job so they know upfront if it is right for them. Another issue is the negative perceptions of the sales profession held by many college students. Much of the literature indicates that students generally have negative perceptions of sales careers, even though these careers may offer tremendous job potential (Karakaya et al., 2014; Mich et al., 2014; Sojka et al., 2000; Waldeck et al., 2010). Because of the negative stereotypes surrounding the sales profession, salesperson recruiters have to work hard to convince potential candidates that a career in sales is a noble profession (Sojka et al., 2000). The job of the salesperson recruiter then becomes one of dispelling the misconceptions of the industry and finding candidates whose skills and personality match that of the organization. Another critical element of the salesperson recruiter’s job is identifying college graduates who have a more positive view of a sales career. Sojka et al (2000) identified marketing majors or students who have taken two or more sales classes as typically having a much more positive view of a sales career. Although the educational experience is considered to be critical in helping students decide on a profession, marketing students and others who are interested in pursuing a career in sales typically only receive one personal selling course (Luthy, 2000). According to Luthy (2000), although this personal selling course serves the purpose of giving students the opportunity to explore the sales career, it really does not teach them the “crucial, job-related skills” necessary to perform on the job (p. 236).
Salesperson Recruitment Methods

The goal of the hiring manager is to recruit top sales talent. The challenge is that although there are many candidates to select from, most may not be qualified, much less be the best person for the job. Recruitment and selection generally requires the support of top management and coordinated efforts with human resource personnel, however it is sales managers that have the primary responsibility for the recruitment and selection of salespeople at most sales organizations (Ingram, LaForge, Avila, Schwepker, & Williams, 2015). The recruitment and selection process can involve various methods, however to best meet current and future staffing needs, sales managers typically follow the three-step recruitment process which includes:

Step 1: Planning for Recruitment and Selection

Step 2: Recruitment: Locating Prospective Candidates

Step 3: Selection: Evaluation and Hiring (Ingram et al., 2015)

Planning for Recruitment and Selection. In order to effectively recruit, sales managers must have a thorough understanding of the sales jobs they are hiring for. Sales managers who are involved in the planning process can gain this understanding through planning activities which include: (a) conducting a job analysis, (b) establishing job qualifications, (c) completing a written job description, (d) setting recruitment and selection objectives, and (e) developing a recruitment and selection strategy (Ingram et al., 2015). Although most sales managers likely held the role of salesperson at one time, it is important for them to conduct a thorough job analysis in order to understand exactly what the salespeople they are hiring are supposed to do. Establishing job qualifications for each job within the sales force helps the sales manager determine which candidates would be best suited for each specific position. Because sales managers know what they are looking for with regard to sales talent, their role in developing job descriptions is critical.
for attracting the right sales applicants. Person-job fit, the “congruence of applicants’ needs, goals, and values with organizational norms, values, and reward systems” may be fostered by tailoring the job description to attract the best-fit candidate for the job (Agnihotri et al., 2014, p. 75). And finally, with regard to setting objectives and developing a recruitment and selection strategy, sales managers must consider whether recruitment and selection should be an ongoing activity or only conducted when a vacancy occurs (Ingram et al., 2015).

Recruitment: Locating Prospective Candidates. The recruitment process involves locating a sufficient number of job applicants both inside and outside of the company. Sales managers must decide which sources to utilize to fill their sales job vacancies. Internal sources may include employee referrals, where current employees refer potential sales candidates, as well as company newsletters and meeting announcements (Ingram et al., 2015). External sources could include online recruitment tools, print advertisements, private employment agencies, colleges and universities, career fairs, professional organizations (Ingram et al., 2015). It is important for hiring managers to find the right combination of recruitment methods that work for their organization to fill their job vacancies with the right candidates.

Online Recruiting. While more traditional forms of recruitment like print advertisements and career fairs have become less popular, recruiting online continues to gain popularity and is being used in a variety of ways. In addition to listing job openings in job banks like monster.com and careerbuilder.com; companies are using social media sites such as LinkedIn, Facebook and Twitter to recruit potential sales applicants (Ingram et al., 2015). In addition to recruitment, these social media sites can provide detailed information about the applicants, with “one in three employers rejecting candidates based on something they found out about them online” (Mackay, 2011, p. 27). Social media sites such as LinkedIn may also provide employers with information about how others, including their peers, view the potential candidates. Individual LinkedIn profiles can be used to communicate with the candidates past co-workers and to review
endorsements and recommendations of others (Offenberger, 2016). Another more recent utilization of the internet is the video resume, where online recruiting firms offer applicants “the opportunity to develop a 30 or 60 second video introduction to sell themselves to potential employers” (Kemp, Bobbitt, Beauchamp, & Peyton, 2013, p. 86). Contact between the recruiter and applicant usually occurs one of two ways, either the recruiter visits the site, views the video resumes and contacts the applicant via a blind email; or the applicant contacts the recruiter directly (Kemp et al., 2013).

**College Campus Recruiting.** Recruiting on college campuses is nothing new. Having been utilized for decades, campus interviews can be critical for establishing applicant attraction to particular firms (Turban & Dougherty, 1992). Regarded as an important business function, college recruiting is a major source of entry-level employees (Weilbaker & Merritt, 1992). As previously mentioned, college students want to make the right decision when choosing their first job. Campus recruiter behavior, characteristic, and interview focus is therefore critical when trying to attract the best-fit applicants for the job vacancies (Turban & Dougherty, 1992). Of particular interest to companies who practice campus recruiting for entry-level sales positions is the students’ field of study, namely a sales education focus (Agnihotri et al., 2014). Students who have had sales-related courses in college are more likely to have a positive view of a sales career, as well as be more confident in their ability to sell (Karakaya et al., 2014). Because marketing students are those likely to have taken multiple sales courses, they are often the primary focus of salesperson recruiters (Sojka et al., 2000). Although the primary focus may be on marketing majors, all business students are important to salesperson recruiters, as research indicates that as many as 60% of all business students will take a job with some sales-related duties upon graduation (Agnihotri et al., 2014).

**Selection: Evaluation and Hiring.** Selection, the process of selecting which candidates will be offered the job, may include: (a) screening resumes and applications, (b) initial
interviewing, (c) intensive interviewing, (d) testing, (e) assessment centers, (f) background investigation, (g) physical examination, and (h) selection decision/job offer (Ingram et al., 2015). The process of screening resumes and applications helps reduce the candidate pool in advance of interviewing. The sales manager then chooses the top prospects to call in for interviews to determine if they are a good fit for the company. A critical component of the interview is not only getting an in-depth look at the candidate, but also providing the candidate with an accurate picture of the job and making sure not to oversell it (Ingram et al., 2015). A wide variety of employment tests are available including personality, values and motivators, interests, emotional intelligence, cognitive ability, skills, and knowledge (Klein, 2013). Sales organizations use these tests because there are “traits, values, and emotional and social skills” that are more likely to lead to behaviors that result in actual sales (Klein, 2013, p. 15). When making the selection decision and job offer, sales managers must temper an enthusiastic pursuit of the candidate with an accurate portrayal of the job in order to get the right person-job fit for the position (Ingram et al., 2015).

**Employer Branding and Salesperson Recruitment**

As previously mentioned, it is expensive to recruit entry-level salespeople. Therefore, salesperson recruiters want to make sure they are utilizing the right methods and strategies to recruit the best candidates who will be a good fit for the firm. The job of the recruiter trying to recruit entry-level salespeople is to create brand awareness among job applicants is the same way that classic product branding creates brand equity among potential customers (Agnihotri et al., 2014). For the employer branding to work effectively, the company must understand the “interests, need, and desires of their target audience – students seeking sales positions” (Agnihotri et al., 2014, p. 77). The study by Agnihotri et al identified sixteen propositions for improving
critical outcomes of the sales student recruitment process. These propositions are based on two critical job search stages: (a) awareness of specific sales jobs in the student population and (b) active recruitment of individual students (Agnihotri et al., 2014, p.77). In addition, the propositions represent three critical recruitment objectives of sales faculty, sales students, and sales recruiters. The three elements are: (a) students want to learn of potential job opportunities and faculty and employers want to provide this information; (b) students are looking for opportunities that match their needs and wants and faculty and recruiters want to make that match; and (c) students and employers both seek high levels of job fit (Agnihotri et al., 2014, p.77). In order to meet these objectives, Agnihotri et al. proposes specific tasks that center around specific faculty activities to match sales program graduates with the right sales jobs.

The first of the three objectives for improving the sales student recruitment process involves creating awareness of sales opportunities among the student population by sales organizations. This objective is comprised of five propositions directly related to employer branding strategies. Of the five propositions, three are more closely related to employer branding and include: (a) developing branding messages that focus on intangible aspects of the sales position, selectiveness of the hiring process, and the ethic and social responsibility of the employer; (b) altering brand messages for specific segments of the student population; and (c) positioning the company brand through sales programs, colleges of business, and university announcements (Agnihotri et al., 2014, p. 78). The second objective for improving the sales-student recruitment process includes matching student needs and wants with the needs and wants of the employer. This objective is also comprised of five propositions that encompass the fundamental elements of a top-notch employer branding strategy. From the list of five propositions, two are closely linked to employer branding strategies and include: (a) students will more highly rate the attractiveness of a sales position with companies that offer internships to sales students, and (b) students will more highly rate the attractiveness of a sales position with
companies that use in-person communication during the sales-student recruitment process (Agnihotri et al., 2014, p. 78). The third objective for improving the sale-student recruitment process involves active recruitment of sales students. This final objective is comprised of six propositions directly related to the role of faculty in the recruitment process. These propositions all involve activities to engage faculty in the interaction of the student and the recruiter, three of which are closely linked to employer branding tactics. These three propositions include: (a) sales faculty that monitor individual student/recruiter interactions in the recruitment process will increase person-job fit for sales program graduates; (b) sales faculty that work directly with companies in creating sales specific internships will increase person-job fit for sales program graduates; and (c) sales faculty that promote student-recruiter interactions through unique, sales-specific events will increase person-job fit for sales program graduates (Agnihotri et al., 2014, p. 80). Employers who can effectively create an employer brand that addresses these critical objectives will have a competitive advantage for recruitment over firms that do not build their employer brand around these three objectives. Ultimately, the employer brand should present the elements of the organization that potential sales candidates are seeking, in the most accurate way possible when recruiting for entry-level sales positions.

Chapter Summary

This review of the literature explored the concept of employer branding within organizations. Literature on both product brands and corporate brands were investigated to help establish the context of employer branding. As the literature review revealed, employer branding is still considered a fairly new concept, with its specific parameters still unclear to some organizations. The relationship of employer branding and human resource management was then explored. The literature revealed that the concept of employer branding typically resides within
the human resource function. Next, the special characteristics of salesperson recruitment and recruitment methods were explored, and sufficient evidence was found to recognize the need for an employer branding strategy for effective salesperson recruitment. Finally, the relationship of employer branding and salesperson recruitment was investigated, with the literature pointing to a more focused-recruitment strategy, like employer branding, when attempting to recruit top talent for entry-level sales positions.

Although the literature served to identify how and why employer branding is so critical for recruitment efforts, it falls short of detailing how to most efficiently and effectively combine employer branding and recruitment methods and strategies. Furthermore, the literature does not speak directly to the sales industry with regard to the relationship of branding and recruitment success. While branding is a critical piece of the marketing pie, it is only one piece. Knowing the importance of employer branding, as well as how to market your company’s brand to potential sales candidates will greatly benefit sales organizations looking for better ways to recruit quality salespeople. Understanding how to infuse branding with current recruitment methods and strategies is critical for recruitment success. Ultimately, the research in this study will attempt to identify the critical components of infusing a model employer branding program with current recruitment methods and strategies that will prove successful for recruiting top sales talent.
Chapter 3

Method

The purpose of this study was to explore sales manager perceptions of the processes B2B companies use to construct their employer branding messages. Of particular interest is how these employer branding messages are utilized for the external recruitment of entry-level sales talent. This chapter begins with an overview of the problem explored in this study, followed by the research questions. Information on the methodology used in this qualitative research study are then provided, including details regarding the four major steps: (a) the research design, (b) data collection procedures, (c) methods of data analysis, and (d) assuring trustworthiness of the data. A project plan detailing each of the major steps for this research study and tasks within each step is provided in Table 3.1.
### Problem Overview

Although the effects of employer branding on recruitment efforts have been explored, the literature falls short of investigating employer branding to specifically enhance recruitment of a particular position within an organization. And, though salesperson recruitment has been explored, researchers have yet to study employer branding’s impact on salesperson recruitment. Recruitment can take place either internal or external of the company. Internal recruitment draws from those employees currently working at the firm; while external recruitment may be defined as bringing a job opening to the attention of potential job candidates outside of the company.

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**Table 3.1**

*Project Plan*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Tasks</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Research Design</td>
<td>• Completed Pilot Project in MGMT 592</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Selected Grounded Theory Design</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Chose Sample</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Developed Instrument</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Secured IRB Approval</td>
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<tr>
<td>Data Collection Procedures</td>
<td>• Participant Recruitment and Selection Process</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• The Interview</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Supplementary Data Sources</td>
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<tr>
<td>Methods of Data Analysis</td>
<td>• Initial Coding</td>
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<td>• Focused Coding</td>
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<td>• Theoretical Coding</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assuring Trustworthiness of Data</td>
<td>• Credibility</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Transferability</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Dependability</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Reliability</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

A more detailed project plan flow chart for this research study, including a timeline for completing the specific tasks comprising each activity, may be viewed in Appendix A.
influencing them to apply, affecting whether they remain interested in the position until they are offered the job, and influencing them to accept the job offer (Breaugh, 2008). This study will examine external B2B salesperson recruitment.

The focus of the problem is that it is no longer enough for salesperson recruiters and sales managers to simply do what has been done in the past to externally recruit potential candidates for entry-level sales positions. In today’s tough labor market, with more sales positions to fill than potential candidates, generic recruitment methods are passé. Recruitment methods like social media and other digital platforms, once all the rage for making connections with candidates, are now being utilized in most salesforce recruitment efforts. While recruitment methods continue to change over time, the new methods spread throughout the industry and quickly become the norm. To differentiate from the competition and become a company where salespeople are attracted and ultimately consider as a place to work, sales organizations must be sure to follow sound recruitment processes and establish a competitive advantage with regard to their recruitment efforts. Employer branding can be a competitive advantage in the recruitment arena.

Potential employees want to know about the companies where they intend to work. In other words, candidates want to establish relationships with prospective companies before they decide to work for them. Marketers, in particular, know that establishing relationships is paramount for attracting customers to specific brands. To gain competitive advantage for attracting top-notch salespeople, organizations need to understand that creating value for the employer brand up front, will attract the “right” candidates to fill sales positions. Organizations that recruit salespeople should recognize that marketing their brand is a critical component that will help build a successful recruitment effort.
Research Questions

In order to explore the role of employer branding in the external recruitment and selection of entry-level salespeople in B2B companies, the current study sought to answer the following research questions:

1. How do employers decide what is important for potential employees to know about their organization’s employer brand, their reputation as an employer?
2. How do employers who develop their employer brand, use their employer branding message to recruit entry-level salespeople?
3. What effect does skillfully managing the employer brand have on company efforts to recruit exemplary entry-level salespeople?

Research Design

This study was guided by research questions that are exploratory in nature and aim to contribute to theory. In this particular study, the researcher wanted to explore the phenomena of employer branding from the perspective of the company, specifically the sales manager. The researcher specifically wanted to gain insight into how employers are framing what comprises their employer brand, how employers are using their branding messages for recruitment of entry-level salespeople, and what effect skillfully managing the employer brand has on company efforts to recruit exemplary entry-level salespeople. Employees are typically aware of their company’s corporate branding and product branding, but may not be aware of their employer branding. As such, employer branding may exist and may be experienced within the organizational culture, but may not be developed and utilized to its full potential for recruitment purposes.
Choosing Grounded Theory

To explore these issues, a grounded theory qualitative approach was chosen. The critical component of grounded theory, according to its founders Glaser and Strauss, is its ability to help keep qualitative researchers constantly involved and immersed in their data so they can spot emerging trends and analyses as they are happening in real time (Charmaz, 2014). This helps speed up the process of theory generation, while simultaneously creating excitement for the researcher. Grounded theory as an analytic approach uses the constant comparative method to systematically compare initial data or to seek new data for purposes of elaboration or modification in an attempt to develop theory (Strauss and Corbin, 1994).

The Sample

To better understand the role of employer branding in the external recruitment of entry-level salespeople, the researcher chose sales managers at B2B companies in the U.S. who practice external recruitment of entry-level salespeople as the population for the study. Much thought went into choosing sales managers for the unit of analysis, after conducting a pilot study on the role of marketing in the recruitment of entry-level salespeople. This pilot study was conducted during the fall 2015 semester in fulfillment of a final project for a Qualitative Methods Course offered by the Smeal College of Business at The Pennsylvania State University. In that pilot study, salesperson recruiters were the unit of analysis. After a careful review of the data, it was determined that sales managers were better informed than recruiters with regard to the employer brand and its role in the salesperson recruitment process, and therefore became the unit of analysis for the current study.
Because qualitative studies focus in depth on relatively small samples to gather rich data, the purposeful sampling approach was employed in this study. Purposeful sampling, typically used in qualitative studies, “focuses in depth on relatively small samples selected purposefully” (Patton, 2002, p. 230). To aid in the process of selecting the “right informants: for the study, the snowball strategy (Patton, 2002) of purposeful sampling was used. This method helps the researcher obtain quality participants for the study because the future participants are recommended by current participants. This also helps grow the sample so enough useful research data can be collected.

As such, the sample for the research study was chosen purposefully from a list of B2B companies from across the U.S. that was compiled after networking with colleagues in the College of Business at Bloomsburg University. These B2B company contacts, primarily sales managers, were compiled during the process of developing the recently declared Professional Sales Program in the Department of Marketing. During that time, marketing faculty have been coaching both undergraduate and graduate students in sales competitions all across the U.S., and reaching out to sales managers of companies in attendance to build a solid sales network for the university. This sales network has been critical for obtaining funding for the sales program, sponsorship of in-house sales competitions and career fairs, internship opportunities for sales students, and job opportunities for sales graduates. When purposefully selecting the specific individuals to include in this study, the researcher followed Alvesson and Ashcraft’s guiding principles of representativeness and quality (2013). In order to stay close to those guiding principles, a set of criteria regarding both the sales managers and the companies they worked for needed to be met in order to be invited to participate in the study, and included the following:

Sales Manager Criteria:

- Employed in their current position for a minimum of three years
- Involved in the interviewing process for entry-level salespeople at their organization
• Involved in the hiring process for entry-level salespeople at their organization.

Company Criteria:

• B2B classification

• Medium-sized or large-sized, employing 100 or more people

• Company practices include external recruitment of entry-level salespeople

• Company sells products or services that require no technical knowledge by the salesperson prior to employment. In some cases, technical knowledge may be gained by salespeople during the on-the-job training at their respective companies.

In grounded theory studies, between 20 and 30 participants is suggested (Creswell, 1998).

I fully recognized that this suggested range may or may not be appropriate for my study, and relied on the principles of theoretical saturation to determine the number of participants to interview. Theoretical saturation, commonly used in qualitative studies to determine sample size, helps ensure that enough data were collected when new themes and insights cease to emerge (Charmaz, 2014). I began to develop some initial categories after four interviews were conducted, transcribed, and coded. I believed these categories likely had promise and I had a strong hunch about what the themes might be. It was at that point that I employed theoretical sampling, purposefully seeking interviews from sales manager of companies that I could easily fit into one of two categories: having a weak corporate brand, or enjoying a strong corporate brand. As is the goal of theoretical sampling, purposefully choosing sales managers of companies that belonged to one of the two categories, would help me collect the necessary data to “elaborate and refine categories in [my] emerging theory” (Charmaz, 2014, p. 192). The final sample size (n=10) was found to be appropriate as the researcher believed theoretical saturation was achieved with eight participants. The final two sales managers were interviewed, and their information was transcribed and coded even after theoretical saturation was attained because the interviews
were already scheduled and the researcher believed more information would further enhance the credibility of the study.

Instrumentation

The data collection instrument utilized for this study was the semi-structured intensive interview method. Appendix D contains the interview protocol used in this study. This method is beneficial in contributing to or advancing theory, as it is both structured and flexible allowing true stories to emerge (Charmaz, 2014). The researcher chose the semi-structured, intensive interview method of qualitative research to gain a deeper understanding of the occurrences of employer branding, what comprises it, and the extent to which it is used in the salesperson recruitment process. The interview protocol was developed based on the research questions for this study, utilizing prior research and relevant literature from the field of employer branding. Table 3.2 shows how the research questions correspond with the specific interview questions for this study.
Table 3.2
The Link Between Research Questions and Interview Questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Questions</th>
<th>Relevant Literature</th>
<th>Interview Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. How do employers decide what is important for potential employees to know about their organization’s employer brand, their reputation as an employer?</td>
<td>Ambler &amp; Barrow (1996); Backhaus &amp; Tikoo (2004); Botha et al., (2011); Edwards (2009); Ewing et al., (2002); Foster et al., (2010); Näppä et al., (2014); Sullivan (2004)</td>
<td>4, 5, 6, 7, 8 and supplementary data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. How do employers who develop their employer brand, use their employer branding message to recruit entry-level salespeople?</td>
<td>Agnihotri et al., (2014); Breaugh (2013); Ingram et al., (2015); Kemp et al., (2013); Klein (2013); Mackay (2011); Offenberger (2016); Turban &amp; Dougherty (1992); Weilbaker &amp; Merritt (1992)</td>
<td>1, 2, 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. What effect does skillfully managing the employer brand have on company efforts to recruit exemplary entry-level salespeople?</td>
<td>(Bristow et al., (2006); Inks et al., (2011); Karakaya et al., (2014); Mich et al., (2014); Shaw (2007); Sojka et al., (2000); Waldeck et al., (2010)</td>
<td>17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22 in addition to synthesis of all questions and supplementary data</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Respondents were told the purpose of the study, which was to explore the role of employer branding in the external recruitment of entry-level salespeople in B2B companies.

They were also informed that their participation in the survey was completely voluntary and that their individual responses would be kept confidential. The researcher cleaned the data to ensure confidentiality, removing personal identifiers such as specific names of individuals and the
companies where they were employed. For the purpose of reporting the information, pseudonyms were not assigned, and the company name was replaced with ‘[Company name]’ in all 10 cases. The researcher determined it may be possible to identify the participants and the companies they work for from what was being said, and therefore deemed this the most appropriate method of reporting the data. To better inform respondents, they were also told how the data would be used, how the results would be discussed, and where the results would be shared.

The qualitative interview was comprised of approximately thirty questions, and was conducted on the telephone with each of the participants. The interview consisted of five main constructs including: (a) the occupation of sales manager and the organizations they are affiliated with, (b) salesperson recruitment, (c) the existence of employer branding within the organization, and (d) employer branding and recruitment, and (e) the sales force. There were multiple questions asked of the respondents for each of the five main constructs. General questions related to the company were also included in the interview protocol.

**Study Approval**

The researcher gained approval for this qualitative research study from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Penn State University. The Proposal to the IRB for the use of Human Research Subjects is provided in Appendix B. The study was determined to be exempt from the pilot study conducted in the fall of 2015. The pilot study was a critical step in determining the viability of the study, as well as the participants to include for the most relevant data related to the revised research questions. As previously mentioned, the pilot study used salesperson recruiters as the unit of analysis. Following that study, it was determined that sales managers were better informed than recruiters with regard to the employer brand and its role in the salesperson
recruitment process, and therefore became the unit of analysis for the current study. The exemption letter from the IRB is included in Appendix C.

**Data Collection Procedures**

**Participant Recruitment and Selection**

In order to recruit participants who met the predetermined criteria parameters for inclusion in the study, the researcher emailed select sales managers, who she and her marketing colleagues had working relationships with. These participants were chosen from the list of B2B companies from across the U.S. compiled through networking with colleagues from the College of Business at Bloomsburg University of Pennsylvania. The researcher and her colleagues had prior conversations with many of these sales managers who had expressed their willingness to be part of the study, with a number of them agreeing to be interviewed. The email contained information regarding the purpose of the research study and an invitation to participate. Respondents to the invitation received an email reply from the investigator thanking them for their interest in the study and requesting potential dates and times for a telephone interview to discuss criteria for inclusion in the study and if met, to confirm participation. After determining that respondents met the criteria of acceptability for the study, and their intent to participate was confirmed, the next step involved sending an email to schedule the interviews for the research study. The email included a request for potential dates and times for the telephone interview to occur. The investigator chose not to email the interview questions, as they are only meant to be a guide to uncover the “real truth” of the participants in the study. Prospective participants who did not respond to the email invitation were sent a reminder email two weeks after the initial email invitation was sent. Throughout the time period allotted for interviews, additional invitations
were sent to sales managers that the researcher networked with and pre-qualified during sales competitions she attended with her marketing students.

**The Interview**

The intensive qualitative interview, when done right, can “illuminate the topic” the researcher wishes to study” (Charmaz, 2014, p. 55). As a method for generating data for qualitative research, intensive interviewing is a “gently guided, one-sided conversation that explores a person’s substantial experience with the research topic” (Charmaz, 2014, p. 56). The interview method is very effective in qualitative studies if the researcher understands and adheres to the key characteristics of intensive interviewing. These key characteristics include the following: (a) selection of research participants who have first-hand experience that fits the research topic; (b) in-depth exploration of participant’s experience and situations; (c) reliance on open-ended questions; (d) objective of obtaining detailed responses; (e) emphasis on understanding the research participant’s perspective, meanings, and experience; (f) practice of following up on unanticipated areas of inquiry, hints, and implicit views and accounts of their actions (Charmaz, 2014, p. 56).

The researcher carefully adhered to the previously mentioned key characteristics to conduct effective interviews. Selecting the “right” participants for the study was a critical element in the research process. When selecting participants for the study, the investigator paid specific attention to representativeness and quality (Alvesson & Ashcraft, 2013). With regard to representativeness, participants were selected that represented the investigator’s research purpose of gaining an understanding of how employer branding is constructed and utilized for recruitment purposes. Regarding the quality of the participant, or their rich descriptions and insightful accounts (Alvesson & Ashcraft, 2013), the investigator purposefully included participants in the
study who were directly involved in the external recruitment of entry-level salespeople. With regard to preparation of the semi-structured interview, an interview protocol based on the three research questions was established prior to conducting the study. Using the semi-structured approach to in-depth interviewing, the interviewer structured the questions to allow for flexibility of moving in the direction of the respondent to uncover truly meaningful information. The semi-structured interview facilitates new perspectives and questions, allowing the respondents to feel free to change the direction of the interview and explore other topics or area of interest (Alvesson & Ashcraft, 2013).

Ten semi-structured interviews comprised of approximately 30 questions were conducted with sales managers from September 2016 to November 2016. All of the interviews were conducted over the telephone and lasted anywhere from 24 to 55 minutes, averaging 36.3 minutes. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Special attention was given to capturing every word and nuance uttered on the taped-recording to ensure the transcriptions became an accurate portrayal of the participant’s words.

Before conducting interviews with each individual participant, informed consent was reviewed, as each participant was reminded that their participation in the interview was voluntary and their responses would be kept confidential. At the start of each interview, I read a brief overview of the study to remind participants of the purpose of the interview. Immediately before asking the first question, I asked for permission to audio-record the interview.

Each interview was then coded using the three-phased approach promoted by Charmaz (2014) including initial coding, focused coding, and theoretical coding. As previously noted, constant comparative methods were used to analyze the data and make comparisons throughout the entire analytical process. This method allowed for continual comparisons among initial codes, category development, and emergent themes throughout the entire data analysis process.
Supplementary Data Sources

It was important to collect multiple sources of data to ensure the believability of the study. Facilitating credibility of the findings and interpretations produced from the study was accomplished through triangulation, a technique that uses cross verification of multiple sources of data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In addition to the interviews with sales managers, the other sources of data collected from each of the representative companies included: sample job postings for the entry-level salesperson position, and general company information taken from their websites. These documents helped the researcher to contextualize the participant responses with regard to what types of individuals they were attempting to hire, and how they were marketing their entry-level salesperson positions to potential salesperson recruits.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using grounded theory techniques (Charmaz, 2014). The critical component of grounded theory, according to its founders Glaser and Strauss, is its ability to help keep qualitative researchers constantly involved and immersed in their data so they can spot emerging trends and analyses as they are happening in real time. This helps speed up the process of theory generation, while simultaneously creating excitement for the researcher. Semi-structured interviews were used to obtain the desired information from the sales managers at the various organizations selected for the study. The semi-structured nature of these interviews helped the researcher further explore the data and follow the lead of the respondent to better understand how companies are using employer branding to their advantage for the successful recruitment of entry-level salespeople. Memos were a key component of this qualitative process, and were conducted after each interview for this study to help the researcher document important
information regarding the collection, categorization, and coding of data. Memo writing encourages the investigator to stop and think about the content of the interview, while continuing to interact with and analyze the data (Charmaz, 2014). The researcher chose to use the three-phased approach promoted by Charmaz, a popular grounded theorist, to develop the grounded theory in this study. The three phases include: (a) initial coding, (b) focused coding, and (c) theoretical coding (Charmaz, 2014). The Charmaz approach was chosen because the researcher believed the coding process moved forward in a logical manner - building categories, populating those categories, and generating hypotheses that attempt to explain the phenomena under study – that would be beneficial in building grounded theory for this particular research study.

**Initial Coding**

The first phase of grounded theory, initial coding, is simply qualitative coding. Specifically, initial coding is the process of defining what the data are about by assigning labels that categorize and summarize each piece of the data (Charmaz, 2014). The goal of initial coding is to assign labels that push out meaning (I. Baptiste, personal communication, May 19, 2016). This initial phase was accomplished by transcribing the interviews, and reading the interview transcripts in an attempt to define the data. Next I named segments of data “with labels that simultaneously categorized, summarized, and accounted for each piece of data” (I. Baptiste, personal communication, May 19, 2016), using line by line coding, allowing me to take a closer look at what the respondents said. I then took segments of data apart, both word-by-word and line-by-line, and compared complete assertions. When categorizing the data, labels emerged from both first-order codes from the respondents’ own words (Van Maanen, 1979), and from the investigator’s own language. This detailed categorizing and labeling of the data helped crystallize the significance of the key points on employer branding and salesperson recruitment
that emerged from the data, and provided the structure to make comparisons of the data across all interviews (Charmaz, 2014). The initial coding phase helped identify possible paths to take with regard to the analysis of the data.

**Focused Coding**

The second phase of grounded theory, focused coding, “means using the most significant and/or frequent earlier codes to sift through and analyze large amounts of data” (Charmaz, 2014, p. 138). During the focused coding phase, the interview transcripts were compared and themes began to emerge. This process is emergent, with unexpected ideas developing from the data. The goal of focused coding is to establish conceptual categories and generate hypotheses that spell out relationships between and among conceptual categories (I. Baptiste, personal communication, May 19, 2016). In this phase, I carefully selected conceptual categories from among the initial codes, concentrating on codes that made “the most analytic sense to categorize the data incisively and completely” (Charmaz, 2014, p. 138).

**Theoretical Coding**

The theoretical phase of grounded theory involves building theory. The goal of the theoretical coding is to integrate the hypotheses to build a holistic explanation of the phenomenon being studied (I. Baptiste, personal communication, May 19, 2016). To accomplish this goal, I looked at the relationships among the hypotheses and integrated them to build theory, or an explanatory account of the studied phenomenon. The purpose of the codes in this final stage is to help theorize the data, as they can lend form and tell an analytic story (Charmaz, 2014). This final phase involves weaving the story back together. Charmaz suggests that many qualitative
researchers who use grounded theory do so to a certain extent and usually falter when it comes to constructing theories rather than describing or applying current theories (2014). Ultimately, all of the codes that emerged during the coding process represent the investigators view of the data.

**Assuring Trustworthiness of the Analysis**

According to Lincoln & Guba (1985), trustworthiness of qualitative data is being able to persuade audiences and yourself that inquiry findings are worth taking note of. The four criteria provided by Lincoln & Guba for assessing trustworthiness are: credibility (internal validity), transferability (external validity), dependability (reliability), and confirmability (objectivity). The researcher assessed each of these criteria with specific techniques. The credibility of a study refers to the internal validity or truth value of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Two techniques were used to assess the credibility of this research study included triangulation and member checks. Triangulation, or cross verification of the data, was accomplished through the collection of data from multiple sources (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Informal member checks were also employed to ensure adequate representation of the data. Participant were given electronic copies of their interviews for approval, specifically asking for them to check for accuracy and offer any additional insight or points of clarification (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Based on responses, transcripts either remained intact or were modified to better reflect the participant experience. Transferability refers to the study’s level of external validity, or the degree to which the results of the research study may be applied to, or generalized to different types of persons, settings, and times (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The researcher ensured transferability of the data by constructing an interview protocol, which contained five constructs with multiple questions to draw out “rich descriptions” from sales managers.
To address dependability, an interrater reliability check was performed (Creswell, 2013). Dr. Monica Favia, a former PhD student in Workforce Education and Development who successfully conducted a qualitative study for her doctoral dissertation, and Jae Young Lee, a fellow student in my PhD cohort served as the two raters for this study. While coding the interviews, and developing an emergent coding structure, a coding dictionary was developed. Following the process used by Butterfield, Trevino, and Ball (1996), I provided the raters with a portion of the coding dictionary, 10 codes (see Table 3.3), along with 20 representative quotes from the transcripts. Each of the 10 code definitions was assigned a corresponding number. The raters were instructed to identify which code from the coding dictionary they believed best represented each passage of text, and write the number of that code next to the passage. After each of the raters completed the assignment, I calculated the interrater agreement by dividing the total number of codes that the two raters agreed by the total number of codes they were given (Butterfield et al., 1996). The overall percentage of agreement between the two coders was .80, which is above the minimum suggested threshold of .70 (Kreiner, Hollensbe, & Sheep, 2009). Achieving this level of agreement helps to assure confidence in the findings and add another layer of reliability to the study (Gioia, Corley, & Hamilton, 2012)

Although the recommended level of agreement between the two coders was achieved, there were some differences in the codes among the two raters and myself that needed to be resolved. In order to manage these differences, I followed the process used by Gioia et al. and attempted to reach a consensus regarding how the passages in question should be coded (2012). One of the raters highlighted the words from each passage that she focused on for her assessment. To reconcile the codes that we disagreed on, I decided to make a note on each passage where there was disagreement, stating how I thought it should be coded and why and send it back to her for review. In two instances, she agreed with my code, in one instance I agreed with her code, and in the final instance we both agreed that the codes that each of us used for the particular
passage were not distinctive enough and should be combined. An example quote and the exchange between the rater and myself is provided:

“I think it's because of the upfront screening process. We hire based on traits but -- or we have hired based on traits but what we’ve modified that is now we're doing a behavioral based model. So we’re measuring against have they done it before, yes or no, and then if they haven't done it before, can you see the potential based on the questions so we'll do that right up front and it's a pretty extensive vetting process so by the time we're well into the interview process, we know that these people either have done it in the past and can keep doing that or they are doing things to show that they can do it in the future.”

Rater chose #8

My comment: I have #7 (qualifying candidates) for this one rather than #8 (practicing selective recruiting) because it talks about an up-front screening process. This may be a case of the two codes are not distinctive enough and probably should be combined. Thoughts?

Rater comment: I agree they should be combined.

After all of the disagreements among codes were discussed with each rater, the changes were made to the respective codes. (Gioia et al., 2012)

The investigator attempted to ensure confirmability with a reflexive journal, as well as by enlisting the help of a colleague to review the research. The reflexive journal, a diary in which the investigator regularly records information about the self and the method, essentially helped keep the study on track, ensuring the criteria for trustworthiness were being met (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). One of the two raters who helped test the working categories, also served as an external researcher to help review my emergent themes, playing “devil’s advocate” with the findings as necessary. She was available and engaged throughout the entire research process, and helped ensure the objectivity of the findings. Overall, I feel confident that special attention was paid to ensuring credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability in this research study.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Example Quotes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Fostering salesperson success</td>
<td>Comments about setting salespeople up to be successful by providing company resources such as training, coaching, and opportunities for advancement.</td>
<td>“My program is a three month long program that we focus specifically on teaching these reps how to do the job so that they're set up for success, which is obviously kind of a long time when it comes to new hire training if you will and so ultimately I think it’s centered on, you know, how do we get the best or, you know, the most out of people by giving them the things that they want the most.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Fostering teamwork</td>
<td>Comments about providing an atmosphere that encourages camaraderie rather than competition among salespeople</td>
<td>“Yeah, yep exactly they are a good team and then they can all feed off, you know, feed off of each other, you know, grab a little bit from what everybody else is saying because nobody's in direct competition. Nobody has the same accounts that they're fighting for so everybody's happy for another person if they're doing well.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Importance of employer brand</td>
<td>Comments about the importance of having a strong corporate reputation, corporate culture, or corporate identity; about practicing internal marketing; and direct comments made about the employer brand when that terminology used.</td>
<td>“I think the reputation is huge, I mean, gosh you're going to be connected to, I mean, again, you know, people just know [Company A] but if you feel good about -- you're going to present the company -- you're representing the company when you're going out to meet with clients so you want to be with a company that represents themselves well.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Confidence in the corporate brand</td>
<td>Comments about how the company has done a good job building their brand and as a result experience the benefits of name recognition and trust in the company.</td>
<td>“We certainly are a Fortune 50 Company so, I mean, our brand pretty much speaks for itself. We’ve been around for over 100 years…”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number</td>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Definition</td>
<td>Example Quotes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------</td>
<td>-------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Strong brand drives applicants</td>
<td>Comments about how the familiarity and name recognition of the company is a catalyst for people applying for a job – because it builds a sense of comfort among the applicant.</td>
<td>“…but I think it’s more people know about [Company H] and therefore, you know, they’re like oh I wonder if [Company H]’s hiring or they see something posted on LinkedIn or, you know, or whatever it may be in terms of job recs and then they start -- they apply.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Trusting campus recruiting</td>
<td>Comments about getting the strongest candidates through campus recruiting specifically from campuses with sales programs.</td>
<td>“…what I’ve seen as the most successful or the methods that I trust the most is actually through that campus recruiting. I feel like we’re getting the strongest candidates when they’re either affiliated with a college or especially with a college, that has a sales program.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Qualifying candidates</td>
<td>Comments about properly screening candidates through an extensive process to ensure they are the right person for the job.</td>
<td>“I think it's more up front of us qualifying these people and also they have a very -- they have a great opportunity to be able to ask us questions in turn. So we also want to see what kind of -- how are they searching for information that isn't necessarily part of the traditional like here is the questions you should ask in an interview. I think the people who are ideal candidates think outside of the box and they think proactively and if they're asking questions around training, it's a great, I guess, foreshadowing of how they’ll be in the role.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Practicing selective recruiting</td>
<td>Comments about being more picky about who to hire due to ensure they are the right person for the job.</td>
<td>“…there were times when we first opened that we were doing hundreds of interviews and just -- it was just a quantity thing and we would hire on -- we -- our -- we would be a little more lax because we just needed the quantity of people and then we would have a lot of terminations and issues and -- but that's what happens when you hire a bunch at the same time. So now that we're more established and we can hire like one, two, three at a time we can be a little more picky.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number</td>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Definition</td>
<td>Example Quotes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Using employee testimonials to promote employer brand</td>
<td>Comments about what people who work at the company have to say about that company as an employer in order to enhance recruitment.</td>
<td>“So as a matter of fact, just -- perfect example is just yesterday we had out our head of not recruiting like -- so employee -- I don't even know what he's called now Global Recruitment. Oh my gosh I can't think of what he's called now. Whatever the case is, they were all out here yesterday because they were doing interviews with top reps and top leaders so that they could put those one minute blurbs on our website so that when people are interested in a job they'll be able to see wow this person came from here or this person's here. That's the kind of person that works at [Company A] and that's where the drive is. So they did commercials and they did videos and now they're all going to be on the [Company A] website.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Leveraging corporate brand for recruitment</td>
<td>Comments about using the corporate brand and the benefits of name recognition and trust in the company during the recruitment process</td>
<td>“In my interview itself, I talk about -- I describe what the job is. I obviously talk about the quality of the leads, the customers, the fact that [Company D] has been around for so many years that we do the -- we do have a very loyal customer base and so forth and that's what it's really, you know, for sales that's why I came here.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Chapter Summary**

The purpose of this study was to explore the phenomena of employer branding from the perspective of the company, specifically the sales manager. This chapter discussed the qualitative research design using the grounded theory approach to develop theory rather than rely on existing theories of employer branding. The sample consisted of sales managers from B2B companies.
who recruit externally for entry-level salespeople. The data were collected through intensive, semi-structured telephone interviews with participants. The data coding process occurred in three phases including initial, focused, and theoretical coding. The data were subsequently analyzed through a qualitative coding process facilitated by Track Changes in Microsoft Word. Details of how the researcher ensured trustworthiness of the data with regard to credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability was also discussed. The findings should prove to be useful for organizations that externally recruit entry-level salespeople, helping them to recognize the importance of building an employer brand for a successful recruitment effort.
Chapter 4

Findings

The purpose of this chapter is to report the findings of the study. The chapter is organized in five sections. The first section presents a brief review of the study, including the purpose, research questions, and research method. The second section provides an overview of the study participants and their respective companies. The third section provides a summary of the entry-level salesperson job profile. The fourth section identifies the major themes that emerged from the analytic process, culminating in a grounded theory model. The fifth section provides an interpretation of the themes to address the research questions used to guide this study. This chapter concludes with a summary.

Review of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore sales manager perceptions of the processes B2B companies use to construct their employer branding messages for the external recruitment of entry-level salespeople. The following three research questions guided the study:

1. How do employers decide what is important for potential employees to know about their organization’s employer brand, their reputation as an employer?
2. How do employers who develop their employer brand, use their employer branding message to recruit entry-level salespeople?
3. What effect does skillfully managing the employer brand have on company efforts to recruit exemplary entry-level salespeople?
To explore these research questions, a grounded theory qualitative data analysis approach was chosen. The grounded theory approach was chosen by the researcher because it makes the most logical sense to study sales manager perceptions of the role of employer branding in the recruitment of entry-level salespeople. In the study, the researcher wanted to explore the role of employer branding with regard to recruiting entry-level salespeople who would be the right fit for a specific organization. The grounded theory approach helps researchers develop theory with many conceptual relationships (Strauss & Corbin, 1994). This theoretical conceptualization focuses on “patterns of action and interaction between and among various types of social units,” rather than creating theory about the individual actors (Strauss & Corbin, 1994, P.278).

Grounded theory was the appropriate approach in this particular study because it looked at the process of the role of employer branding in recruitment efforts, rather than at the individual actors, or sales managers who were telling their stories. This approach was well suited for exploring the perceptions of sales managers, where ‘how’ individuals tell their stories is not nearly as important as ‘what’ they are saying. Because sales managers, by the nature of their occupation, are performing the same duties and roles in the workplace, they are representative of the phenomena as a whole.

The grounded theory method is also appropriate for this study because the goal of the researcher was not to simply describe the perceptions of sales managers with regard to employer branding, but rather to build a sound theory that is grounded on data. The responsibility of using grounded theory is to contribute to the knowledge of the discipline, tell the actors’ stories, and develop theories that serve a wider audience (Strauss & Corbin, 1994). Following Strauss and Corbin’s lead, the goal for this research study was to contribute to the knowledge of the role of employer branding in the recruitment of entry-level salespeople, to tell the stories of the sales managers, and to develop a theory that is applicable to a wider audience.
Overview of the Participants

The participants selected for this study were sales managers at B2B companies in the U.S. who practice external recruitment of entry-level salespeople. Purposeful sampling, which “focuses in depth on relatively small samples selected purposefully” (Patton, 2002, p. 230) was used. For inclusion in the study, participants responding to the invitation for this study were asked to verify that they met the following participant and company criteria:

Participant Criteria:

- Employed in their current position for a minimum of three years
- Involved in the interviewing process for entry-level salespeople at their organization
- Involved in the hiring process for entry-level salespeople at their organization.

Company Criteria:

- B2B classification
- Medium-sized or large-sized, employing 100 or more people
- Company practices include external recruitment of entry-level salespeople
- Company sells products or services that require no technical knowledge by the salesperson prior to employment. In some cases, technical knowledge may be gained by salespeople during the on-the-job training at their respective companies.

Participant Descriptions

The 10 participants in this study were all sales managers of B2B companies. It is important to note that all participants were recruited for this study from various campus-run
student sales competitions I attended with my students, and from a list of B2B companies from across the U.S. that have a working relationship with the marketing and sales department in the College of Business at Bloomsburg University. Therefore, they have all relied on some form of campus recruiting for entry-level salespeople. Eighty percent of the participant were men. The total number of years that participants spent with their current employers ranged from 5 to 30 years, for an average of 12.6 years. The number of years the participants spent in their current role of sales manager ranged from 3 to 17 years, for an average of 6.7 years. A summary of these demographics of the participants is provided in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1

Demographics of Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Years Employed at Company</th>
<th>Years in Current Role</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male – 80%</td>
<td>30 – 10%</td>
<td>17 – 10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female – 20%</td>
<td>20 – 10%</td>
<td>14 – 20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>17 – 10%</td>
<td>10 – 10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10 – 40%</td>
<td>8 – 10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9 – 10%</td>
<td>5 – 10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5 – 20%</td>
<td>4 – 10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3 – 30%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The sales manager participants represented 10 different companies and were geographically dispersed throughout the United States. All participants began their careers with their current employers as salespeople, and were subsequently promoted to sales manager after a company-specified period of time. It was clear from my conversations with them that nearly all B2B sales organizations require that their sales managers come from the sales departments within
their companies. One of the participants described this in terms of the promotion process at her organization:

Yes so we actually -- we don’t hire sales managers from outside of the company. You have to have a minimum of two to three years with the company as an account executive before you’re eligible to move into a leadership role.

Although all participants were sales managers, their specific job-titles were wide-ranging, with no two titles the same. As previously mentioned, all personal identifiers such as specific names of individuals, the companies they worked for, and company-specific terms were removed to ensure confidentiality. For the purpose of reporting the information, pseudonyms were not assigned. The researcher determined that it may be possible to identify the participants and the companies they work for because of what is being said, and deemed this the most appropriate method of reporting.

Company Descriptions

The respective companies with whom study participants are employed all met the criteria for inclusion in the study. All B2B companies included in the study were considered large-sized businesses, employing more than 1,000 individuals. All companies practiced external recruitment for the hiring of entry-level salespeople, with no technical knowledge required by the salesperson prior to employment. The 10 companies were quite varied with regard to their sales volume and level of success in their respective industries. For the purpose of reporting the information, the company name was replaced with ‘[Company name]’ for all participating companies.
Entry-level Salesperson Job Profile

Before presenting the thematic analysis of the research study, it is necessary to understand what organizations are looking for when recruiting entry-level salespeople. After coding the interviews, I analyzed company websites and job postings for entry-level sales positions for each of the 10 companies. From the collection of data, I was able to create a job profile of an entry-level salesperson candidate. Two distinct categories that emerged from the interview data, but were not relevant for the creation of themes were: characterizing an exemplary salesforce, and characterizing ideal salesperson candidates. These two categories were instrumental in understanding sales manager’s perceptions of what defines an ideal salesperson applicant.

After scanning each individual company website, I was able to find the career link and download a job posting for an entry-level salesperson. I printed each job posting and quickly coded chunks of information from each, looking for similarities and differences among them. I quickly noticed a few things from my coding. First, none of the jobs postings had the words "entry-level" in the job title, with only 20% of the job descriptions containing the word "entry-level" in the body of the job posting. Of particular interest was the various job titles, or different ways each organization labeled the sales professional in their job posting. Although most sales manager participants in this study believed their target job applicant was a college student in a marketing and professional sales degree program, or a recent college graduate, 40% of the job postings did list a college degree as a requirement for consideration. And most surprising when creating this job profile was the fact that half of the job postings for entry-level salespeople required at least one year of prior sales experience to be considered for the job. This seems rather inconsistent with the concept of "entry-level."
Overall, the information that emerged for an analysis of the company websites and job postings provided a much different profile of an entry-level salesperson than that of the spoken word of the participants. However, based on this information I created two distinct tables to depict both the profile of the entry-level salesperson candidate as per the job descriptions (see Table 4.2), and a summary of the characteristics of an ideal entry-level salesperson from the perspective of the sales manager (see Table 4.3).

Table 4.2

*Job Profile Summary for Entry-Level Salesperson from Job Postings*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Job Title</th>
<th>College Degree Required</th>
<th>Experience Required</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Account Executive – 50%</td>
<td>Yes – 60%</td>
<td>Yes – 50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inside Sales Representative – 20%</td>
<td>No – 40%</td>
<td>No – 50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Account Manager – 10%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sales Apprentice – 10%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Junior Sales Representative – 10%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.3

*Summary of Ideal Entry-Level Salesperson Attributes Described by Participants*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attribute</th>
<th>Percentage of Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Driven</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-motivated</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exhibiting ethical behavior</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organized</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resilient</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong work ethic</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Thematic Analysis

This section provides evidence of the researcher’s exploration from the analysis of the data to the construction of themes. Through this bottom-up iterative process of coding and categorizing the words of the participants, I was able to develop generalizations and eventually themes. Two major themes emerged from my analysis of the data: strength of the employer brand, and strength of the corporate brand. The strength of the employer brand consisted of three categories formed from 16 of the initial codes. The three categories that comprise strength of the employer brand are: evidence of a strong employer brand, practicing employer branding for retention, and practicing employer branding for recruitment. The strength of the corporate brand consisted of two categories formed from six initial codes. The two categories that comprise the strength of the corporate brand are: corporate branding strategies, and leveraging the corporate brand for recruitment. These two major themes are discussed to understand sales manager perceptions of the role of employer branding in the external recruitment of entry-level salespeople. Figure 4.1 presents a visual representation of the codes, categories, and themes that resulted from my analysis.
Figure 4.1. Data Structure
Theme 1: Strength of the Employer Brand

The employer brand is defined as “the package of functional, economic, and psychological benefits provided by employment, and identified with the employing company” (Ambler & Barrow, 1996, p. 187). Central to the purpose of the research study, the strength of the employer brand emerged as a theme that describes the company as a great place to work. Comments about the strength of the employer brand were grouped into three categories: evidence of a strong employer brand, practicing employer branding for retention, and practicing employer branding for recruitment. In this study, it became clear that companies with a strong employer brand were relying on employer branding strategies to manage the retention of their current salesforce. On the other hand, companies that have a strong employer brand but a weak corporate brand, compensate for their weak corporate brand by promoting their employer brand to recruit salesperson candidates.

Evidence of a strong employer brand. In this study, evidence of a strong employer brand was used to describe comments about the sales manager participant’s company as a great place to work. Most comments specifically talk about the importance of the employer brand, opportunities for salespeople, and overall employee satisfaction with the company. Additionally, comments about having a strong corporate culture also denote evidence of a strong employer brand. As evidence of a strong employer brand, one sales manager discussed salesperson opportunities at his company in terms of extensive training that is occurring immediately upon onboarding for new salespeople:

*I oversee the on boarding program which means that I work very closely with our recruiting team, our training team and then I’ve got four sales managers that report in to me that actually directly manage the classes of reps that we bring in, you know, in terms of hiring. So, we basically are responsible for teaching the reps everything from how you turn your computer on to how you close the deal in terms of working with the merchants that we obviously work so closely with to set up deals. So, we kind of -- we teach them everything in terms of here’s*
how you do this job and then after they graduate our program is when they join the sales floor and continue to do that and develop over time.

Speaking directly about the importance of a strong employer brand, one sales manager participant points to the tenure of her colleagues as evidence:

But, I don't know, for me there's so many people that just come and go within different companies but the people -- they're tenure at -- here, I mean, my boss has been here for 25 years. My other boss has been here for 20 years. For instance, I mean, they've been here for so long and you just don't hear that these days. You just hear people been there for two years, then move to another company to move up. But there's so much career pathing here that you might as well just stay and that's all branding.

Another sales manager participant explained the evidence of a strong employer brand within her organization with regard to genuine employee satisfaction:

Yes, and I think what I would say around my experience it's different across the board if you would interview a lot of different sales managers as to like why they chose [Company name] specifically but it all rolls up to this is a great place to work and I think the freedom that our company gives us feel to talk willingly about that. Everyone's story is different but it all rolls up to hey we're happy to be here. We want to stick around and we have the opportunity to do so.

Referring to his perception of a strong employer brand with comments about the general satisfaction of employees at his organization based on a company survey, another sales manager participant had this to say:

Well, I guess, you know, just for example, you know there's a quarterly meeting where everyone can hear all of the top executives from [Company name] talk about what's going on in the company. There's a massive employee survey every two years that's done and the markets take very seriously to get feedback from the field and then we do a great job here of taking that and taking action steps to, you know, improve where we could and those surveys here have come back really, really positive since I've been here. So, you know, that's an indicator to me that, you know, for the most part people are really happy.

Noting his personal satisfaction with his employer, one sales manager described evidence of his employer’s strong employer brand in the following manner:

You know, I would imagine that, I'm still here after 10 years, I mean, there's got to be something they're doing right to keep me here and I think I'm doing my
job, number one, but there's -- I wouldn't be here if the benefits weren't what I thought they needed to be.

**Practicing employer branding for retention.** Different from evidence of a strong employer brand, practicing employer branding for retention is a deliberate promotion of the benefits of employment with the company to current employees. Therefore in this study, practicing employer branding for retention refers to comments about promoting the functional, economic, and psychological benefits of employment with the company to manage the retention of quality employees. All sales manager participants in this study spoke about how their employers used employer branding messages to manage the retention of employees. Most comments made by sales manager participants focused on fostering salesperson success. In particular, statements about advancement within the company, career pathing, training, and professional development were found in the majority of sales manager responses. One sales manager participant spoke about career pathing, her company’s formalized plan to enable employees to chart their own course within the organization. She talked about the power of career pathing as a means of retention in the following manner:

*I always talk about career pathing with my team because there's so much and, I mean, we really just want you to stay with the company -- if you can hang out in the job -- we usually try to get people to go but some of them don't go and they've been in the job forever because they're making good money. But we always try to get people to wherever they want to go or to the next level. Like if you stay in this job for two or three years, it's time to start looking and we'll help you get there.*

Evidence of collective discussions of career pathing for employee retention within the sales industry is illustrated by the comments of another sales manager:

*We always want to talk career pathing. I think that's important with retaining your people and the opportunity to grow in the organization. You know, folks don't come on to a company and just want to stay in one position forever so, I mean...*
Further evidence of career pathing for employee retention within the sales industry is provided by another sales manager who contends that his company not only promotes advancement, but also provides the coaching to get salespeople to the next step in their careers:

*Our career path and promotion process is defined and outlined and communicated to everybody. It’s very transparent. They know how to get to the next level. Managers spend a lot of time coaching and working with reps to get to that next level, you know, within sales or whether it’s moving into management and so on and so forth.*

Another sales manager has a similar process of advancement within his company, but his company also has a formal recognition plan for employees who receive promotions:

*We have detailed -- they’re called performance development goals that we work on with everyone at the beginning of the year including their own individual development plan. We push people to make commitments of what they’re going to do on their own to develop their career. We promote -- when people are promoted we promote that in house which happens quite a bit...our high potential employees, you know, people that have been recognized by our department head group as those who, you know, are likely to be leaders in their current roles and have a lot of potential to move onto larger roles.*

Using discussions of opportunities for advancement within the company for employee retention, one sales manager describes a formal process recently instituted by his company for this particular task:

*[Company name] has been around for a long time and they've got a very great company brand so when it comes to longevity in the position, you certainly have a step forward with [Company name]. The other piece to that is our sales and the promotion from within so we offer a significant ability for people to get promoted within the organization into higher levels. So wherein some of the companies you might get stuck, so to speak, in a sales position. We constantly evaluate move and promote people from within based upon their abilities as well as their aspirations. So again, through the...process they can raise their hand and say I’d like to take on more responsibility. Their directors -- we have an annual -- it's ongoing but a formal annual process where we review that. That's kind of changing a little bit within the past few years where it's going more ongoing coaching and allowing for that...process to take place so it can happen at any time. We used to have an annual formal discussion called a career discussion. We've changed that to the...process which allows for open door policy, discussion at any time that you'd like. If you want to raise your hand, you raise your hand. I mean, some people are proactively identified that they'll raise their hand, obviously.*
Citing numerous opportunities within his company, one sales manager participant described employer branding messages for employee retention in this way:

*As far as opportunities, we have a lot of opportunities for the company -- for employees and people to move up.* We have the -- we have on our computer system, we have a place called...where there's all the job postings. We have learning -- learn to learn on there, which is all kinds of educational processes, things that have nothing to do with my current role but classes I can take that will expand my knowledge into other parts of the company and so forth. I mean, it’s a very large company so there's areas of the company that frankly coming in, you don’t have any idea what they are so opportunities to grow. You know, if you -- you can get into the sales -- outdoor sales and you think that you know what I've been doing this for three or four years. I'm getting kind of bored with this. I'd like to go try the business to business. *There's training modules on how to get into that and who to talk to and, you know, it's a very-- they've done a very good job on once you get into the family to keep you here.*

Speaking about how she uses training and professional development in her employer branding messages for employee retention, another sales manager participant had this to say:

*So I would start with training as a pillar and then being able to work with the individuals that are on my team very closely so we've got a reliable structure so that we're not only showing them how to be effective in the role but also I'm working with them really closely to figure out how are they going to grow even further as a professional.* What are their goals, maybe short-term and long-term. So I talk about some of the opportunities that we have but one of the biggest responsibilities I have personally is to ensure that these people, whatever their next step is, that I can help them get to the next step.

Another sales manager participant felt strongly that what really helped to maintain current employees was the benefits, namely insurance offered by the company and had this to say:

*Yeah, I mean, we talk when we go through mid-year and year-end reviews, I mean, we talk about, you know, what's big with our regional vice president the succession planning and where you want your next step to be so we do talk about that and then, I think in just in the branding element for the company in team meetings we'll talk about, you know, hey, your open enrollment period is open right now and just keeping people up to date on stuff that they need to be paying attention to that they may kind of forget so you know, it's probably nothing really formal but it's certainly communicated down to us hey make sure you talk to the -- to your teams about this and that and that type of stuff. But it formally rolls down us...and we roll it back.*
In an effort to retain quality employees who are considered a flight risk, one sales manager participant’s company discusses stock options with the company as a method of employer branding for retention:

*We do different things to retain depending on if we think someone's at risk, I mean, sometimes if believe someone's at risk, there's other methods that come into play. But, you know, with retention what is often done really -- we talk about stock options but if stock options...*

**Practicing employer branding for recruitment.** In this study, practicing employer branding for recruitment describes comments made by employees of the company about the benefits of employment when talking with potential salesperson candidates. These employee testimonials, including comments made by sales managers, generally include promoting the benefits of employee training, a positive corporate culture, and the opportunities for advancement with the company. During the interview process, it became very clear that sales managers either welcomed discussing the utilization of employer branding in their recruitment messages, or became defensive and argued the irrelevance of conveying the employer brand to potential salesperson candidates. There was really no middle ground. It became evident through my analysis of codes and categories, that in every case it was sales managers who were employed at companies with weak corporate brands that were praising their employer brands with potential candidates. When discussing how she deliberately discusses her personal experience with her employer in her recruitment messages, one sales manager had this to say:

*I always like to kick off the interview with a quick synopsis of how I found [Company name]. And why, you know, what attracted me to [Company name] in the first place and then ultimately why I stayed so long, because I feel like not only does it highlight all of the great things about our culture and all the opportunity within but also is very personal. I think people can hold onto that and see that while I didn't have experience at a company like [Company name], I had the resources to be successful. I had really great people that I learned from and ultimately got me to where I am today so that's all encompassing like how I talk about [Company name] on a personal level that has supported a really nice conversation with an applicant.*
Another sales manager participant personally spoke about why he has remained with his employer for so long:

_ I tell people that, you know, the reason I stay here is that, you know, we’re selling an exciting product that changes constantly so it’s, you know, we don’t sit on our hands. The company is very aggressive in making sure it changes to the way consumers are behaving and so there’s always a constant change going on so it’s exciting. I talk about, you know, that the company takes care of us well. I think our payment plans are respectable in the way they should be and that we also receive benefits on the side with health and dental and financial benefits. They take good care of us, so._

Speaking about how her company leaders understand the importance of employer branding, one sales manager participant described her employer’s deliberate effort to practice employer branding for recruitment through the packaging of employee testimonials on the company website:

_ So as a matter of fact, just -- perfect example is just yesterday we had out our head of not recruiting like -- so employee -- I don't even know what he's called now Global Recruitment. Oh my gosh I can't think of what he's called now. Whatever the case is, they were all out here yesterday because they were doing interviews with top reps and top leaders so that they could put those one minute blurbs on our website so that when people are interested in a job they'll be able to see wow this person came from here or this person's here. That's the kind of person that works at [Company name] and that's where the drive is. So they did commercials and they did videos and now they're all going to be on the [Company name] website._

One sales manager had this to say about the importance of her company’s positive culture, and how she believes it is important to discuss with salesperson candidates:

_ Mostly I talk about culture. I talk about goals. I talk about more of our, you know, who we are, how long we've been around, how long this office has been around. If you were to ever walk in, you would be able to see like culturally it's a complete team. Nobody -- it's a sales organization so there's always commissions, goals, quotas, every -- you know, that is clearly in place but there's all ages, all types of people, all everything and everybody gets along and as we walk people from our reception area back to where we interview them, they get to experience and they know -- are like wow that's so true. It looks like everybody's have fun, everybody's making money. I want to work here._

Another sales manager talked about the importance of candidates understanding his company’s culture and commitment to training in his recruitment messages:
I think -- our interview process is, you know, we want them to know what it’s like and to see what the culture’s like and understand what the job is as well so we take some time to make sure that they get exposure to that and they can really envision themselves doing this on a day-to-day basis in addition to also meeting with, you know, a couple of interviewers so I don’t think I’d say, you know, everybody that walks in the door knows them -- knows that. I think they could figure it out if they did some research and stuff but I think they -- I think when they leave they definitely know that. I think it’s something that’s kind of just organically developed on its own where it’s lots of focus on culture and engagement and positive reinforcement, tons of training and development that we do.

Similar to the comments by the previous sales manager, conveying his company’s commitment to training is also something another sales manager believes is important for candidates to know, and conveyed his message in the following manner:

...we do talk about how we train, how we continually train our people, I mean, it's not even just in when you come in the job. There's always additional training throughout the years that you're here. So, I mean, we certainly talk about that.

When talking about her company’s training program with candidates, one sales manager believes it not only lets candidates know about the benefits of the company, but also acts as a method for identifying the strong candidates by their level of interest in the training program:

I find that the people who are really strong candidates and really evaluating [Company name], they want to know more about the training program. The people who aren't as strong of candidates, they don't think to ask what kind of resources are behind the door so it's acting as a -- it's a good leading indicator but it also helps us be able to talk about it.

Theme 2: Strength of the Corporate Brand

As previously mentioned, a brand may be used to identify a company in terms of the goods or services it sells, the employment experience, and the company image. When identifying a company in terms of company image, the term corporate branding is commonly used. Unlike the employer brand that focuses on potential and current employees as its branding target, the corporate brand focuses on internal and external stakeholders. The corporate brand includes the
communication of the brand’s values, serves as a means of differentiation from their competitors, and enhances the esteem and loyalty by which the organization is held by stakeholder groups (Balmer & Gray, 2003). In this research study, the strength of the corporate brand emerged as a theme that describes the distinctive qualities or image of a particular brand of goods and services, and its proximity to top-of-mind awareness, the highest level of awareness. Comments about the strength of the corporate brand were grouped into two categories: corporate branding strategies, and leveraging the corporate brand for recruitment.

**Corporate branding strategies.** Corporate branding strategies in this study, was used to explain how sales managers spoke about how well-known or successful their company was in terms of awareness. During the interviews, it became clear that sales managers were very aware of the strength of their company’s corporate brand and could easily categorize it as weak or strong. Discussing their corporate brand with regard to the benefits or challenges it presented with recruitment was common among all sales manager participants.

**Weak corporate branding strategies.** In this study, weak corporate branding strategies refer to comments about how the company has not been successful in building their brand, as many people outside of the industry do not know about the company or about what the company does. Sales manager participants employed by companies with weak corporate branding strategies spoke candidly about the challenges they faced with regard to salesperson recruitment. One sales manager described the challenges of his company’s weak corporate brand in terms of the lack of brand awareness from college students, their target entry-level salesperson candidate. He described this challenge in the following manner:

*I think it's just getting our brand exposed in front of the, you know, especially with the entry-level so that's going to be college graduates and recent college graduates. It's getting them exposed to who we are. I think that's probably our biggest challenges. Again, they don't know what [Company name] is and once they can figure out who we are, then they usually will get interested. But it's, again, it's that exposure I think is probably our toughest thing still.*
Another sales manager described a similar challenge with his company’s lack of brand awareness among potential candidates this way:

\[ I \text{ think we’re a privately owned, family owned company from an industry perspective we’re a pretty boutique media company and most people that aren’t in the media world haven’t -- don’t really know [Company name] or what [Company name] is.}\]

**Strong corporate branding strategies.** Specific to this study, strong corporate branding refers to comments about how the company has done a good job building their brand and as a result experiences the benefits of name recognition and trust in the company. Sales manager participants employed by companies with strong corporate branding strategies were very proud of their company’s strong corporate brands. All sales manager participants employed by companies with strong corporate brands spoke about the benefits a strong brand provides with regard to recruitment. Sales manager participants who were employed by companies with strong corporate brands tended to speak about their strength in terms of ratings, such as the Fortune 50 and Fortune 500 lists. In this regard, one sales manager had this to say about her strong corporate brand.

\[ \text{You always know that [Company name] is the top one…I mean, it's the Fortune 500 Company. It's the big powerhouse corporate company that is like AAA rated. So they know that that's the one. So there's always -- it's the ultimate place to get to for the people who are all working if that makes sense.} \]

Another sales manager participant echoed the sentiments of the previous participant and had this to say about his company’s strong corporate brand:

\[ \text{We certainly are a Fortune 50 Company so, I mean, our brand pretty much speaks for itself. We've been around for over 100 years.} \]

Another sales manager spoke more about how the corporate brand of his company is perceived by various stakeholders, and had this to say:

\[ \text{I believe the [Company name]'s got a very positive brand name. A very family oriented, good core values, treats associates fairly. I believe that's out in the industry, you know, as far as I mean, our customers believe that. Our customers, you know, tell us that all the time and mainly most of our employees do as well.} \]
One manager focused his discussions on his company’s strong corporate brand around all of the national advertising they were currently running and how that affected people’s perceptions of his employer:

Our national marketing has created the brand awareness and taken our brand awareness to another level. Not as an employer kind of as you’re driving at, you know, in terms of our benefits and things like that. All of that is very solid but just in terms of the company and the company to work for, being successful and, you know, on the edge of some great things so to speak.

Leveraging the corporate brand for recruitment. In this study, leveraging the corporate brand for recruitment refers to comments about using the corporate brand and the benefits of name recognition and trust in the company during the recruitment process. Comments about how their companies leveraged strong corporate brands for recruitment purposes centered on how the familiarity and name recognition of the company serves as a catalyst for people to apply for a job with the company, because it builds a sense of comfort and trust among the applicants. One sales manager described that phenomenon in the following manner:

I think they perceive, again, the [Company name]’s done a very good job building a brand that I think most people recognize and they’re very comfortable with. So I believe that most salespeople when they come to us, they have a certain expectation of a company being fair in treating them right and providing good quality leads and so forth and they and that's what's they get.

Another sales manager participant described the phenomena in much the same way:

…so I can tell you that based on my conversations with the recruits, that's one of the first things that jumps out is [Company name], it's a well-known company with a great company brand so I would say that that's primary in what their considerations are for making the decision.

Another sales manager participant who believed his company had high brand awareness, and therefore had people actively looking for employment with his company, described his perceptions in the following manner:

…but I think it’s more people know about [Company name] and therefore, you know, they're like oh I wonder if [Company name]’s hiring or they see
something posted on LinkedIn or, you know, or whatever it may be in terms of job recs and then they start -- they apply.

Another sales manager participant believed his company’s strong brand was perceived by salespeople as important for achieving success with the company and had this to say:

People that are coming to work for us are looking for a product to sell that's a very good product and it's well positioned in the market place, you know, from a brand standpoint. So it’s going to make it easier for me to sell. Not be difficult for me to sell.

Synthesis of the Themes: Grounded Theory Model

This section provides a synthesis of the themes, as well as an illustration (see Figure 4.2) of that synthesis through a grounded theory model. The movement from the data structure to the building of a theoretical model that is grounded in the data is an important part of the process for presenting the participants’ experiences in theoretical terms (Gioia et al., 2012). The grounded theory model in Figure 4.2 shows the movement of the categories and themes that were outlined in the data structure, illustrating the key relationships among the emergent concepts from this study. The model was based on sales manager perceptions of employer branding’s role in the recruitment of entry-level salespeople in B2B companies. The model begins on the far left with B2B company sales managers as the participants. Moving left to right, the two major themes that emerged from the data were: strength of corporate brand, and strength of the employer brand. All companies possess both a corporate brand and an employer brand. When following the upper path of the model, strength of corporate brand, it becomes clear that companies fall into one of two distinct categories; they either have strong or weak corporate branding. Companies that believe they have strong corporate branding, leverage that brand awareness for recruitment purposes. On the other hand, consistent with logic, weak corporate branding provides no benefit to a company.
When following the lower path of the model, strength of employer brand, the model illustrates a clear path from evidence of a strong employer brand to practicing employer branding for retention. While the focus of the study was on employer branding for recruitment, an analysis of the data was quite clear in showing employer branding for retention when companies had a strong employer brand. However, in the absence of a strong corporate brand, companies with strong employer brands compensate and consequently practice employer branding for recruitment. This relationship is illustrated by making a literal connection with weak corporate branding and a strong employer brand, that in combination describe the companies that are practicing employer branding for recruitment.
Figure 4.2. Grounded Theory Model

Addressing the Research Questions

The sales managers who participated in this research study described their perceptions of employer branding strategies for entry-level recruitment for their companies. This information was collected through semi-structured telephone interviews with the sales managers, as previously discussed in Chapter 3. The following section attempts to answer the three
overarching research questions that guided this study. A map of sorts was subsequently provided from an analysis of both the production of a data structure, and the construction of a grounded theory model. These tools, as well as the words of the sales manager participants themselves provided the necessary information to address the three research questions.

Research Question #1: How do employers decide what is important for potential employees to know about their organization’s employer brand, their reputation as an employer?

Before beginning each interview, I read the purpose of the research study and a definition of employer brand to the participants. I made the decision to recite the definition of employer brand after consulting with my professors regarding my interview protocol. It was determined that it was more germane to this study to determine if companies were using the intention of the employer brand, rather than whether they were using the correct terminology. The decision to read the definition of employer brand to participants turned out to be a good one, as most participants believed they had heard the term but were unsure of what it meant. This lack of familiarity of the term is consistent with the literature, as Ambler and Barrow speak about the variety of terms that are interchangeable with employer brand including corporate reputation, corporate culture, identity, and internal marketing (1996).

Of the 10 sales managers who participated in this study, only one had never heard of the term. From the sales managers who had previously heard the term employer brand, only one was using the terminology at her respective company. During the interview process it became clear that when the sales managers began to make sense of what the term employer brand comprised, they were able to provide a description of what they believed their company’s employer brand to be. Almost all participants, 90%, believe their companies have clearly defined, strong employer brands. As previously mentioned, strength of the employer brand became a major theme in this
research study. It became clear as the study progressed that lack of confidence in the employer brand among sales manager participants would have produced very different findings.

With regard to employee retention, a topic not covered by this research question, 100% of participants believed that their respective companies are leveraging their strong employer brand for retention. However only 60% of sales manager participants believe the employer brand is important for salespeople when choosing an employer. The remaining 40% of participants, who did not believe the employer brand was important for job applicants when choosing an employer, were clearly relying on their corporate brand to attract candidates. The sales manager participants, who felt the employer brand was important for salespeople when choosing an employer and therefore conveyed it in recruitment messages, were able to provide details of what comprised their employer branding messages. Interestingly enough, the information that employers felt was important for salesperson candidates to know, directly correlated to the six initial codes that formed the category: practicing employer branding for retention, detailed in Figure 4.3.
In the context of this research study, this direct correlation seems reasonable, as employers would want to provide information to potential candidates about what keeps people at their company in an attempt to hire individuals who will remain with their company. Therefore companies are essentially choosing what comprises their employer branding messages to recruit entry-level salespeople from the list of benefits the company provides to retain their quality employees. From the data, the five initial codes that comprised the category: practicing employer branding for retention consisted of: (a) professional development for retention, (b) training for retention, (c) career pathing for retention, (d) retention by advancement with the company, (e) fostering salesperson success, and (f) fostering teamwork. Woven into the sales manager’s message to potential salesperson candidates, the above topics comprise the employer branding messages to potential candidates.
Professional development, or the opportunity to grow as an individual was defined by one participant as:

...opportunities that will expand my knowledge...opportunities to grow as an individual through education.

Participants believed that having clearly defined processes in place for professional development was a major company benefit, and a big part of the reason why people stayed with their companies. As a result, sales managers who relied on their employer brand for recruitment used information about their company’s professional development plan in their employer branding messages.

Nearly all participants praised their company’s training programs as a huge competitive advantage with regard to salesperson recruitment. When describing how important it was that applicants knew her company for its training, one participant said:

“…everybody knows that if you start working at [Company name], it's an amazing training program and like even before I even got into it…I would hear people just say that oh [Company name] well they train you up like no other company.”

Talking to applicants about training was common among all sales managers who rely on their company’s employer brand to recruit entry-level salespeople.

With regard to career pathing at her company, one participant stated:

“…so even if you -- you're not thrilled with the position that you're in or maybe you just find that sales isn't for you, [Company name] is so big. I mean, if you want to go into client services, if you want to go into project management, if you want to go to another country, that's all great. You can do any of that because it's so big...and they're really into career pathing. So if your family -- a lot of times somebody who's married, their spouse gets relocated to South Carolina, we'll home shore you just do the same job and we'll home shore you so that your spouse can go and you can go with them.”

From the research data, it became clear that career pathing played a big role in the recruitment messages among sales managers who practiced employer branding to recruit entry-level salespeople.
Equally important for retention of salespeople is the opportunity for advancement within the company. One sales manager had this to say about his company’s commitment to promoting from within:

*They do a very good job once we get in place to keep us motivated, move us along with the employment chain, and, you know, give us opportunities to expand.*

Findings from the data suggest that sales managers were proud of their company’s pledge to promote from within, and were undoubtedly talking about advancement within the company if they relied on their employer brand to recruit salespeople. Describing how their companies foster salesperson success and teamwork were varied among sales managers, but were also common talking points in employer branding messages for recruitment.

**Research Question #2: How do employers who develop their employer brand, use their employer branding message to recruit entry-level salespeople?**

One of the major categories that developed from this research study was: practicing employer branding for recruitment. The data was very rich in providing answers to this research question with a number initial codes describing the employer branding strategies sales managers were using in their recruitment messages. In most cases, sales managers were previously unaware that they were practicing employer branding for recruitment, but quickly caught on as the interview progressed.

As previously mentioned, almost all participants, 90%, believe their companies have clearly defined, strong employer brands. However, only 60% of sales manager participants believe the employer brand is important for salespeople when choosing an employer, with 50% of the participants feeling confident that their respective companies are practicing employer branding for recruitment. Most relevant to addressing this research question is the fact that even if
the sales managers recognized that their company had a strong employer brand, some did not believe it was important to convey to potential candidates, and therefore did not use it for recruitment purposes. In all cases, the research findings suggested that companies with strong corporate brands were not using their employer brand to recruit. Conversely, in the absence of a strong corporate brand, companies needed to compensate with their employer brand.

As previously mentioned, this research question became a populated category, rich with seven different codes. The codes essentially provided details about how employers were practicing employer branding for recruitment. An illustration of this category, and the codes that form it, is provided in Figure 4.4.

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Figure 4.4. Practicing Employer Branding for Recruitment and Related Codes

The data provided a tidy package full of codes that translated into the methods that sales managers believed their companies were using to promote their employer brand to potential candidates. These methods include: (a) using employee testimonials, (b) promoting employee training, (c) using social media, (d) promoting longevity with the company, (e) promoting
corporate culture, (f) promoting advancement with the company, and (g) promoting company benefits.

The use of employee testimonials is perhaps the most blatant method of employer branding, and certainly the most common. All sales managers who were practicing employer branding for salesperson recruitment were using employee testimonials, both their own, and those of top salespeople to position their company as an employer of choice. Garnered from the participants’ own words, these testimonials are occurring in both formal and informal recruitment messages (networking), through company websites, and through social media messages. One sales manager spoke about her company’s formal policy for how to talk about their employer brand in recruitment messages:

*So they clearly define like how they would want us to represent [Company name] but they also ask us to have that genuine human element to, you know, be able to tell stories, give our own personal recount of it. So they give us like the overview of what they're hoping for but also they want us to be, you know, people about it, if that makes sense.*

Another sales manager discussed the power of employee testimonials on her company website in the following manner:

*...our Chief HR person is on our website. We have our -- the -- what is her position, like Employee Engagement. Like there's tons of people all over here putting in their two cents and doing -- just having videos on here on why they work for [Company name]...They're going to go right on the career site. So if you go on [Company name].com and then on the right hand side it says careers, there's a whole career page...that talks about -- that doesn't even ask for, you know, just put your information in and it talks about [Company name] as the brand and then if you're interested then you go apply. You don't just apply. So it's kind of cool because it's a first step before you're even applying blindly to a company like...make sure you want to work here because this is us.*

Promoting the company’s salesperson training program is also considered a key method of leveraging the employer brand for recruitment. As previously mentioned, one sales manager even felt that inquiring about training opportunities was a mark of a strong candidate. All of the sales managers spoke about using some form of social media. From LinkedIn to Twitter,
companies are figuring out ways to convey their brands through posting promotional pieces about their companies, or catchy hashtags that succinctly describe their company as a great place to work. The following quote is from a sales manager who believes that his company suffers from a lack of employer branding:

*I think it’s a short fall of us because our company has been so shy at like getting press and things. This is what our corporate HR people talked about that came - - it was after an article came out in I think Forbes about {Company name}, you know. Our company shies away from that so, you know, people want to work for Google and, you know… Progressive and Amazon and, you know, just because it sounds cool and they’ve built an image. So I think it’s really important. It hurts us. It really narrows our pool down and makes the effort that we have to put into recruiting, you know, getting more people interested instead of sort of really weeding through the best talent a lot of times.*

Nearly all sales managers spoke about their tenure with their respective organizations as a sign of their commitment to a strong employer brand. With an average of 12.6 years of service to their companies, when these positive feelings about your longevity with your company are conveyed to potential candidates, the employer brand has been used for recruitment. Similarly, when sentiments of the corporate culture and an explanation of the company benefits are conveyed to applicants in recruitment messages, that is employer branding for recruitment.

**Research Question #3: What effect does skillfully managing the employer brand have on company efforts to recruit exemplary entry-level salespeople?**

From the sales manager participants’ perspective, in the absence of a strong corporate brand, skillfully managing the employer brand is a critical component in entry-level salesperson recruitment. The research suggests that among companies practicing employer branding for recruitment, 100% of sales managers believe they are getting a big enough pool of candidates with their current recruitment methods. However, only 20% of them believe their recruitment efforts were producing the best, or exemplary candidates. When those same sales managers were
asked how they could improve their efforts to attract better quality candidates, half of them said they did not know, while the remaining 50% stated they believe that ramping up campus recruitment efforts would help. As previously mentioned, all participants in this study have relied on some form of campus recruiting in the past, as most were initially contacted at various campus-run student sales competitions I attended with my marketing students. Interestingly enough, among the companies that leverage their corporate brand for recruitment, only 25% believe they are getting a big enough pool of candidates. Among those same sales managers, only 25% believe their current recruitment efforts are producing the best quality candidates. These finding suggest a couple of things. First, leveraging employer branding for recruitment is far better for attracting a large pool of candidates than relying on the corporate brand. Second, neither employer branding nor leveraging the corporate brand in isolation appears to be producing the best quality salesperson applicants. And third, when asked how they could improve recruitment efforts to attract better quality candidates, participants overwhelming pointed to increasing campus recruiting as a solution. It is important to note that most sales managers spoke about an extremely difficult vetting process for applicants, which could be another reason why these companies feel they are not getting enough, or the right quality candidates. Many job applicants may not be passing the first phase of the vetting process with the recruiters.

Chapter Summary

The findings of the research study were reported in this chapter. The chapter began with a review of the study, followed by a description of both the participants and their respective companies. Next, a job profile of the entry-level salesperson, along with the common attributes an ideal salesperson candidate should possess as described by the participants was provided. A discussion of the two major themes that emerged from the data analysis: strength of the employer
brand, and strength of the corporate brand were then discussed. The chapter concluded by addressing each of the three research questions that guided this study, and attempting to provide some answers.
Chapter 5
Summary, Discussion, and Recommendations

This chapter concludes my research study on sales manager perceptions of employer branding strategies that select B2B companies are using for entry-level salesperson recruitment. The chapter is organized in four sections. The first section provides a summary of the research study. The second section presents a discussion of the findings. The third section identifies limitations of the study. The fourth section discusses recommendations, both for practice and for future research.

Study Summary

The purpose of this study was to explore sales manager perceptions of the employer branding strategies B2B companies are using for the external recruitment of entry-level salespeople, and sought to answer the following three research questions:

1. How do employers decide what is important for potential employees to know about their organization’s employer brand, their reputation as an employer?
2. How do employers who develop their employer brand, use their employer branding message to recruit entry-level salespeople?
3. What effect does skillfully managing the employer brand have on company efforts to recruit exemplary entry-level salespeople?

This topic was originally chosen because of my interest in the sales profession. However, as the study progressed, I quickly realized that my passion for marketing was much more intense, and as such the study explored branding much more than I had initially anticipated. After
identifying the research questions that would serve to guide the study, I began a review of the literature. I paid particular attention to the concept of branding to ensure that I could distinguish among the various terms. To explore the research questions, a grounded theory qualitative data analysis approach was chosen. In this particular case, grounded theory was identified as the best approach for studying sales manager perceptions of employer branding’s role in the recruitment of entry-level salespeople.

Ten sales managers from B2B companies who engaged in the external recruitment of entry-level salespeople for their organization were interviewed for this research study. The interviews were subsequently transcribed and coded, using the three-phased coding process touted by Charmaz, which includes initial coding, focused coding and theoretical coding (2014). The result was the building of themes with rich descriptions and insightful accounts (Alvesson & Ashcraft, 2013). Adhering to the principles of confidentiality, the identities of the participants were not disclosed in the reporting of the data. Identifiers such as name, company name, and other descriptive terms used within each individual organization were removed. Member checking was also conducted by providing each of the participants with electronic copies of their interviews for approval, specifically asking them to check for accuracy and offer any additional insight or points of clarification. To achieve interrater reliability, I enlisted the help of Monica Favia, my colleague at Bloomsburg University of Pennsylvania and former PhD student at Pennsylvania State University; as well as Jae Young Lee, a fellow student in my PhD cohort. The reliability of my study was evaluated through a review of a section of my coding dictionary, along with a list of representative quotes for the raters to code. A level of agreement among the raters of .80 was achieved, which is above the recommended threshold of .70 (Kreiner et al., 2009).

Adhering to the methods outlined in Chapter 3, my findings revealed two major themes: strength of the employer brand, and strength of the corporate brand. The strength of the employer
brand consisted of three categories formed from 16 of the initial codes. The three categories that comprise strength of the employer brand are: evidence of a strong employer brand, practicing employer branding for retention, and practicing employer branding for recruitment. The strength of the corporate brand consisted of two categories formed from six initial codes. The two categories that comprise the strength of the corporate brand are: corporate branding strategies, and leveraging the corporate brand for recruitment.

Conclusions

This section provides a synthesis of the findings reported in Chapter 4, as well as a collection of personal thoughts that were recorded as memos throughout the entire analytic process. As previously mentioned; memos were a key component of this qualitative process and were recorded after each interview, during the coding process, and throughout the writing of this paper. Charmaz contends that memo writing encourages the investigator to stop and think about the content of the interview, while continuing to interact with and analyze the data (2014). I believe my experience with the memo-writing process provides evidence of the critical nature of this step in the grounded theory process. This synthesis of the findings and memos will be presented in terms of: conclusions that arose from the data but were not covered by the research questions, and my personal conclusions that are not grounded in research.

Data-driven Conclusions

Prior to conducting the study, I recognized that the sales manager was only one of multiple company representatives involved with salesperson recruitment. Unfortunately, the data revealed a lack of communication among sales managers and other company representatives
involved with recruitment, namely salesperson recruiters with regard to the processes employed in the recruitment of top sales talent. The data also provided a sense of just how strongly all sales managers felt about participating in the recruitment process. All sales manager participants overtly expressed a strong desire to be involved, or more involved in the recruitment process, either physically or through the ability to provide input on how to best construct the recruitment framework. In some cases, the sales managers did not believe the recruiters were doing enough to attract the right type of job applicants. Most participants sited *quality of the applicants* as the primary cause of their disappointment with the recruitment process.

The research study also revealed that sales managers are divided on what is important to convey to employees in their recruitment messages. Some believe that their primary role is to convey the company benefits and sell the company to job applicants, and thus promote the employer brand. Other sales managers, particularly those who believe their strong corporate brand drives applicants to apply for employment, feel their main role during the recruitment process is to uncover the qualities of the individual, especially at the entry level, to ensure they are the right candidate to fill the position. While both sales managers who rely on their employer brands, and those who leverage their corporate brands for recruitment described a complex vetting process for job applicants, those leveraging their corporate brands seemed to screen candidates to a larger degree. In other words, when describing the vetting process for salesperson recruiting, companies with strong corporate brands seemed to employ a much more difficult up-front screening process for job applicants to endure.

With regard to employee retention, a topic not covered by the research questions, all participants who felt their companies had clearly defined, strong employer brands, believed their respective companies were leveraging their strong employer brand for retention. In all cases, the sales managers were able to speak at length about the benefits their company provided for employees that fostered good will. They also discussed how they were using those benefits in
discussions with their salesforce for employee retention. In most cases, the sales managers used themselves as testaments of the benefits of employment, expressing that their companies should be regarded as employers of choice. They cited their longevity, career advancement, and compensation as some of the major benefits that motivated them to remain with their companies.

The findings from the study also suggested that while employers were getting more job applicants by utilizing employer branding messages rather than corporate branding messages, neither method in isolation was producing quality applicants. However, one of the most important findings of this study was that 50% of the participants cited campus recruiting as the best method for producing quality salesperson applicants. These findings imply that if companies increase their efforts to build a strong employer brand, and target college campuses with their employer branding messages, they will attract a big enough pool of quality salesperson candidates.

**Personal Conclusions**

After conducting multiple interviews with sales managers, it became clear that having initially conducted a pilot study with salesperson recruiters was beneficial for being able to properly research the current study. I would not have asked the right questions of sales managers and successfully completed this study, had I not understood the traditional framework for recruitment practiced at most B2B sales organizations. In one interview in particular, it became abundantly clear that the sales manager thought I “had the wrong guy” with regard to who I should be interviewing for the study. He felt I should be speaking with the salesperson recruiter at his company. I explained to him that I had initially spoken to salesperson recruiters, and received a first-hand look at the front-end recruitment processes before embarking on the current
study. I also reminded him that the purpose of my study was to get sales managers’ perceptions of the employer branding strategies used for the purposes of entry-level salesperson recruitment.

Because this study focused on the sales profession with regard to employer branding’s role in recruitment, I believe the findings are very different than they would have been had the study focused on any other profession. Since the inherent role of the salesperson is to *sell* the value of their company in terms of products or services, they not only have to believe that the company has value, but also have to convince others that the company’s goods or services have value as well because their livelihood depends on it. Findings on employer branding suggest that the employees of companies with strong employer brands will actually ‘live the brand’ (Maxwell & Knox, 2009). I believe this idea of *living the brand* is critical for the success of salespeople in any organization. From my review of the literature, it became abundantly clear that the most widely used definition of the term employer brand is “the package of functional, economic, and psychological benefits provided by employment, and identified with the employing company” (Ambler & Barrow, 1996, p. 187). However, in the context of the sales profession, it appears the definition of the employer brand should be expanded to include: *the opportunity to sell a well-known, well-branded product from an established company*. I believe that this salesperson context is the reason why many of the sales manager participants felt strongly about relying on their strong corporate brands for attracting job applicants. Some participants even went so far as to say that the fact that the company was well-known and admired for its product or service was of utmost importance for a salesperson when choosing an employer. Therefore, it seems logical that in the context of the sales profession, the benefits of a strong corporate brand should be included in the employer branding messages.

My personal impression from my conversations with sales managers was that it was not important that sales managers were using the term employer brand. What seemed to be much more important was that the employer brand did exist, and was actively being cultivated to build
value in the company as an employer of choice. Equally important were the findings that suggested all of the sales managers that believed their respective companies had a strong employer brand were leveraging it for retention.

**Limitations of the Study**

The findings of this study should be interpreted by acknowledging the following limitations. First, because the sample of the study was entry-level sales professionals in B2B companies, the results may not be generalizable to business-to-consumer salespeople. Another limitation is that while a sample size of 10 is appropriate to develop grounded theory provided saturation of the data has occurred, expanding the research sample to include a broader range of industries may help increase generalizability to all types of B2B companies.

**Recommendations**

**Recommendations for Practice**

As previously mentioned, in today’s competitive business environment, salespeople are in high demand. This high demand for salespeople creates a buyers’ market, and provides the future salesperson with a variety of choices of employers. While much of the data revealed that employers believed they had strong employer brands, 90% of the participants acknowledged that the employer brand terminology was not used within their organizations, and there were no formal processes in place to talk about it with regard to recruitment. It is my impression from the participants own words that the terminology is not nearly important as the intention of the employer brand within the organization. Thus, employers of salespeople must deliberately
cultivate their employer brand, regardless of the label they attach to it, to attract a big enough pool of entry-level salesperson candidates. They need to populate their employer brand with information about their salesperson training, career pathing, opportunities for advancement, and professional development. They should deliberately coordinate their efforts among all company representatives that play a role in salesperson recruitment, and build a framework for not only clearly defining and continuing to build a strong employer brand, but also promoting that strong employer brand to attract job applicants. While literature on employer branding discusses the informal nature of employer branding, this research study suggests that employers should formally promote their employer brand. This formal promotion of the employer brand should occur through cleverly crafted employee testimonials on company websites, employer accolades on social media sites, and formal networking, such as postings of praiseworthy company endeavors using platforms such as LinkedIn.

As previously mentioned, the data revealed that although much of a sales manager’s time was devoted to training and coaching their current salesforce, they would like to play a bigger role in salesperson recruitment. Citing time constraints, many of them implied that their role could be one of having input into the design of the salesperson recruitment framework, rather than being more physically involved in the front-end recruitment processes. Therefore, another recommendation for companies who want to attract a big enough pool of quality entry-level salesperson applicants, would be to build a recruitment team comprised of human resource professionals, salesperson recruiters, sales managers, and marketing managers. Input from each of these important company representatives would enable companies to build strong employer brands utilizing corporate branding elements, and successfully promote those messages to potential job applicants.

The findings of this study revealed that employer branding strategies were attracting a much bigger pool of job applicants than corporate branding strategies. This information is
particularly useful for companies who believe their strong corporate brand is driving applicants, as the research illustrates that is not the case. However, the study did imply that the corporate brand was an important element contributing to the ultimate success of the salesperson. Therefore, formally integrating the elements of a strong corporate brand into formal employer branding messages can be useful in building a better framework for recruitment, and ultimately attracting a bigger pool of job applicants. This can be accomplished by integrating elements that comprise both the employer brand and corporate brand, as well as input from sales managers, human resource professionals/salesperson recruiters, and marketing managers to build a better recruitment framework.

Another recommendation for practitioners who want to hire the best possible sales talent is to engage in campus recruiting. The targeting of college campuses by employers can occur in a variety of ways. The most obvious form of campus recruitment has been the traditional college career fair. However, the research suggests that for salesperson recruitment in particular, partnering with schools that have a marketing and professional sales program will provide the most talented students. These partnerships could include sponsoring university sales programs, offering internships, sponsoring and participating in campus-run student sales competitions, and speaking with students in the classroom on a variety of sales topics. Collaborations with college campuses build brand awareness among the college students, and provide employers with the first opportunity to access these students.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

This section provides suggestions for future studies that might be interesting and ultimately contribute to the field of salesperson recruitment. One recommendation for future research would be to include other company representatives within the organizations who are
involved with recruitment of entry-level salespeople as part of the sample. Although a pilot study was conducted with salesperson recruiters prior to this study, and it was determined that these recruiters could not provide the necessary information on branding, input from recruiters, as well as sales managers would have provided a more comprehensive look at the front-end recruitment methods and processes that account for an applicant’s first impression of the B2B organization. Therefore, the addition of qualitative interviews with salesperson recruiters or human resource professionals may add an additional element by providing a more specialized look at recruitment and therefore increase the generalizability of the findings.

Another recommendation for future research would be to employ a mixed methods approach to the research study. In order to provide a more holistic, inside-outside view of what attracts potential entry-level salesperson candidates to particular companies; it would be beneficial to survey those job applicants. As identified by sales manager participants in this study, college students in marketing and professional sales programs planning to enter the sales profession could provide the sample for this study. Student competitors involved in collegiate sales competitions would also be a prime sample. A quantitative questionnaire on the different elements that attract applicants to the companies where they plan to apply would provide quantifiable data about what attracts entry-level salesperson candidates for recruitment purposes. The researcher could then compare the results of the qualitative survey of sales managers and the quantitative results of the salesperson questionnaires in a mixed method study, to see if the sales managers’ perceptions of their recruitment messages are similar to the potential candidates’ impression of the message.

Because this research study used only sales managers as the sample, it did not reveal another important aspect of employer branding, which is how the employees of the company talk about the company with people outside of the organization. An interesting follow-up study would be to conduct qualitative interviews with a number of salespeople from the same
companies where the sales managers were interviewed to get a better understanding of what they are saying about their employer, whether good or bad. This would help to determine whether the sales manager and salesforce’s perception of the company, and how they are representing it to the public is consistent.

When conducting the literature review for this qualitative research study, it became clear that quantitative research studies may also be appropriate. Many of the previous studies on the role of employer branding in recruitment efforts used the qualitative approach (Ambler & Barrow, 1996; Berthon, Ewing, & Hah, 2005; Näppä et al., 2014), and were able to collect interesting data. A quantitative questionnaire may serve to better quantify some of the participant responses with regard to salesperson recruitment. In particular, a quantitative study would be required to determine the assignment of weights to specific attributes that attracted current employees, or that will attract potential employees to the organization.
References


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http://doi.org/10.1177/1094428112452151


http://doi.org/10.1080/08832323.2012.740520


## Appendix A

### Project Plan

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<td>Submit Draft of Proposal (Chapters 1-3) to Committee Chair for Initial Review</td>
<td>43d</td>
<td>04/11/2016</td>
<td>06/08/2016</td>
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<td>Call IRB Coordinator about whether modification necessary</td>
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<td>Complete IRB modifications (if necessary)</td>
<td>10d</td>
<td>04/11/2016</td>
<td>04/22/2016</td>
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<td>Review introduction, literature, and methodology with Methodologist</td>
<td>6d</td>
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<td>Use feedback to revise proposal as necessary</td>
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<td>Finalize Methodology</td>
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<td>Meet with Methodologist to review methodology</td>
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<td>Email sales managers</td>
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<td>Conduct second order coding</td>
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Appendix B

Proposal for Use of Human Research Subjects

Date: Monday, August 29, 2016 12:11:41 AM
View: SF: Basic Information

Basic Information

1. *Title of study:*
   What role does marketing play in the recruitment of exemplary salespeople by top sales organizations?

2. *Short title:*
   Salesperson Recruitment

3. *Brief description:*
   I am working on identifying current methods for recruiting exemplary salespeople utilized by recruiters of top sales organizations. I am working on this particular topic because I want to find out which methods work best in today’s changing recruitment landscape, and where both traditional and nontraditional marketing fits into the salesperson recruitment plan. I am ultimately hoping to understand how and where both traditional and nontraditional marketing fit into the salesperson recruitment plan.

4. *Principal investigator:*
   Michele Welliver

5. *Does the investigator have a financial interest related to this research?*
   - [ ] Yes
   - [x] No

6. *Will an external IRB act as the IRB of record for this study?*
   - [ ] Yes
   - [x] No

7. *Attach the protocol:*

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<td>View HRP-591 - Protocol for Human Subject Research Michele WelliverREVISION NOV 3.docx(0.01)</td>
<td>IRB Protocol</td>
<td>11/4/2015</td>
<td>History</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

8.
9. **Use one of these templates:**
   - Protocol Templates
   - PRAMS Legacy Documents

View: SF: Funding Sources (not integrated with Grants) [PSU]

**Funding Sources**

1. **Identify each organization supplying funding for the study:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Funding Source</th>
<th>Sponsor’s Funding ID</th>
<th>OSP Number</th>
<th>Budget Fund</th>
<th>Billing Notes</th>
<th>Attachments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
   
   There are no items to display

2.

View: SF: Study Team Members _ PSU

**Study Team Members**

1. **Identify each additional person involved in the design, conduct, or reporting of the research:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Roles</th>
<th>Financial Interest</th>
<th>Involved in Consent</th>
<th>E-mail</th>
<th>Phone</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Glen Kreiner</td>
<td>Advisor</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
<td><a href="mailto:gek12@psu.edu">gek12@psu.edu</a></td>
<td>814 867 2381</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2.

3. **Study Team Qualifications:** (additional information regarding each Study Team Member’s Qualification (including the PI) is required)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HRP-509 - Study Team Member Qualification Template Michele Welliver.docx</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.

Refer to the following template

   - HRP-509 - Study Team Member Qualification Template
Study Scope

1. *Are there external sites where the investigator will conduct or oversee the research?*
   - Yes
   - No

2. *Does the study do any of the following:*
   - Specify the use of an approved drug or biologic?
   - Use an unapproved drug or biologic?
   - Use a food or dietary supplement to diagnose, cure, treat, or mitigate a disease or condition?
   - Yes
   - No

3. *Does the study do any of the following:*
   - Evaluate the safety or effectiveness of a device?
   - Use a humanitarian use device (HUD)?
   - Yes
   - No

Consent Forms and Recruitment Materials

1. **Consent forms:** (include an HHS-approved sample consent document, if applicable)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Document</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Date Modified</th>
<th>Document History</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>There are no items to display</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. Refer to the following templates and instructional documents:
   - Consent Templates
   - HRP-090 - SOP - Informed Consent Process for Research
   - PRAMS Legacy Documents
   - HRP-103 – Investigator Manual (navigate to the “How Do I Create a Consent Document?” section)

3. **Recruitment materials:** (add all material to be seen or heard by subjects, including ads)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Document</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Date Modified</th>
<th>Document History</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>There are no items to display</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Create STAR Submission

Do I need to create a STAR submission?

A STAR submission is only applicable to studies being reviewed by Penn State Hershey IRB/HSPO.

This action is required for either:

- Any clinical research study where it is possible for items and services to be captured in the hospital billing system and potentially billable to a study sponsor, a third-party payer, and/or the participant.
- Any clinical research study in which there will be invoices generated to a sponsor/funding agency for services provided.

A STAR submission is optional for non-billable/non-invoiceable clinical studies for which the research team may choose to use the STAR system for participant and study tracking functionality. Optional studies may include:

- Chart reviews
- Survey procedures
- Existing database/data analysis
- Patient registry studies
- Interview procedures or focus groups
- Educational/training studies
- Existing tissue samples/biospecimen analysis
- Long term follow up (active treatment complete)
- Observational

To create a STAR submission click box here: 

View: SF: Training Summary

Training Summary

Required Trainings:
IRB Training

Study Team Member's Training Status:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Roles</th>
<th>Training Status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Glen Kreiner</td>
<td>Management and Organization (UNIVERSITY PARK)</td>
<td>Advisor</td>
<td>IRB Training Completed (expires 5/15/2017)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michele Welliver</td>
<td>Learning and Performance Systems (UNIVERSITY PARK)</td>
<td>Principal Investigator</td>
<td>IRB Training Completed (expires 10/5/2017)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

View: SF: Supporting Documents [PSU]

Supporting Documents
Attach supporting files, naming them as you want them to appear in the approval letter:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Document</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Date Modified</th>
<th>Document History</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>View</td>
<td>Interview Questions for Subjects(0.01)</td>
<td>11/1/2015</td>
<td>History</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Suggested attachments:**

- Data collection instruments, such as:
  - Surveys/questionnaires
  - Interview questions/focus group topics
  - Observation checklists
  - Videos or images that subjects may be asked to view (stimuli)
  - Debriefing forms
- Data use agreements *(UP only)*
- Certificates of confidentiality from HHS Agency
- Collaborating approval materials, including:
  - Radiation Review Form *(HY only)*
  - Use of Human Tissue for Research Form *(HY only)*
  - Scientific Review Memo *(HY only)*
- Completed checklist of Department of Energy requirements, if applicable
- Other IRB approvals
- Other study-related documents not previously uploaded
Appendix C

Institutional Review Board Exemption Letter

Date: November 4, 2015
From: Stephanie Krout, IRB Analyst
To: Michele Welliver

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Submission:</th>
<th>Initial Study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Title of Study:</td>
<td>What role does marketing play in the recruitment of exemplary salespeople by top sales organizations?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal Investigator:</td>
<td>Michele Welliver</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study ID:</td>
<td>STUDY00003769</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Submission ID:</td>
<td>STUDY00003769</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funding:</td>
<td>Not Applicable</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Documents Approved: | • Interview Questions for Subjects (0.01), Category: Data Collection Instrument  
• HRP-591 - Protocol for Human Subject Research Michele WelliverREVISION NOV 3.pdf (0.01), Category: IRB Protocol |

The Office for Research Protections determined that the proposed activity, as described in the above-referenced submission, does not require formal IRB review because the research met the criteria for exempt research according to the policies of this institution and the provisions of applicable federal regulations.

Continuing Progress Reports are not required for exempt research. Record of this research determined to be exempt will be maintained for five years from the date of this notification. If your research will continue beyond five years, please contact the Office for Research Protections closer to the determination end date.

Changes to exempt research only need to be submitted to the Office for Research Protections in limited circumstances described in the below-referenced Investigator Manual. If changes are being considered and there are questions about whether IRB review is needed, please contact the Office for Research Protections.

Penn State researchers are required to follow the requirements listed in the Investigator Manual (HRP-103), which can be found by navigating to the IRB Library within CATS IRB (http://irb.psu.edu).

This correspondence should be maintained with your records.
Appendix D

Interview Protocol for Sales Managers

Exploring the Role of Employer Branding in Salesperson Recruitment

Things to remember during the interview:

- Let the respondent lead
- Probe issues in depth
- Limit the use of the word “why”
- Try to avoid injecting your opinion on the respondent
- Don’t be afraid of silence as it may encourage the respondent to continue talking
- Stay involved and present in the interview with positive remarks
- If questions are “falling flat,” repeat the last thing the respondent said and ask them to continue

Greeting and Explanation: Thank you for taking the time to talk with me today. The purpose of my study and of this interview is to explore the role of employer branding in the external recruitment of entry-level salespeople in business-to-business companies. For the purposes of this study, employer branding is defined as the package of functional, economic, and psychological benefits provided by employment, and identified with the employing company. Simply put, your employer brand is your company’s reputation as an employer. Your participation in this interview is completely voluntary, and your individual responses will be kept confidential. I will do my best to stay within the thirty-minute time frame we discussed. To ensure accuracy I would like to audio-record this interview.

Do you agree to be audio recorded? (Yes or No, if Yes continue)

I have a list of approximately 20 questions I will be asking you today. In an attempt to get through all of the questions in an hour, I may shift topics quickly. I may also ask probing questions to fully understand all of your responses. If it is ok with you, I would like to begin with a few questions about you and your work just for the record:

Interviewee Details

- How many years have you been employed at your present company?
- How long have you been a sales manager at your present company?
  - Current title: ____________________________.
- What was your job/title before becoming a sales manager?
- What are your specific roles and duties as the sales manager (insert actual title) of your company?

Questions related to salesperson recruitment
1. Describe the methods you and your organization using to recruit salespeople?
2. Which of these identified recruitment methods do you believe is producing the best result?
3. What defines the success of a recruitment method? (if prompting, number, quantity)

Questions related to the existence of employer branding within the organization

Read this paragraph to the interviewee: As I previously mentioned, the purpose of this study and this particular interview, is to explore sales manager perceptions of the role of employer branding in the external recruitment of entry-level salespeople in business-to-business companies.

4. Does your company use the term employer brand to refer to their employer brand image (i.e. the bundle of benefits provided to both current employees and potential employees by employment with your company)?
5. Does your company use the term employer branding to refer to the process of promoting your company as the employer of choice to current and potential ideal salespeople?
6. Does your company have a clearly defined employer brand (or a clear reputation as an employer to potential applicants)?
7. Describe what you believe your employer brand (or company reputation) to be.
8. Do you feel potential employees know your company’s employer brand? ADDED: (How do you think your employer brand is perceived by potential salespeople?)

Questions related to employer branding and recruitment

9. How important do you believe the employer brand image (employer reputation) of an organization is for salespeople when choosing a company to work for?
10. How do you feel your company’s employer brand (employer reputation) is generally perceived by potential salespeople?
11. Do you believe your company leverages its employer brand to recruit potential employees?
12. Does your company have a formal policy for how to talk about your employer brand to potential candidates? (things like approval ratings, training opportunities, using top salespeople as spokespeople)
13. How do you specifically use / talk about the employer brand in your recruitment messages?
14. Do you believe your company leverages its employer brand to retain ideal current employees?
15. Does your company have a formal policy for how to talk about your employer brand to current employees? (again approval ratings, training, bonuses, etc)
16. How do you specifically use / talk about the employer brand with current employees?

Questions related to the sales force

17. How would you describe your sales force?
18. What characteristics do you believe define an exemplary salesperson?
19. Are your current recruitment methods producing a big enough pool of entry-level salesperson candidates to fulfill your company’s current needs?
20. Do you believe your current recruitment methods are producing the most qualified entry-level salesperson applicants for the job? **If YES, proceed to question 21. If NOT skip 21 and proceed to question 22.**
21. **If yes,** what aspects of your recruitment do you feel are critical for reaching the “right” applicants for the job?
22. **If not,** how could you modify your recruitment efforts to produce more of the “right-type” of applicant?

**General Company Information**

23. For the record, how many employees are currently employed at your company?
   a. Local figure:
   b. Company-wide figure

24. **One Last Question:** Is there anything else you believe I should know concerning the employer brand of your organization?

   *Thank you for your time, I greatly appreciate it!*
VITA
Michele C. Welliver

EDUCATION
Ph.D., The Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA
Workforce Education and Development, HRD/OD emphasis, May 2017
M.B.A., Wilkes University of Pennsylvania, Wilkes-Barre, PA
magna cum laude, Marketing, received 1994
B.A., Bloomsburg University of Pennsylvania, Bloomsburg, PA
Mass Communications/Advertising, received 1989

ACADEMIC EXPERIENCE
Marketing Instructor Bloomsburg University, Bloomsburg, PA, 1996-Present
Marketing Instructor Penn State University, Hazleton, PA, 2005-2006
Marketing Instructor Marywood University, Scranton, PA, May-Aug 2002

PUBLICATIONS & PRESENTATIONS
Refereed Conference Proceedings

Book Chapter

OTHER ACADEMIC RELATED ACTIVITY
Faculty Coach National Sales Challenge, RBI, 2016; William Patterson University
Faculty Coach International Collegiate Sales Competition, 2016; Florida State University
Faculty Advisor Retail Collegiate Challenge, 2015; Kutztown University
Faculty Coach/Judge National Collegiate Sales Competition, 2011-present; Kennesaw State University
Assistant Faculty Advisor American Marketing Association (AMA), 2011; Bloomsburg University of PA College of Business

CERTIFICATIONS/MEMBERSHIPS
Penn State World Campus Graduate Student Online Teaching Certificate, December 2015
American Marketing Association Professional Certified Marketer (PCM), August 2014
Pi Lamda Theta Honor Society 2015-present

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE
Director of Marketing and Research WNEP-TV 16 (ABC affiliate) Moosic, PA, 2000-2002
Marketing Consultant CITADEL COMMUNICATIONS/ MAGIC 93 Radio Wilkes-Barre, PA, 1998-2000
Advertising Representative MAGEE INDUSTRIAL ENTERPRISES/ WHLM Bloomsburg, PA, 1993-1998