

Target your Employees

Identifying key elements in employer-branded social media advertising

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Master's Thesis

June 2024

Word Count: 20.200

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ABSTRACT

In the rapidly evolving recruitment landscape, social media is crucial for employer branding, especially in sectors as horticulture facing labor shortages. This thesis addresses the gap in understanding which elements of employer-branded content resonate most with potential employees on social media. The primary research question is: What elements of employer-branded content and their strategic integration on social media are key for building a strong employer brand and engaging potential employees?

A mixed-methods approach was used, combining qualitative content analysis and interviews. The content analysis focused on social media posts from horticultural companies, identifying elements within themes such as visuals, narratives, and authenticity. Interviews with experts, the content creators, provided insights into the strategies behind employer content on social media, while interviews with potential employees assessed the impact of these elements.

Findings indicate that high-quality visuals and videos are crucial in capturing attention and effectively conveying the employer brand. Using specific color schemes and logos for brand recognition and using videos to showcase work environments and employee experiences helps potential employees visualize themselves within the company. Narratives and storytelling techniques also play a significant role, with stories highlighting personal and professional journeys, challenges, and successes creating a connection with the audience. Authentic representations of work culture and employee experiences build trust and credibility, positively influencing perceptions. The study concludes that a strategic combination of visual elements, compelling narratives, and authenticity in employer-branded content significantly enhances employee engagement on social media. These findings offer valuable insights for companies aiming to strengthen their employer brand and attract talent in a competitive job market, particularly in the horticultural sector. By integrating these elements into their social media strategy, companies can enhance their online presence, attract the right employees, and maintain a competitive edge in the labor market. Making social media as a recruitment tool more effective and reliable.

Keywords: *recruitment, employer branding, social media advertisements, employer-branded content, horticulture sector*

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1. Introduction

In the ever-evolving landscape of recruitment, social media has emerged as a vital platform, underscoring the importance of employer branding (Bondarouk et al., 2014, p. 24; Mičík & Mičudová, 2018, p. 171). First, we should wonder why the recruitment landscape has changed. Due to the scarcity of the labor market in various sectors, companies were, and still are, in danger of failing, since without labor they are not able to produce products or services (LTO, 2022, p. 2; Metro et al., 2022, p. 501; Peralta & Caporusso, 2020, p. 418-420; Swayze et al., 2018, p. 212-214). To attract and retain labor, companies, and organizations must make drastic changes (The Future of Jobs Report 2023, n.d., p. 34-35). One of these solutions is building an employer brand (Moroko & Uncles, 2008, p. 161; Wilden et al., 2010, p. 64-73). The employer brand is to be understood as the identity of an employer, which is established in the minds of the target audiences – potential employees (Kaoud & ElBolak, 2022, p. 451-452). Ideally, a strong and favorable employer brand triggers the target audience to view the employer as a desirable place to work. There are several strategies recognized by previous studies for developing this favorable employer brand (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004, p. 513; Carpentier et al., 2019, p. 1-2). One of these strategies is brand positioning through social media by sharing employer-branded content (Kaoud & ElBolak, 2022, p. 451-452; Yoganathan et al., 2021, p. 524). A recent Statista study (2023) reveals that over 79% of job seekers utilize social media in their job search process, underscoring its critical role in connecting employers with potential employees. This recognizes the effect of marketing initiatives to actively promote their employer brand on social media to recruit potential employees.

While the significance of social media in recruitment is widely acknowledged (Bondarouk et al., 2014, p. 24; Mičík & Mičudová, 2018, p. 171; Carpentier et al., 2019, p. 1-2), there exists a noticeable research gap regarding the key elements of employer-branded content on social media platforms that interest and attract new employees. Identifying and understanding these elements will enable companies to tailor their social media strategy, fostering a stronger employer brand and attracting talent in a competitive job market. The study aims to bridge existing literature gaps, providing specialists and marketers with a nuanced understanding of leveraging social media effectively in the unique context of positioning the employer brand for recruitment purposes. To achieve this overarching goal, the following research questions will guide the study:

What elements of employer-branded content, and strategic integration of these, on social media are key for building a strong employer brand and at the same time engaging potential employees?

1. How do **visual elements** of employer-branded content, such as images and videos, contribute to engaging employees through social media?
2. To what extent do **narratives and storytelling techniques** influence the engagement and interest of potential employees?
3. What role does **authenticity** play in the perception and engagement of employer-branded content on social media?
4. How does **the strategic integration** of elements from employer-branded content enhance employee engagement on social media platforms?

To enrich the study outcome, it is important to select a certain target audience that receives the content, as each target audience has its values that must align with a specific strategy (Wilden et al., 2010, p. 64-73). Preliminary research identified the pressure of labor shortage within the horticultural market, specifically greenhouse horticulture. Therefore, various experts already suppress the importance of a campaign that creates a positive image for working within the horticulture sector (Berkhout et al., 2023, p. 36; Nieuwe Oogst, 2023, seventh paragraph; LTO, 2022, p. 2). Based on the critical labor shortage but also the positive recognition of marketing initiatives for the recruitment processes, a case study in the field of greenhouse horticulture. The case study enhances sector-specific knowledge, and, at the same time, draws conclusions that are applicable to other sectors with labor market shortages. Furthermore, the academic relevance of this study extends beyond human resource management, contributing to the broader context of digital marketing and recruitment communication. Given the scarcity of the labor market, the study becomes even more crucial.

The research will employ a mixed-methods approach, utilizing content analysis to examine the employer-branded posts of horticultural companies and identify elements of employer-branded content. Simultaneously, interviews with experts, and content creators of various companies, will explore the intended goals of the content, while interviews with potential employees will assess how these elements are perceived. This combination of methodologies aims to offer a detailed insight into the interaction between social media, employer branding, and recruitment processes, and support identifying the key elements to build a strong employer brand through employer-branded content.

2. Theoretical Framework

The recruitment of new employees through employer-branded content on social media is a process influenced by various elements. Drawing on relevant theoretical approaches and empirical research, this theoretical framework aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the key elements of employer-branded content found on social media that enhance the recruitment of new employees.

2.1 Defining the importance of sharing employer-branded through social media

Employer brand is described by Ambler and Barrow (1996) as "the package of functional, economic, and psychological benefits provided by employment, and identified with the employing company" (p. 187). Employer branding is the process of developing a unique identity to help an employer differentiate itself from its competitors in the labor market (Ambler & Barrow, 1996, p. 199). Organizations have experienced that employer branding leads to a competitive advantage (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004, p. 502-507). It all comes down to presenting the business as a desirable place to work (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004, p. 507). To build this employer brand, expertise in human resources and marketing is required to collaborate (Theurer et al., 2016, p.155-156). A widely recognized concept to support building the employer brand is employer-branded content (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004, p. 513). Employer-branded content plays a dual role in enhancing a company's reputation, both internally and externally (Theurer et al., 2016, p. 155-158). Internally, effective employer branding reinforces the company's values and culture, fostering a sense of pride and belonging among existing employees. This internal alignment not only improves morale but also supports retaining employees by making them feel connected and valued within the company (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004, p. 503-504). Externally, employer-branded content serves as a critical tool in attracting potential employees by showcasing the company as an attractive place to work. It highlights unique benefits, career growth opportunities, open job positions, the organizational culture and values, employee experiences, company events and initiatives, and the overall work environment, which can attract new employees who align with the company's values and objectives (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004, p. 503; Ewing et al., 2002, p. 3-19; Sivertzen et al., 2013, p. 473-474). These strategic usages of employer-branded content help create a cohesive perception of the company, that appeals to both current and potential employees. For this research, we focus on employer-branded content used for external purposes. There are various channels for the distribution of employer-branded content, offline through partner magazines or newsletters, and online through websites or social media channels. Previous studies confirm that companies should approach

social media channels to manage recruitment by communicating their employer brand (Carpentier et al., 2019, p. 1-2; Kaoud & ElBolok, 2022, p.460). Social media not only facilitate the enhancement of an employer's brand and reputation but also play a critical role in attracting new employees (Wowor et al., 2022, p. 4118-4119). This is because, social media facilitate building a positive employer brand, and positively influence the job seeker's intention to apply for a vacancy (Sivertzen et al., 2013, p. 473-474). Furthermore, social media simplify the collection of personal information, which helps employers assess the suitability of potential employees for both the position and the company culture (Wowor et al., 2022, p. 4119). The presence of diverse age groups on social media also ensures access to a wide audience, with 79% of job seekers using these platforms to find opportunities (Statista, 2023). The cost-effectiveness of social media further enhance its utility for recruitment purposes (Wowor et al., 2022, p. 4119). Emphasizing social media as a great channel for positioning an employer brand by sharing employer-branded content. However, the challenge remains in defining what establishes appealing employer branding content.

Several social media platforms can be used as communication channels to build the employer brand. First, the platform LinkedIn, which is a Social Networking platform, focused on the business community with more than 830 million members. It allows professionals to connect, share information, and find job opportunities. 49 million LinkedIn accounts use this social media channel to search for jobs (Statista, 2023). However, LinkedIn is mainly used to promote vacancies and communicate vacancies directly, one-on-one, to specific individuals instead of using employer-branded content as mass communication to persuade potential employees (Mičák & Mičudová, 2018, p. 176). To clarify, on LinkedIn potential employees are mainly contacted through direct messaging, within this message, the recruiter will refer to the company's social media page or website which contains employer-branded content (Mičák & Mičudová, 2018, p. 171-185; Podhorcová & Balková, 2023, p. 20-22). This social media page could be established on Social Networking platforms, Instagram and Facebook. These platforms are mainly used by companies to build the employer brand by sharing employer-brand-related content (Joglekar & Tan, 2022, p. 624-625; Yoganathan et al., 2021, p. 525). Instagram is a platform that connects and creates engagement with friends, family, and brands. Individuals can publish different types of content, mainly visuals, for followers. Mostly people use it to make business brands and personal brands. The platform is interactive, followers can relate to content by liking, commenting, and sharing. Facebook has 2 billion daily active users as of December 2023, whereas Instagram has approximately 1,3 billion daily active users (Statista, 2024). Through Facebook recruiters can post job openings directly on their business pages, streamlining the application process. Additionally, share

employer-branded content (Podhorcová & Balková, 2023, p. 14-15). The difference between the platforms, Facebook and Instagram, is that Instagram is more visually oriented and therefore attracts a broader audience, including both younger and older users (Statista, 2024; Yu et al., 2024, p. 2). While Facebook includes mainly text-oriented content, which Generation Z avoids (Mičík & Mičudová, 2018, p. 176; Panel, 2023, introduction-, and conclusion paragraph; Statista, 2024). Making Instagram an important channel for sharing employer-branded.

2.2 Sectors applying exclusively Business-to-Employee (B2E) communication on social media

In response to threatening labor market shortages, companies are increasingly turning to social media to build their employer brands and support recruitment efforts (Carpentier et al., 2019, p. 1-3). However, sectors, such as the military, public transportation, healthcare, and horticulture, do not use social media for commercial purposes. This is largely because these sectors typically engage in Business-to-Business (B2B) sales or operate through intermediaries, and thus, do not primarily use social media for direct product sales (Metro et al., 2022, p. 501; Peralta & Caporusso, 2020, p. 415-416; Swayze et al., 2018, p. 212-214). These specific sectors apply Business-to-Employee (B2E) communication since they solely engage on social media to attract new employees. B2E communication refers to social media communication that is focused on employees rather than on consumers (Ladkin & Buhalis, 2016, p.331-335). Since the companies within these sectors did not apply social media before, they are forced to make significant investments. By including marketing expertise and developing a social media strategy from zero to build an employer brand. Despite the high costs of building an employer brand, the critical labor market shortages have made these investments increasingly necessary (Berkhout et al., 2023, p. 36, 54-57; Nieuwe Oogst., 2023, introduction paragraph).

During this study, the case study of horticultural companies is applied, since this sector is experiencing a significant labor market shortage that threatens their long-term viability (Berkhout et al., 2023, p. 54-57; Nieuwe Oogst, 22, introduction- and first paragraph, 2023, introduction-, fifth-, and seventh paragraph). Like horticulture, sectors such as the military, public transportation, and healthcare do not rely on social media to sell products but use it as a vital tool for recruitment and staffing. For example, the military targets younger demographics highly active online, providing a glimpse into military life and career opportunities that attract those seeking structured career paths and benefits (Peralta & Caporusso, 2020, p. 419-420). Public transportation sectors face an aging workforce and the

need for new skills amidst technological advancements, using social media to attract younger, tech-savvy professionals who can drive modernization (Metro et al., 2022, p. 501). Similarly, the healthcare industry leverages social media to showcase the rewarding aspects of careers in healthcare, focusing on the impact potential employees can have on community health, job stability, and professional growth opportunities (Swayze et al., 2018, p. 224-226).

These sectors must construct compelling employer brands on social media that not only inform but also engage potential employees about the benefits and opportunities within their fields. Investing in a social media strategy that effectively communicates their unique employer brand is essential for attracting new employees to sustain and grow their workforce. (Carpentier et al., 2019, p. 10-11; Ladkin & Buhalis, 2016, p. 35). This strategic use of social media is crucial for addressing labor market shortages and ensuring long-term operational viability (Bondarouk et al., 2014, p. 26-27), highlighting the importance of continuing this study and defining the most effective strategy for employer-branded content.

2.3 Defining the importance of the target audience-specific content

Every company, or sector, wants to attract employees that align with their company values as this will increase their productivity (Wilden et al., 2010, p. 64-73) Thus, each employer will have a certain target audience to attract with their content. As Wilden (2010, p. 64-73) concluded, each target audience has its specific interest. The employer-branded content must relate to these interests to make the content engaging for the audience (Mičík & Mičudová, 2018, p. 171-185). Highlighting the essence of investigating and determining the most compelling content per target audience. Making the inclusion of a case study more valuable as it determines the interests of potential employees within the sector horticulture.

Nonetheless, a variety of vacancies contribute to the sector, and each role requires a unique kind of individual. It is impossible to recruit each individual to their unique preferences therefore the need for segmentation comes in place (Kotler & Armstrong., 1972, p. 213). Segmentation is the process of generalizing individuals into a larger target audience while acknowledging that each person has distinct qualities, values, and interests, according to Kotler and Armstrong (1972, p. 210). The researcher analyzed vacancies on the vacancy platform, called Indeed, to segment the target audiences within the sector horticulture. Indeed, is a platform (Tuinbouw Vacatures, n.d.) primarily used by horticultural companies to find potential employees. The target audiences within the horticultural sector include work students, graduates in horticulture, and general individuals unfamiliar with horticulture (Tuinbouw Vacatures, n.d.). Each group has distinct characteristics:

Work students are individuals currently enrolled in educational programs who may be

seeking part-time work, Saturday jobs, or holiday work. They are typically aged between 13 and 25 years, which are defined as Generation Z according to Dimock (2019, fifth paragraph) and their interests are often driven by a fun work environment (Global Farmer Insights 2022, n.d, second paragraph; Tuinbouw Vacatures, n.d.).

Graduates in horticulture refers to a group consisting of graduates who hold degrees in horticultural sciences or related fields, but also individuals who are already employed within the sector without a degree. Beginning at 21 years old, they are likely to be attracted to content that highlights opportunities for career development, innovation in technology, and fun work environment (Global Farmer Insights 2022, n.d., second paragraph; Tuinbouw Vacatures, n.d.).

A third group can be labeled ‘general individuals’ comprising a large group with no specific background in horticulture. These individuals are interested in potentially transitioning into the sector. Starting at 21 years old, the social content targeted at this audience should highlight the horticultural sector's accessibility, the potential for a career change, and the advantages of working in a crucial sector like food production that plays a vital role in global sustainability (Global Farmer Insights 2022, n.d., second paragraph; Tuinbouw Vacatures, n.d.).

Effective segmentation and tailored content per segment are supported by literature emphasizing the importance of understanding and addressing the specific needs and preferences of each group (Kotler & Armstrong, 1972, p. 213; Wilden et al., 2010, p. 64-73). By aligning content with the unique characteristics of the groups described above, companies in the horticultural sector can more effectively attract and engage the right employees.

2.4 The composition of employer-branded content on social media

Effective employer-branded content is not just about showcasing the company but strategically communicating its unique culture and values. The structure of employer-branded content is multi-dimensional, incorporating concepts such as visuals, narratives, and authenticity. Previous studies defined these concepts as crucial components of building an employer brand (Alonso et al., 2022, p. 2819; Edwards, 2009, p. 8; Ewing et al., 2002, p. 3 - 12; Lievens & Slaughter, 2016, p. 407). The reason behind their cruciality will be defined below. Visuals play a crucial role in capturing attention and creating an immediate impression (Lievens & Slaughter, 2016, p. 413-415). These could range from high-quality images of the workplace to engaging videos that showcase day-to-day activities, all intended to provide a preview of the working environment (Lievens & Slaughter, 2016, p. 413-415). Narratives are equally important, as they tell the story of the company through the experiences of its

employees, these stories can be told through the visual or caption of the social media post (Bandura & Cervone, 1986, p. 92). A narrative helps to promote the brand, making it relatable and inviting to potential employees (Alonso et al., 2022, p. 2817-2819). Through stories, companies can communicate challenges, successes, and the career opportunities available, which can appeal to potential employees (Kaoud & ElBolok, 2022, p. 454-455). Authenticity is critical in ensuring that the content resonates with its audience. It involves being truthful about what an employee can expect in terms of both culture and challenges (Ewing et al., 2002, p. 11). Authentic content builds trust and helps in aligning the expectations of potential employees with the reality of the company increasing employee satisfaction (Alonso et al., 2022, p. 2817-2818; Edwards, 2009, p. 19; Ewing et al., 2002, p. 11). The core aspects of authenticity are transparency, engagement, and genuine representation (Jiang & Luo, 2018, p. 140).

As explained, employer-branded content must not only reflect the company's values but also engage with the target audience in a manner that is most likely to resonate with them, fostering a deeper connection and building a foundation of trust based on shared values and mutual respect (Edwards, 2009, p. 19). For example, as Panel (2023, introduction paragraph) indicates Gen Z, the younger generation born between the years 1997 and 2012 (Dimock, 2019, fifth paragraph), seeks authenticity and values content that is explicit, original, and engaging.

To clarify, employer-branded content consists of the concepts, of visual, narrative, and authenticity. To identify the most appealing strategy for employer-branded content we need to define elements from these concepts that engage with the target audience, but also define the strategic integration of these elements, referring to the main research question.

2.5 Theoretical approaches

The deconstruction of employer-branded content will help to clarify relevant frameworks and theories for this study, enabling a greater degree of contextualizing the research question. Previous research done by Alonso et al. (2022, p. 2804), Edwards (2009, p. 5-19), Ewing et al. (2002, p. 3-12), Kaoud and ElBolok (2022, p. 451-460), and Lievens and Slaughter (2016, p. 407) examined various concepts of employer-branded content; however, none concentrated on determining the key elements within these concepts of employer-branded content that perform best in recruiting new employees. Therefore, the theories listed below will serve as the theoretical foundation for understanding how these concepts engage with individuals.

To start, the **Visual Communication Theory** serves as a building brick in

understanding the impact of visual elements in employer-branded content on social media (Lievens & Slaughter, 2016, p. 413-415). According to studies in visual communication, the strategic use of imagery and visual aesthetics in employer branding can enhance how potential employees perceive company culture and values (Allen et al., 2012, p. 271-274; Ståhl & Kaihovirta, 2019, p. 264-265). The theory supports the idea that effective visual communication, such as the use of compelling images and cohesive visual design, can create strong associations with an employer brand, making it more attractive to job seekers (Messaris, 2003, p. 551-556). Moreover, the integration of visuals in employer branding helps convey complex information quickly and memorably. For instance, using specific color schemes, logos, and visual styles can consistently communicate the employer's brand personality and ethos, potentially influencing an applicant's decision to apply for a job (Messaris, 2003, p. 555). This approach aligns with broader communication theories that suggest visuals can trigger emotional responses and foster a deeper connection with the content, thereby enhancing the effectiveness of the recruitment message (Goodness, 2020, p. 265-270). According to Goodness (2020, p. 270-274), emotional responses and deep connections can be triggered through visuals that align with individuals' identity, the individual must recognize themselves in the visuals. It corresponds to the Social Identity Theory, which this chapter will address later. Goodness (2020, p. 265-275) also concludes that visualizing examples of humans expressing emotions will cause an emotional reaction in them.

The aim is to identify the type of visual that persuades individuals to apply for the job or feel attracted by the employer. Understanding the target audience and context is therefore essential when designing visual communication. Applying this theory to the first research question, it is expected that different types of visuals contribute differently to the effectiveness of recruitment efforts on social media platforms. This research will examine how visuals can be appealing for recruiting new employees through social media.

The Storytelling Theory contributes to the understanding of how narratives and storytelling techniques influence engagement and interest in potential employees. Storytelling has the power to create a connection between the audience and the employer brand by presenting experiences, challenges, and successes in a relatable manner (Woodside et al., 2008, p. 98-101). Effective storytelling may involve showcasing the personal and professional journeys of individuals. This is also verified by the Narrative Persuasion Theory. Green and Brock (2000, p. 719-720) add that storytelling through employer-branded content can create an emotional connection by sharing narratives that emphasize passion, dedication, and impact, employer-branded content. To contribute to this, the Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura,

1986, p. 64-141; Bandura & Cervone, 1986, p. 92) claims success stories, testimonials, and day-in-the-life features to be powerful models for potential employees. These types of narratives can be seen as inspiring, influencing potential employees' behavior. As they observe the narratives and might want to imitate them (Bandura & Cervone, 1986, p. 92). Additionally, these narratives influence the perceptions of the sector and motivate potential employees to consider careers (Woodside et al., 2008, p. 128).

Potential employees' interest in applying for a job is predicted to be influenced using narratives and storytelling techniques in employer-branded content on social media, such as stories about employees' experiences, career development, and the advantages of working for a particular sector. These narratives should match the target audience's interest to make the content persuasive. The theories forecast how narratives can be persuasive to attract employees. This research will examine how narratives and storytelling techniques influence the engagement and interest of potential employees.

Furthermore, authenticity is a concept of employer-branded content. Authenticity refers to the transparency of a company (Jiang & Luo, 2018, p. 140). The **Social Identity Theory** can be applied to examine the role of authenticity (Tajfel & Turner, 2004, p. 17-37; Yoganathan et al., 2021, p. 527). The theory suggests that individuals categorize themselves and others into social groups based on shared characteristics (Tajfel & Turner, 2004, p. 30-37; Yoganathan et al., 2021, p. 527). This means that companies should be open and transparent about their work environment, employee experiences, employee benefits, company events and initiatives, and career development support to make sure that individuals can easily categorize themselves with the company's values (Tajfel & Turner, 2004, p. 36-37). To clarify, an authentic portrayal and transparency of the company culture and values help individuals categorize their social identity. When they categorize themselves with the company's culture and values, a sense of belonging is created. Making the individuals attracted to apply for a job at the company (Jiang & Luo, 2018, p. 140; Tajfel & Turner, 2004, p. 36). Additionally, authentic representations of work culture, employee experiences, and the organization's commitment to society, such as sustainability, can build trust and credibility, positively influencing employees' perceptions (Edwards, 2009, p. 19). Thus, sharing authentic employer-branded content on social media will appeal to potential employees and make them willing to apply for a job. However, to get a better understanding of the topic it is important to acquire sector-specific knowledge as each sector has a different social identity.

To conclude, this theoretical framework (see Figure 1) integrates the above-mentioned theories to provide a comprehensive understanding of the elements contributing to the

influence of employer-branded content on social media since no complete theory supports answering the research question. The interplay of visuals, narratives, and authenticity creates an approach offering insights for designing impactful employer branding strategies. However, utilizing employer-branded content for recruitment purposes is a newly developed approach within the horticultural sector. Therefore, no previous studies are available on the possible workings of these concepts. The empirical investigation in this thesis will contribute valuable insights to create an understanding of effective employer-branded content as part of recruitment strategies in the horticultural sector. The concept of strategic integration is defined during the research and will be described in chapter 4.4.

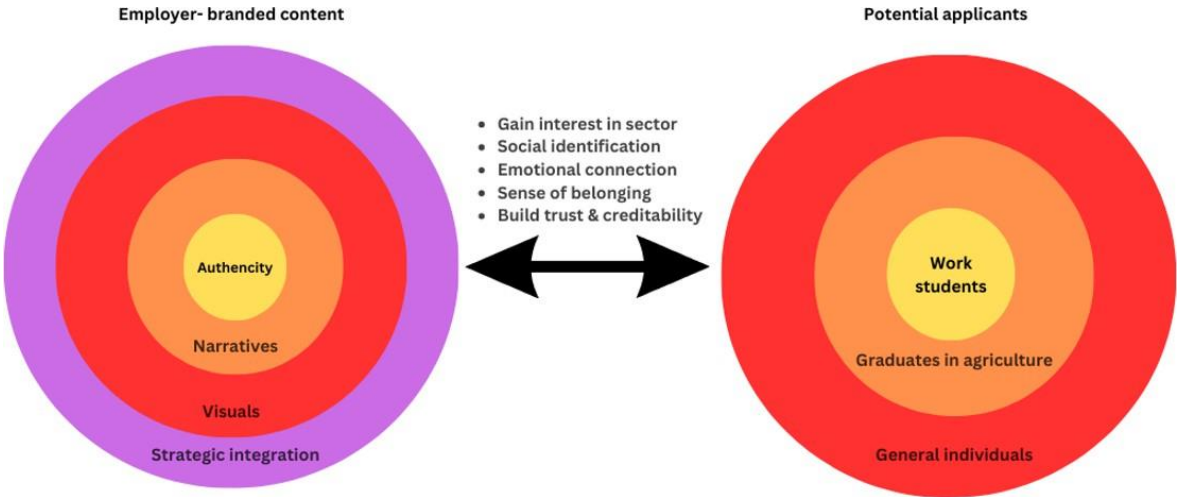


Figure 1 Theoretical framework – elements of employer-branded content

3 Method

To investigate employer-branded content shared on social media for recruiting new employees, a mixed-methods research design will be employed. This design integrates qualitative methods, allowing for an in-depth and comprehensive exploration of the key elements of employer-branded content.

3.1 Methods

To achieve optimal outcomes for recruitment purposes, it is essential to explore how employer-branded content communications can be effectively utilized. By thoroughly exploring the themes from Figure 1, this study aims to pinpoint how these elements should (not) be incorporated on social media- and more in particular on Instagram. To find elements within the concepts of employer-branded content we need to deconstruct posts. Therefore, the research utilizes qualitative content analysis. As mentioned, this study is enriched by a case study focusing on a specific sector, horticulture, which is struggling with the labor shortage. Within the sector (as in any sector) various vacancies need to be filled, all attracting a different target audience. Within horticulture three different target audiences can be distinguished, work students, graduates in horticulture, and general individuals.

The selected social media content will be decoded into the themes: visuals, narratives, and authenticity. Wherein, visuals include the images or videos that are shared, narratives are the stories being told, such as personal journeys, and the authenticity elements specifically focus on transparency which helps individuals to connect with the company. The latter include for instance elements as sharing company culture or employee experiences. To clarify, the narrative differs from the authenticity theme, as narratives decode storytelling elements and techniques, and authenticity decodes the transparency of the company. The content analysis is intended to explore elements within these themes. However, simply identifying the most frequently used elements is not sufficient to determine the key aspects of employer-branded content that result in engaging new employees. Individuals could have a different perspective on what engaging elements of employer-branded content would look like or might propose engaging content that is not covered by the social media content analyzed, or they could encode certain elements differently than the intentions of the creators. Therefore, interviews with both the creators (experts) and the intended social media users will be necessary to gain a deeper understanding. Based on the findings of the content analysis, a selection of social media content will be chosen and presented during the interviews with the experts and target audience. The questions asked during the interviews must result in detailed

responses on how the various elements of employer-branded content are perceived by the experts and received by the audience.

The second step includes understanding the underlying intentions on behalf of the creators of the social media content done through expert interviews. Each company shares employer-branded content on social media with a certain intention. To see if this message is received correctly, it is important to know the underlying intentions per content. The expert interviews provide detailed and nuanced information that is not available through other data collection methods, such as the underlying intentions. These content creators, experts, possess specialized knowledge offering deep insight into the topic (Leavy, 2020, p. 434). Secondly, they provide context and background information to better understand the reasoning behind integrating an element. Thirdly, they can help validate findings found through the content analysis, to add credibility to the research (Flick, 2022, p. 540). The interview questions are focused on understanding the strategy and purpose behind the post. Additionally, the interviewees will be asked about the specific target audience for the post. By examining how different job functions within horticulture are targeted with employer-branded content, the study aims to explore and define effective strategies tailored to the unique characteristics of each role. The interviews are semi-structured to create an interactive environment through the ability to ask follow-up questions and give the experts the availability to mention themes not initially considered by the researcher (Flick, 2022, p. 567).

The third step includes semi-structured interviews with the receivers of the social media content. Semi-structured interviews allow us to get a deeper understanding of some perceptions by asking follow-up questions on interesting points of conservation. Furthermore, this method provides insights into the interviewee's thoughts, feelings, and experiences, which are valuable for understanding their perception of the content and gaining new perspectives (Flick, 2022, p. 567). The questions will be based on the findings of the content analysis to acquire information on how employer-branded content is received by potential employees and what their interests are when it comes to employer-branded content. As Wilden et al. (2010, p. 64-73) noted, each target audience has its specific perspectives and interests, making it essential to examine how the content resonates with the audience they are intended to reach. The examination of how different target audiences are approached by the content will lead to identifying elements, done through steps one and two. In the interviews with the receivers, per target audience, we will examine how the social media content is received and how the target audience wishes to be approached. This segmented approach helps to ensure that employer branding efforts are aligned with the specific needs and preferences of potential employees, enhancing recruitment effectiveness in a sector with

varied and specialized demands.

In sum, this study will employ a structured three-step approach. Firstly, social media posts from horticultural companies that are active on social media are analyzed to identify elements that are related to the themes. Next, the original intention of the posts is assessed, ensuring the purpose of the posts is aligned with their reception. To assess this, the target audience is questioned on how they receive and decode the message, examining their appeal.

3.2 Sampling strategy

3.2.1 Content analysis

The content analysis includes analyzing employer-branded social media content, however, to make the study feasible and more detailed the scope is set to solely Instagram content. Instagram and Facebook share employer-branded material more frequently than LinkedIn, which is why the platform was included there (Joglekar & Tan, 2022, p. 625-629). Instagram offers greater potential to reach a wider target population than Facebook, despite Facebook having more active users. Given that the majority of work students use Instagram (Statista, 2024; Yu et al., 2024, p. 2). To collect data for the content analysis, Instagram posts will be purposively selected from the platform. A post refers to a message, photo, video, or other content that a user shares on a social media platform like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, etc (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.). The sample for the content analysis consists of employer-branded content from a diverse range of greenhouse horticulture companies that implement Instagram for solely B2E purposes. A varied sample of companies is selected through desk research, with consideration given to factors, the number of employees, sales product, and the strength of the employer brand. The selection includes five Dutch horti-related businesses specialized in vegetable and flower cultivation: Schenkeveld, The Valley, SV.co, Beekenkamp, and Daily Fresh Radish (see Table 1). There is specifically chosen to label these the companies by name within the result section, as we want to generalize the information. Thus, the size or type of sales product does not matter for the results. Additionally, naming the companies by name makes the data more creditable and valuable within the horticultural sector. Appendix A provides an overview of the company's employer brand in more detail. All companies are asked to provide consent for their posts to be selected, analyzed, shared with interviewees, and mentioned in the study. All companies gave consent to the consent form (see Appendix B). A purposive sampling strategy was employed when collecting the posts to ensure that a diverse range of post types was represented, allowing for the selection of various elements. The total number of posts analyzed depended on the saturation point which was reached at 15 posts, three posts per company, see Appendix A for an overview of posts used.

The saturation point is used as the sample criterion because it indicates the point when no new information is observed, so the point where the most valuable information is gathered (Glaser & Strauss, 2017, p. 61).

Table 1 overview characteristics of companies analyzed

	Sales product	Number of employees	Mission	Tagline
Schenkeveld https://schenkeveld.co/	Tomatoes	300	Emphasizes on sustainability and commitment to quality in their horticultural practices – optimization and growth. Passion for growth, optimization, and collaborating.	“Passion for Perfection”
The Valley https://www.thevalley.eu/	Tomatoes	200	The Valley positions itself as a producer of various vegetables for the European market, emphasizing hard work, enjoyment, and clear ambition. They aim to grow sustainably to over 100 hectares within the next five years, aspiring to be among the top in the Netherlands.	“Exceed yourself”

SV.co https://www.svco.nl/	Pot plants	150	Cultivating blooming pot plants in a market-oriented manner, leveraging their unique identity to add value for both partners and consumers. The vision of SV.CO is to be the leading grower of sustainable blooming pot plants, driven by innovation and collaboration.	"Everyday blooming flavours"
Beekenkamp https://werkenbijbeekenkamp.nl	Pot plants, bedding plants, and packaging	450	Commitment to quality plant production and innovative packaging solutions. Beekenkamp's vision likely includes sustainability and leading the industry in quality and innovation.	"Together for the best result"
Daily Fresh Radish https://www.dailyfreshradish.nl	Radish	50	Fresh product, quality and reliable. With the vision of a healthy honest business with the goal of always satisfied customers	"Passion for Perfection"

3.2.2 Interviews with content creators

To continue, the research involves interviewing experts, content creators, behind the selected posts from the five companies. This is done to understand the strategies and purposes behind their employer-branded content. In total, there were four interviewees as Schenkeveld and The Valley outsource their marketing practices to the same third-party agency, called BQurius. Interviews with experts provide in-depth, specialized knowledge that enhances the depth and credibility of the research. They help validate the findings from the content analysis and provide rich qualitative data valuable for comprehensive analysis (Leavy, 2020, p. 434). Experts were asked to reflect on the content they had been responsible for creating. To clarify,

each interview was guided by questions that related to the company’s Instagram post used within the interviews with the target audience. Insights from these interviews with experts helped identify the target audience of each post, which is crucial for selecting appropriate interviewees to explore how employer-branded content is perceived by viewers on Instagram.

3.2.3 Interviews with target audience members

As stated in the Theoretical Framework chapter, this study categorized three target audiences from the potential employees for horti business: work students, graduates in horticulture, and general individuals emphasizing them as the sample. Interviews are conducted with interviewees from these groups until data saturation is achieved. As this provides the point where no new insight will be gathered. This process resulted in the participation of three work students, four horticultural graduates, and three general individuals, all selected purposively. These interviewees were selected in a variety of ways: the work students were contacted while they were working, graduates in horticulture are contacted through LinkedIn, and the general individuals are contacted by the researcher via the university of Rotterdam to make sure they are unknown to the horticultural sector. See Table 2 or Appendix H for the sample overview.

Table 2 Sample overview - interview target audience

Label	Age	Gender	Level of education	Current workplace
Work students				
WS1	13 years old	Man	Secondary school	The Valley
WS2	18 years old	Man	Secondary school	Mooie Boules - restaurant
WS3	16 years old	Woman	Secondary school	Bakery
Graduates with horticultural background				
GA1	35 years old	Man	Bachelor Applied science	Team Lead Labor – The Valley
GA2	24 years old	Woman	Bachelor Applied science	Administrative assistant – Schenkeveld
GA3	33 years old	Woman	University Master	Assortment and research – OK plant
GA4	38 years old	Man	MBO	Production manager – Dynaplant
General individuals				
GI1	45 years old	Man	MBO	Jac. Van Zeijl baggerwerken
GI2	30 years old	Woman	Bachelor Applied science	School social worker
GI3	26 years old	Woman	Bachelor Applied science	Marketeer – The stone (fashion)

All the interviewees gave consent to the form of Appendix B. Each target audience was asked its own specified questions that related to the posts targeted at their identity. This structured approach ensures comprehensive feedback on the reception of employer-branded content, providing valuable insights to pinpoint the elements that should (not) be incorporated on social media- and more in particular on Instagram to recruit potential employees.

3.3 Operationalization

As previously indicated, employer-branded content consists of three concepts which are visuals, narratives, and authenticity. These three components include various techniques or elements that make the content more engaging and appealing for new employees. An additional perspective is the integration of the three themes contributing to building the employer brand. The three named concepts are the themes for this research. A theme captures important aspects of the data concerning the research question and represents some level of patterned response within the data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 87). The themes for this research occur in a deductive manner, developed from the research questions and literature review.

Visuals

In the content analysis, images and videos will be analyzed for relevance, diversity, and type of employer-branded content used to recruit. The visuals can be related to the cultural values of the organization, employee experiences, employee benefits, and work environment.

In the expert interviews open questions will be used assessing why specific elements of the visual are chosen. For example, why the text is presented in the visual, why the type of visual is chosen, why this specific visual is chosen for the target audience. The questions are created with the assistance of the findings from the content analysis.

In the interview target audience open questions will be used assessing the impact of visuals on the perceived effectiveness of horticultural recruitment content by showing examples, identifying with the content analysis, and asking interviewees' opinions. The questions are created with the assistance of the findings from the content analysis.

Narratives and Storytelling Techniques

In the content analysis, the captions will be analyzed to identify of elements that are presented with a narrative structure or storytelling technique. Captions are the descriptive text or commentary that accompanies an image, video, or other content shared on social media. Captions can provide context, convey a message, include hashtags, and engage the audience by encouraging likes, comments, or shares. They help to enhance the understanding and impact of the visual content (Yu et al., 2024, p. 2-10). These captions can include narratives

as personal and professional journeys such as a success stories, testimonials, and day-in-the-life features. But also, the technique used to tell the story, such as the inclusion of emojis or quotes.

During the interviews with experts, open questions will be asked to assess the reason to choose specific elements of the narrative. These questions focus on determining the theme used and the purpose of the theme. The questions are created with the assistance of the findings from the content analysis. Furthermore, questions are asked to uncover the reason for choosing certain storytelling techniques. The questions are created with the assistance of the findings from the content analysis.

Finally, the interviews target audience include open questions to explore the influence of narratives and storytelling techniques on potential employee engagement by showing examples and asking interviewees' opinions. The aim is to identify why an individual will feel a sense of belongingness through narratives shared. The questions are created with the assistance of the findings from the content analysis.

Authenticity

The content analysis assesses the authentic portrayals within content, including content related to organizational transparency. To clarify, content that requires an organization to be transparent and open about, for example, the way of working, and sharing employee's opinions. The authenticity elements of ads are focused on connecting with individuals through self-identification.

The interviews with experts, open questions are asked to explore how companies perceive their transparency and the importance they place on transparency during the recruitment process. The questions are created with the assistance of the findings from the content analysis.

Open questions are asked on perceived authenticity, trustworthiness, and the impact of authentic content on recruitment interest, during the interviews with the target audience. It is important to identify if trust and self-identification are established by using authentic content and identifying the certain elements that make this happen. The questions are created with the assistance of the findings from the content analysis.

Strategic integration

The strategic integration is an extra perspective established during the analysis. For example, the content analysis gained the fact that different types of posts are shared with various elements confirming that there is a strategic integration behind posting employer-branded content which must build on the employer brand. Analyzing the relation and appearance of certain elements might lead to making meaning to this strategic integration.

During the interviews with experts, open questions were asked on how the creators perceive the usage of social media to build the desired employer brand. Additionally, follow up questions determined their social media strategy to build a strong employer brand and identified what should support this according to the experts.

The open questions within the interviews with the target audience assessed how receivers denote the employer brand communicated and let the interviewees define elements that should be included in the strategy of building an employer brand through social media content.

Structure of the interviews

To clarify, Appendix F provides the interview guide with the general questions. Each interview is specified by including questions (question 12- 23) that relate to the company's post used within the interviews with the target audience. Meaning the expert of company Bqurius is asked questions to understand content 1, 2, 5, and 6, SV.co content 7 and 9, Beekenkamp content 11, and Daily Fresh Radish content 15.

Furthermore, Appendix I provides the general interview guide for the interviews with the target audience. Although each target audience has their own specified questions that relate to the posts targeted at their identity. Work students received content 1, 7, and 6, graduates in horticulture content 5, 11, and 15, and general individuals' content 2, 9, and 11. The interviews were structured by, first, analyzing the perception of two posts, followed by general questions, and, if time and attention of the respondent were still available additional questions were asked on the third post selected. The posts were selected based on the findings of the content analysis, the target audience that was referred to, and type of narrative, to aim for rich and in-depth insights. Content 11 is chosen for two target audiences to analyze how the different audiences respond to the post.

3.4 Data analysis

To secure the analysis process the data was collected and saved. The posts were collected through screenshots, links, and captions saved in a Word document (see Appendix D). All this data is saved on the researcher's computer and an external hard drive. As mentioned, the qualitative content analysis involved coding and categorizing elements within visuals, narratives, and authenticity themes from the selected employer-branded content. This was done through thematic analysis, identifying the elements, and making meaning to these

elements. The coding scheme was prepared before analyzing the data but also developed during the analysis process (see Appendix C). The codes are based on the theories presented in chapter 2. Based on this coding scheme findings gave insights into the key elements used by companies to create employer-branded content. These key elements were discovered by identifying elements that are included in the selected posts and by concluding on their frequency of usage.

The interview data were collected in two phases, first, the experts of the content were interviewed. They were contacted by mail which was found on their website. The interviews were held within the range from 9th of April till 19th of April. To enhance the validity of the study, the interviewees provided their consent to use their original names and share the data. The interviews were recorded, and notes were taken during the interviews. After the interview, the transcripts were written within three days. Since it is important to stay transparent and iterative, therefore the transcript is sent to the interviewee as final control. This also prevents misperceptions. The data is stored securely on the researcher's computer and an external hard drive. The second phase for collecting data from the interviews with receivers used a similar approach. Although the interviews were held within the range from 22th of April till 2th of May. Again, interviews were recorded, interviews were transcribed within 3 days, and data is stored on an external hard drive.

The interview data is thematically analyzed, adhering to the coding scheme outlined in Appendix K, with codes refined during the analysis process. Pre-defined codes within the themes helped to focus on answering the research questions, ensuring intersubjectivity, and assisted the researcher to maintain reflexivity. Additional codes emerge from patterns in the data, indicating key elements. The additional theme, strategic integration, was developed during the data analysis as data reflected on a pattern that entails a specific strategy behind the key elements to build an even stronger employer brand. This thematic analysis deepened the understanding of how certain elements related to the visuals, narratives, and authenticity themes in employer-branded content impact potential employees.

The consistency of the researcher's interpretative lens throughout the analysis enhanced the richness and validity of the findings. However, the potential bias due to the researcher's marketing role within the horticultural sector and familiarity with employer-branded content is acknowledged. Meaning that she can have a predetermined opinion on the effectiveness of each element. To limit this impact, the data set is analyzed repeatedly to capture nuances or contradictions within the themes, adding complexity and explanatory strength to answer the research questions.

4 Results

The chapter outline is as follows: each subheading corresponds to one of the key themes—visual, narrative, authenticity—as identified in the literature review. Another perspective, the fourth theme, is the theme of strategic integration of the elements, this theme is identified during the research. We will delve deeply into each theme by following a three-step approach: first, identifying the relevant elements used in Instagram posts by horticultural companies; second, analyzing the intended message of the posts; and third, evaluating how the elements of the posts are perceived by the target audience and if the intended message aligns with the reception. Finally, the strategic integration of the elements will be analyzed. Relating each of these phases will ultimately lead to the conclusion.

Each theme is analyzed based on the three-step approach, the subchapters. Except for the strategic integration, this theme solely includes findings from the interviews with experts and the target audience since the content analysis is analyzed per post and not in relation to each other. Furthermore, within these subchapters, the findings are presented per target audience since each target audience has different interests.

4.1 Visuals

The results for this section are based on data that can be found in Appendix D, G, and J.

4.1.1 Content analysis

Table 3 gives the main findings, based on the findings from the content analysis found in Appendix E. Appendix D gives the content of the posts and answers to the questions asked. The primary aim of the visuals across all companies is to visualize aspects of the company culture, which is consistently portrayed as fun and ambitious. Fun is expressed by visualizing fun activities at work such as content 6, 8, and 12. These visuals show activities a cooking class and games with colleagues. Ambitious is expressed through visualizing employees in their work environment, content 2, 4, 9, 10, and 14, do this. The employee is visualized to his work habitat. The company Daily Fresh Radish did not explicitly communicate ambitions or opportunities for personal development. Daily Fresh Radish is focused on visually positioning their work environment as fun, done through unrealistic images as drinking beer on the work floor. Additionally, promoting casual interactions among employees through arranged activities like The Valley’s annual pancake day (content 6), captured to highlight team cohesion and workplace enjoyment. All companies consistently employed high-quality, professionally produced visuals. However, there was a noticeable variation in the informal quality of visuals, for example when portraying company activities, as seen in content 8. The resolution differences might indicate budgetary constraints, for example, companies such as SV.co and Daily Fresh Radish did not incorporate video productions, while other companies

did. Color does not serve as a primary focus across the companies; except for The Valley, which uses a specific color filter on its visuals and accentuates key phrases and hashtags in its posts with company colors. As Messaris (2003, p. 555) indicated consistent color usage should enhance brand recognition. The color or logo applied for recognition is the company clothing worn in visuals, as seen in content 4.

Table 3 overview visual elements

	Work student	Graduate in horticulture	General individuals
<i>Type of visual</i>	Video	Image	Video/ image
<i>Quality</i>	High	High	High
<i>Purpose of message</i>	Great work environment	Stability and career development	Work environment and career development
<i>Narrative</i>	Activity, facial expressions	Long-term employment, career experience.	Career experience and interviews with employees
<i>Presentation style</i>	Informal, with real- life setting	Formal, background is greenhouse	Informal and formal, with personal touches.
<i>Text</i>		Add context	



Content 4 & 5: The Valley's post referring to the consistent usage of colors and letter font (Source: Instagram)

Text in visuals is employed by all companies but not in a notably strategic manner. Typically, the text complements the visual elements by enhancing the viewer's understanding of the visual. For example, The Valley incorporates quotes and hashtags directly in the visuals; Schenkeveld labels individuals; Beekenkamp uses titles and hashtags that mention the company's values, and SV.co, details the content of job vacancies.



Content 7 & 11: Instagram posts that include text within their visuals

(Source: Instagram)

Analyzing visual elements per specific target audience revealed tailored strategies to engage distinct audiences. The visuals targeting work students are created to be engaging by showcasing the work environment as dynamic and enjoyable. High-quality, professionally edited visuals depict fun and pleasure, often capturing happy expressions and interactions among employees. Presentation styles are predominantly informal, with real-life settings being portrayed in a manner that mixed reality with a touch of set-up engagement, like the pancake video from The Valley or the friend-themed video from Schenkeveld (content 1). In contrast, content aimed at graduates in horticulture is more focused on professionalism, such as stability and career development, and is often set within the contextual background of the greenhouse to emphasize the work environment. This is done through snapshots including various aspects of the companies, from future visions to daily activities. Stability is communicated by highlighting employees who already worked for the company for several years, such as Eric from The Valley (content 4) or Sabine from Beekenkamp (content 10). Videos are less common but maintain high production standards when used. The informal presentation is noted, with visuals as flying tomatoes (content 3), although mainly formal presentation is used. Text is minimally used, solely to add context to enhance interactions or deeper engagement with the content. The broader audience, individuals unknown to the horticulture sector, are approached through visuals including a mix of videos and pictures serving to convey work environment and career development narratives, ensuring the employer brand but also the sector are well positioned. The balance of formal and informal

visual styles provides a diverse audience, with personal touches such as Stefan's descriptive video (content 2) or Jelmer's tomato-themed picture (content 3) helping to draw in viewers from outside the horticultural sector.

Table 3 concludes the main findings indicating the following, the strategic use of visual content in employer branding effectively reflects each company's unique culture and identity while appealing to the specific target audience. Each visual element, whether a video or an image, seems to be carefully chosen to contribute to the overall narrative of the employer branding, aiming to attract, engage, and retain potential employees by showcasing a workplace that values fun, ambition, and a supportive community environment. In general, work students are targeted by showing a more fun and relaxed work environment, individuals with an horticultural background by communicating the company's ambition and showing the possibility of career development, and finally individuals without an horticultural background are targeted mainly through descriptive videos.

4.1.2 Interview experts

The results for this section are based on transcripts from the interviews with experts, found in Appendix G. To come to the findings the data is analyzed, see Appendix K. According to content creators from Beekenkamp and SV.co, the quality of visuals is essential to create engaging communication and branding. Beekenkamp enhances visual quality by organizing dedicated content days, where a professional photographer creates a collection of high-quality visuals that can be used over an extended period. On the other hand, Daily Fresh Radish acknowledges the high costs associated with video production, which is why their feed predominantly features photos to maintain visual consistency without incurring excessive expenses. SV.co collaborates with a marketing agency, called Social Routine, to produce and edit high-quality visuals, ensuring their content remains professional and engaging. Similarly, Daily Fresh Radish collaborates with a marketing agency, called Maximizd, to achieve the same level of visual quality.

The content creator from The Valley highlights the strategic use of color to enhance employer branding. They consistently use standard formats for their posts, incorporating company colors, neon green, and a specific font to maintain brand identity. Beekenkamp also focuses on employer branding by utilizing a structured grid system that ensures a cohesive feed. SV.co uses the structure of content 9 multiple times, a format recognized internally as 'Lekker bezig [Good job]' content, which is used to introduce employees and foster a sense of

community. Furthermore, the expert from SV.co emphasized that text in visuals is used thoughtfully to convey specific messages and enhance the overall impact of the content.

4.1.3 Interview target audience

Table 4 gives the main findings, based on the transcripts found in Appendix J. Appendix K provides the findings done through analyzing the transcripts.

Table 4 overview of visual elements

	Work student	Graduate in horticulture	General individuals
<i>Type of visual</i>	Video	Video	
<i>Quality</i>			High quality
<i>Narrative</i>	Fun work environment, type of work and employees	Story must relate to work environment	
<i>Presentation style</i>		Personal touch, company related color use + logo	Logo and
<i>Text</i>	Add context, attracts		Essential to add context, but not too much.

The analysis of employer branding effectiveness across different target audiences reveals specific preferences for visuals, enriched by direct feedback from participants. Work students highlight the importance of videos, with interviewee WS3 noting that the visual must show and give recognition to what type of company or job it is related to. They also appreciate when visuals provide a clear and inviting representation of the work environment, as WS1 highlighted that he would like to see how employees are valuable to the company (see Appendix J, p. 88) and WS2’s critique of an employee’s pose in content 7: "He looks cheerful enough. A bit static, though. He sits there a bit awkwardly. Not necessarily a very inviting pose" (see Appendix J, p. 114). Besides this, the work environment should represent a fun work atmosphere and acknowledge what kind of company or job it is about. Text in visuals is essential for clarifying content, as WS1 emphasizes content 7 that it is very convenient that the text was visualized in the visual, because otherwise he would not have known where the visual was about and would have skipped the posts (see Appendix J, p. 90). Also, WS3 shares

her positive opinion about the recipe of content 7 in the visual as it receives her first attention (see Appendix J, p. 133). WS2 reflects that texts in the visuals clarify the posts' purpose, which makes the visual more appealing (see Appendix J, p. 109).

For Graduate Horticultural students, videos are favorable, with interviewee GA3 commenting, "Yes, because you see much more in just three seconds" (see Appendix J, p. 215) and GA4 admits he favors videos since he can just enjoy watching them and it gives him a better idea of the people that work for the company (see Appendix J, p. 229). GA2's feedback on content 11, which lacks people for self-identification, defines the importance of personal touch in visuals (see Appendix J, p. 172). GA2 highlights the importance of consistent color use in employer branding since color usage would immediately show from which company the content comes from (see Appendix J, p. 172), as done with content 5. She emphasizes how consistency supports recognition: "Bringing the same visual style to the forefront in the post helps with recognition" (see Appendix J, p. 188). Her comments emphasize the importance of consistent visual elements in strengthening employer branding.

General individuals also prefer videos, with interviewee GI3 stating that she prefers watching a video over reading a whole text (see Appendix J, p. 302). The strategic inclusion of text within visuals is noted by GI2, who suggests that integrating short, informative texts can enhance understanding, "I think I would have liked it more, if more use had been made of text within the image" (see Appendix J, p. 280). GI1 emphasizes the importance of clarity in the textual content within visuals, noting in content 9, "It should be clear what the text 'lekker bezig [Good job]' refers to" (see Appendix J, p. 254). Additionally, GI2 and GI3 warn against overloading visuals with text, stating about content 11, "Yes, there's just too much text in a post. I then don't know where to look or what to read" (see Appendix J, p. 264-266) and "I find it too much text" (see Appendix J, p. 284), indicating that unnecessary text can be unfavorable. This highlights the need for a balanced approach to text usage in visual content to maintain clarity and viewer engagement. Furthermore, GI3 emphasizes the critical role of visuals in forming a company's first impression and facilitating self-identification with the potential workplace. She states, "Well, because you immediately get an insight into the company you are going to work for... So you immediately see, oh well, I could be walking there too. Yes, so that you can imagine yourself there, so to speak" (see Appendix J, p. 294). Additionally, GI3 points out that employer branding recognition is effectively achieved when including the company's logo in visuals, further enhancing the immediate identification with the brand, as Beekenkamp did. GA4, GI2, and GI3 all stress the importance of quality in visual content. GA4 points out, "Well, no. If a company makes an effort to take a good photo,

it says more than just making a quick easy photo" (see Appendix J, p. 225) and GI3 appreciates high-quality visuals, as she enjoys looking at it (see Appendix J, p. 279). Their comments underline that quality not only enhances the impact of the visuals but also reflects positively on the company's brand image.

At the company level, Schenkeveld receives high marks for its visual presentations. In contrast, The Valley is recognized for its use of color and text in visuals, which enhances brand recognition, though GA3 criticizes specific content for not representing the company accurately, "if you want to become interested in the company itself, then I don't think you should put a picture with a windmill and a sheep in the background" (see Appendix J, p. 201). SV.co's format for job vacancies is well-received by work students, as evidenced by WS3's feedback, "The recipe really kind of draws you in. It's the first thing I look at" (see Appendix J, p. 133). However, Beekenkamp's approach is criticized for poor visual quality and excessive text, though its branding positioning is generally well-received. This feedback highlights the critical importance of aligning employer branding efforts with the specific preferences and needs of different target audiences to ensure that the content is not only engaging but also informative.

4.2 Narratives

This section investigates overarching narrative elements and their specific applications across different companies, ultimately assessing how these narratives resonate with target audiences such as work students, graduate students in horticulture, and general individuals. Narratives can be distributed in two subthemes, the storytelling technique and the themes/elements discussed in the narrative.

4.2.1 Content analysis

Table 5 sums the main findings, and the approaches to the diverse target audiences applied, based on the findings from the content analysis found in Appendix E. Appendix D gives the content of the posts and answers to the questions asked.

Table 5 overview narrative approach per target audience

	Work student	Graduate in horticulture	General individuals
<i>Storytelling technique</i>	Informal, direct language + Humor anecdotes, word games	Detailed	
<i>Purpose</i>	Fun work environment	long-term career opportunities and professional growth	Company culture and career opportunities >personal experiences and professional insights

Across all companies, narratives utilize a mix of professional success journeys and social activities. These narratives are strategically created to enhance employer branding, portraying each company as unique. For example, companies often feature narratives such as The Valley's story of Eric, who progressed from a production worker to managing a location, illustrating professional growth facilitated by the company (content 4). These stories are often told from the company's perspective and underscore long-term career opportunities and the career development offered to employees. Professional achievements are frequently shared through interviews, as seen in content 2, 3, 4, 5, 9, 10, and 14, highlighting employees who share their ambitions and career journeys.



Content 10: post with narrative emphasizing an employee's professional journey (source: Instagram)

Social activities, although less frequently narrated, play a role in showcasing the company's commitment to employee well-being and team building, evidenced in content 6, 8, and 12. This all contributes to promoting the employer branding with the main goal of hiring new employees. However, a limited of times a direct vacancy is shared as content as content 7 and 15.



Content 8: post with narrative promoting social activities at work (source: Instagram)

Each company adopts a unique approach to convey its employer brand. The companies Schenkeveld and Valley focus on personal and professional achievements to demonstrate their commitment to supporting and enabling employee growth. For instance, Schenkeveld features narratives such as Jelmer's transition from sports education to a cultivation specialist, emphasizing career development within the company (content 3), and Eric features long-term employment at The Valley, underscoring a commitment to employee development (content 4). Whereas SV.co concentrates on personal development closely tied to professional aspirations (content 9). This is evident in narratives that describe team-oriented environments and personal growth opportunities, such as the engaging description of a team event (content 8). Beekenkamp introduces the company's operations and values, sketching proactive growth, aiming to engage prospective employees who value forward-thinking environments. Additionally, they highlight a sense of belonging and community involvement, as seen in Sabine's narrative about her 25-year contract and deep connection to the company culture (content 10), related to content 4. Lastly, Daily Fresh Radish utilizes simple stories of appreciation to showcase the company's culture, focusing on creating a relaxed and enjoyable work environment. This approach is tailored to attract those seeking a less stressful workplace environment. SV.co focuses on personal development that ties closely with professional aspirations, for example, SV.co's narrative for a job ad mixes a playful tone with serious

career opportunities, inviting participation with phrases as “mix your task from building cars to production activities” (content 10) to attract young work students. They also promote a team-oriented environment, as evidenced by their engaging description of a team event (content 8). Conversely, Daily Fresh Radish stands out by using humor and emphasizing a relaxed work environment, which differentiates it from the others that focus more on professional growth and teamwork. This might appeal to a different segment of the job market—perhaps younger professionals or those prioritizing a less stressful work environment. But also, Daily Fresh Radish provides a sense of security and appreciation for long-term employees, like Jack, who has contributed a decade of service, emphasizing stability and loyalty (content 14).



Content 11: post by Daily Fresh Radish with an informal communication style (source: Instagram)

Companies employ various techniques to make these narratives relatable and engaging. Schenkeveld and SV.co use rich descriptive language to bring the narrative to life, enhancing emotional engagement, as the Narrative Persuasion Theory of Green and Brock (2000, p. 719 - 720) states. The Valley, Beekenkamp, and Daily Fresh Radish use the approach to directly communicate while also adding descriptive elements to enrich the narrative. Only The Valley, SV.co, and Daily Fresh Radish strategically use narratives to evoke emotions such as a sense of belonging, satisfaction, and fun. For instance, The Valley’s narrative about Tim and Bjorn making pancakes adds a warm, personal touch to the company's image (content 6). All companies discussed incorporate their employees into the narratives, which adds authenticity and relatability to the stories. A notable example is from Schenkeveld, where the narrative focuses extensively on sharing the characteristics of employees. This not only highlights the types of personalities that fit well with the company culture but also serves as a direct appeal to similar potential candidates. Content 9 is a strong example of how professional success stories can showcase the personalities and motivations of those working in horticulture, providing insights into their professional journeys and

personal growth within the company. All companies open the caption with an attractive hook, questions or statement. All content includes the usage of hashtags that relate to the content of the narrative. The opening of the narratives often features an attractive hook, question, or statement, which serves to immediately engage the reader and draw them into the story. Additionally, all companies make use of hashtags that relate to the content of the narrative, enhancing visibility and engagement on social media platforms.

The narrative strategies deployed across various companies are finely tuned to address the unique needs and interests of distinct target audiences—work students, graduate horticulture students, and general individuals—effectively leveraging tailored storytelling to enhance employer branding and engagement. For the demographic work student, companies employ humorous anecdotes and light-hearted narratives that emphasize the enjoyable and social aspects of their work environments. The language used is often informal, designed to attract a younger audience with direct calls to action. For example, Schenkeveld's "Friends club" campaign effectively utilizes casual and social media-friendly language to appeal to students (content 1), highlighting the fun and communal aspects of the workplace. Narratives targeting this group of horticultural graduates are more detailed and substantively focused on long-term career opportunities and professional growth within the horticultural sector. These stories typically commence with a personal or professional challenge, showcasing the comprehensive support and growth opportunities available, thereby appealing to those interested in substantial career development. A notable illustration is The Valley's portrayal of Eric's 33-year progression within the company, underscoring the stable and rewarding career paths available in horticulture (content 4). For a broader audience, narratives are a blend of personal experiences and professional insights that provide a good overview view of the company's culture and career opportunities. These stories are intended to both inform and inspire, demonstrating how the companies support both personal fulfillment and professional advancement. Beekenkamp's narrative about Sabine's 25-year journey within the company exemplifies this approach, highlighting long-term growth and employee satisfaction (content 10).

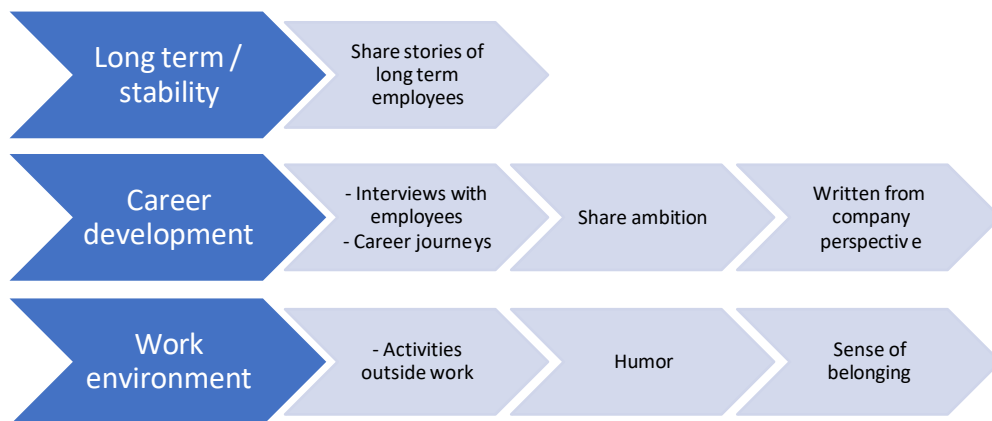


Figure 2 narrative techniques approached per message purpose

Figure 2 defines the narrative approach of narrative techniques used towards the messages purpose. The analysis reveals that while there are common types of narratives across companies, such as the emphasis on personal and professional growth and community engagement, narrative strategies are finely tuned to meet the specific interests and needs of different target audiences. This tailored approach ensures that narratives not only reflect the unique employer branding of each company but also resonates with the intended audience, enhancing recruitment and brand perception.

4.2.2 Interview experts

The results for this section are based on transcripts from the interviews with experts, found in Appendix G. To come to the findings the data is analyzed, see Appendix K. The expert interviewee from Schenkeveld explained that the company strategically employed a "Friends" themed video (content 1), aiming to attract both scholars and parents by featuring relatable characters while promoting the appeal of the horticultural sector. Their clear intent was to enable viewers to see themselves or their children in the characters depicted, simultaneously showcasing the enjoyable and unexpectedly engaging aspects of horticulture. They sought to provide a glimpse into the horticultural world that highlights it's fun and inviting nature. Similarly, The Valley's content focused on building a connection with viewers by introducing them to the company and fostering an emotional bond. Their strategy aimed to evoke specific feelings and create a memorable impression of the company, thereby deepening viewer engagement. This approach was intended to resonate on an emotional level,

helping viewers form a lasting association with The Valley. Meanwhile, Beekenkamp's content 11 was designed to clarify employer branding by communicating the various companies that exist under the Beekenkamp brand. SV.co has positioned its employer brand about food, choosing to structure its job vacancy like a recipe to enhance recognition in this niche. Each of these strategies reflects a thoughtful approach to using narrative and thematic elements to engage specific audience emotions and perceptions, thus reinforcing their respective brands. SV.co took a unique approach by positioning their employer brand about food and structuring their job vacancy content like a recipe. This creative strategy was designed to enhance brand recognition within the food industry niche, leveraging the familiar and appealing format of a recipe to attract potential employees. Each of these companies has employed a thoughtful and strategic approach to using narrative and thematic elements to engage their specific target audiences. By tapping into emotions, perceptions, and relatable scenarios, they have reinforced their respective brands, making their employer branding efforts more effective and resonant. These strategies underscore the importance of understanding and appealing to the unique preferences and expectations of different audience segments, ensuring that the content is not only informative but also engaging and memorable.

4.2.3 Interview target audience

Table 6 gives an overview of topics and storytelling techniques appreciated per target audience. The findings are based on the transcripts found in Appendix J. Appendix K provides the findings done through analyzing the transcripts.

This subchapter presents findings on how narrative techniques in company communications are received by the interviewees representing different target audiences. The Valley, Beekenkamp, and Daily Fresh Radish employ a mix of direct and descriptive language in their communications. According to the target audience, this approach helps to identify themselves within the companies' ambitions and growth potential, which is highly valued by potential employees. For instance, The Valley is appreciated for its personal approach and emphasis on growth, signaling an ambitious nature that is attractive to future team members. Schenkeveld focuses on using purely descriptive language, bringing its narratives to life by displaying its work atmosphere as a fun and engaging place. This is enhanced by features such as a salary calculator link, which is well-received by the audience. SV.co, known for selling flowers, incorporates recipes into its narratives. This unusual combination captures attention, although the link between the products and the recipes is not clear to the interviewees, suggesting a need for clearer communication of this relationship.

Table 6 overview of narrative topics and storytelling techniques recognized by receivers per target audience

	Work student	Graduate in horticulture	General individuals
<i>Topics</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Fun workplace - Characteristics needed for job - Salary - Vlog – Day in the life story 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Descriptions of a company's activities - Work environment - Day in the live 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Company culture - The roles of individual employees
<i>Storytelling technique</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Emoji - Direct language - Short narrative 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Emoji - Start with question 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Emoji - Start with question
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Start with question 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Employee perspective 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Employee perspective/ personal

Each company has specific posts and narratives applied per target audience. It is important to know how these target audiences prefer to be attracted. Work students express a preference for narratives that incorporate visual elements and direct engagement. Interviewee WS1 appreciates straightforward job postings that avoid unnecessary details, he highlights that younger people do not like to read and therefore short texts and the usage of hashtags are more appealing (see Appendix J, p. 101). Another important topic to address is the work atmosphere, as WS3 addresses that for her a social and cozy work environment will contribute to how fast she works (see Appendix J, p. 125). WS2 appreciates the description of the characteristics needed as WS2 says: “yes you recognize yourself in it” (see Appendix J, p. 117). The use of vlogging and ‘a day in the life’ videos is particularly appealing, as they provide a tangible sense of the work environment. As WS1 shares his preference on a video, vlog in particular, that shown how everything looks (see Appendix J, p. 96). Salary transparency is another significant factor; WS2 notes in the caption of content 1 that it refers to a link where you can immediately calculate what you are going to earn. He states that this is very attractive for students (see Appendix J, p. 108). Furthermore, the inclusion of emojis and hashtags in narratives appeals to this demographic, as they make the content visually appealing and easier to digest. As WS2 says “You also see emojis written all over the place,

of course that also stands out ... you do see those emojis right away” (see Appendix J, p. 103) and WS3 also comments that a short story is more appealing when it includes emojis (see Appendix J, p. 144). Graduates in horticulture, like interviewees GA1 and GA2, emphasize the importance of receiving detailed descriptions of a company's activities and its potential for personal growth. GA1 specifically highlights the necessity of this information: "It is the first information you need: what the company does." (see Appendix J, p. 161). Moreover, engaging content that begins with questions is particularly valued by this group for its ability to captivate and encourage further reading, as GA3 notes: "I think if they start with a sort of uninteresting first sentence, then you would read less quickly than if you start with a question, then you would continue reading." (see Appendix J, p. 204) The preference for narratives told from an employee's perspective is strong among graduates, with GA1 pointing out the credibility it adds: "The employee himself is trustworthy. He can simply talk about what he does and what he experiences." (see Appendix J, p. 165). GA2 adds that a personal touch is more engaging, suggesting content should be conveyed from the first-person perspective, for example, a day-in-the-life or employee experience which ultimately should showcase the company culture (see Appendix J, p. 190). Additionally, GA2 proposes using short reels that provide key glimpses into primary activities and the work environment, supplemented by captions that detail job responsibilities. GA4 supports a narrative structure where an employee shares their typical workday, which not only gives an immediate insight but also complements a job posting, enhancing the narrative's practical relevance. For the general individuals, narratives that provide deeper insights into the company culture and the roles of individual employees are valued. Interviewee GI3 emphasizes the appeal of this approach: "Well, I find the company culture involves showing more faces and just really looking behind the scenes." (see Appendix J, p. 291). Personal stories and employee perspectives make the narrative more relatable and engaging, as GA1 confirms (see Appendix J, p. 255). GI2 and GI3 highlight the importance of narratives that showcase real employees and behind-the-scenes content. This approach not only personalizes the company but also enhances its attractiveness by portraying a supportive and dynamic work environment.

4.3 Authenticity

This section identifies elements used that relate to authenticity, these elements contribute to the company's transparency.

4.3.1 Content analysis

Table 7 sums the main findings, narratives that require transparency from the company, based on the findings from the content analysis found in Appendix E. Appendix D gives the content of the posts and answers to the questions asked.

Table 7 narratives that require transparency

	Work student	Graduate in horticulture	General individuals
<i>Content that requires transparency</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Activities - Behind- the scenes > fun workplace 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Day-in-the life 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Balanced work-life environment - Employee experiences

First of all, the level of authenticity per company varies. Beekenkamp shares many facts about their company and The Valley does tell its future goal. Schenkeveld and The Valley build trust through employee portrayals of day-to-day activities and transparent communication about company processes and employee experiences. Their social media strategy includes sharing real-life stories from employees, such as the welcoming environment for school-age workers and the team atmosphere in their workplaces. This openness about the working conditions and the emphasis on team spirit help cultivate a trustworthy image, this transparency helps potential employees create expectations. For example, Schenkeveld utilizes the ‘friends concept’ where real employee experiences are shared via Instagram reels, such as the story of their Friends club, where school-age workers share their fun and dynamic work environment. This approach not only showcases the team spirit at Schenkeveld but also positions the company as a lively and engaging place for young workers. Similarly, The Valley, with narratives like Eric’s career progression from a production worker to managing a location, underscores personal growth and long-term commitment within the company, enhancing not only the potential for career advancement within The Valley but also strengthening trust by demonstrating their investment in employee satisfaction. Similarly, SV.co and Beekenkamp utilize personal stories—SV.co focuses on the detailed personal experiences that underline the collaborative nature of their work environment, while Beekenkamp emphasizes team contributions and individual appreciation. This strategy not only fosters a connection with current and prospective employees but also enhances the overall perception of the company as a genuinely good place to work. Additionally, SV.co

shares their "SV.COLlega-borrel" events (content 8), and Beekenkamp their cooking activity (content 11) which contributes to their company culture. Daily Fresh Radish constructs trust by consistently demonstrating its commitment to employees and the quality of their work experiences. The narrative around Jack, who has been with the company for over a decade, and the detailed description of the daily operations highlight the company's appreciation for hard work and dedication. Such stories not only celebrate employee loyalty but also show the company's commitment to quality and tradition. But also sharing experiences of joy enhances a good employer image.

The representation of authenticity in corporate communication is crucial for engaging specific target audiences such as work students, graduate students in horticulture, and the general individual demographic. Each group requires a nuanced approach that aligns with their expectations and values, thereby enhancing the company's credibility and trustworthiness. For work students, companies often highlight engaging and fun activities and behind-the-scenes insights that convey a fun workplace. This strategy includes sharing moments from everyday work life and team collaborations, which fosters a sense of belonging as the reel of Schenkeveld (content 1). A typical post invites students to join their team, emphasizing fun and friendship: "Come work with us and become a friend of Schenkeveld too!" (content 1). This not only conveys a welcoming work environment but also underscores the company's open, inclusive culture, which is essential for attracting young workers looking for flexible job opportunities. Authenticity for this group is particularly emphasized through the portrayal fun work environment that aligns with their aspirations for a summer job. Graduate students in horticulture receive content related to the practical application of their field of study. Companies targeting this group often focus on detailed insights into horticultural practices, by sharing day-in-the-life narratives. For the general individual, companies tend to showcase a broad range of content that illustrates a balanced work-life environment, emphasizing opportunities for both professional growth and personal fulfillment. Authenticity here is often presented through stories of employee experience, team involvement, and the overall quality of life within the company. A standout example comes from their content showcasing the day-to-day life and contributions of an employee named Jack. Jack's story is shared in a highly engaging and personal manner on Instagram, where it is noted that despite technological advancements in the industry, his team still hand-bunch radishes, adding a personal touch to the product. The post reads:

In the past, all radishes were harvested by hand but nowadays we also use machines. Nevertheless, Jack and his team still provide hand-bunched radishes. They add an extra touch of love and passion to every bunch of radishes! (content 14).

By highlighting how traditional methods coexist with modern efficiencies, Daily Fresh Radish effectively communicates its commitment to quality and authenticity, strengthening trust and appealing to a broad demographic interested in the integrity behind its food sources.

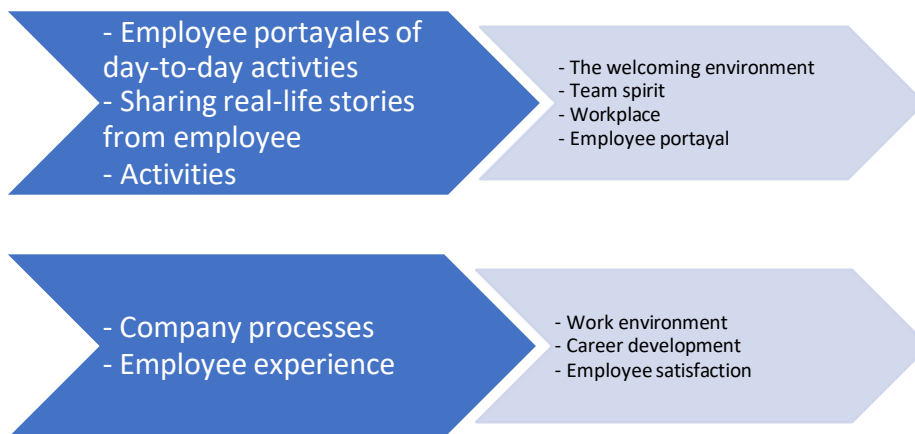


Figure 3 Narrative elements seen as trust enhancing

Figure 3 shows the narratives that build trust with the audience and the related content that requires transparency from the company.

4.3.2 Interview experts

The results for this section are based on transcripts from the interviews with experts, found in Appendix G. To come to the findings the data is analyzed, see Appendix K. During interviews with experts, discussions about how companies wish to be perceived provided valuable insights. Schenkeveld, for instance, strives for transparency by showcasing their employees, though they admit that they do not frequently display their work activities. As a large company, Schenkeveld emphasizes the opportunities for career development and prioritizes maintaining a fun workplace where employees can work alongside friends. They hope that parents or work students can see themselves in the characters they feature, thus finding the work environment appealing and interesting. This strategy aims to create a relatable and inviting perception of their workplace. The Valley, in building its employer brand, focuses on openly sharing its visions and goals to allow people to genuinely connect with the company. They emphasize transparency to provide clear insights into their

operations, helping the audience to recognize The Valley's true nature. By sharing personal information about their board members, the expert interviewed explained that the company tries to emphasize their identity as a family-run business, fostering a sense of intimacy and trust. Their content aims to show what work activities look like, offering a realistic glimpse into daily operations to build a strong connection with potential employees and stakeholders. According to the expert of SV.co, they integrate authenticity into their branding by frequently using the phrase 'lekker bezig [good job]' in their internal communications and transparently sharing this culture through Instagram. They highlight their commitment to honesty and showcase fun activities at work, reinforcing a positive and open workplace culture. This approach not only engages current employees but also attracts potential hires who value an enjoyable and straightforward work environment. According to the content creator interviewed, Beekenkamp seeks to balance its identity as a large international company with a family-oriented atmosphere where personal interactions are highly valued. This dual approach aims to present Beekenkamp as a professional yet approachable employer, capable of offering both global opportunities and a nurturing work environment. Their employer branding efforts are designed to communicate this blend of scale and intimacy effectively. Daily Fresh Radish intends to integrate the culture of the Westland region into its employer branding, promoting radish cultivation in a way that aligns with regional characteristics and horticultural focus. This localized approach helps to create a strong, culturally resonant brand identity that appeals to both local talent and those interested in the horticultural sector.

In summary, each of these companies employs a strategic approach to employer branding that emphasizes transparency, authenticity, and a strong connection to their values and culture. By understanding and addressing the unique preferences and expectations of their target audiences, these companies aim to create engaging, relatable, and honest portrayals of their work environments. This is not only with the intention to enhance their attractiveness as employers but also to build a trustworthy and appealing brand image.

4.3.3 Interview target audience

Table 8 provides an overview of the themes supporting transparency per target audience. The findings are based on the transcripts found in Appendix J. Appendix K provides the findings done through analyzing the transcripts.

Table 8 an overview of the themes supporting transparency

	Work student	Graduate in horticulture	General individuals
<i>Themes</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Salary - Characteristics necessary for the job - Job description - Workplace, greenhouse - Employees demographics 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Career opportunities - Employees demographics - Company values 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Work activities - Production process - Employees demographics

In assessing employer branding effectiveness across different target audiences, individual and company-specific responses reveal crucial insights. For work students, interviewee WS1 underscores the value of authenticity and relatability in content, particularly through videos. She suggests that a nice, spontaneous video naturally made in the greenhouse would be much more reliable than something else (see Appendix J, p. 130). Additionally, self-identification in employer branding could, according to the interviewees be influenced by the recognition of individuals displayed or described in the content, as well as through the portrayal of characteristics considered necessary for the job. This approach would allow potential candidates to see themselves in the roles showcased, fostering a connection between their aspirations and the opportunities offered by the employer. Furthermore, disclosing salary aspects was seen as enhancing authenticity and transparency.

Graduates in horticulture expressed a need for a deeper understanding of a company's direction and growth, which aligns with their career aspirations. Interviewee GA2 emphasizes that she values knowing the future goals of the company since she does not like to work for an unambitious company. Since her own ambitions it to develop her skills (see Appendix J, p. 175). The accurate representation of employee demographics such as age, gender, and education level are also vital for self-identification, as noted by GA2, GA3, and GI3. This group appreciates a straightforward depiction of the company's values and culture, where transparency about company policies and employee satisfaction plays a significant role in building trust.

For the general individual, interviewee GI1 highlights the importance of relevant work activities being showcased, “I will look further at the company website, when work activities

that interest me are presented” (see Appendix J, p. 242). Additionally, GI2 underpins the theme of sharing the production process, and which valuable piece the employee is to this process. GI2 and GI1 highlight the importance of realistic and personal content for credibility, with GI3 pointing out “Content 2 does not show Stefan's face, which would have made it more reliable and personal” (see Appendix J, p. 296). The different target audiences highlight the appreciation of reliable content, so companies should be transparent as WS2, GA2, and GI1, and GI3 mentioned, but the content that they portray should be a reflection of their real work environment to foresee any surprises when employees do actually apply for a job. For example, content 15, visualizes a picture of drinking beer during work. The content attracts the attention of all the audience, although all the interviewees said they do not believe that drinking during work is reliable. As GA1 said, “That is not the reality. Actually, this one shouldn't have been on there Instagram page, that beerbottle there.” (see Appendix J, p. 168).

At the company level, Schenkeveld outshines by displaying its employees accurately, enhancing its authenticity. However, according to the interviewees, there is room to improve the realism and personal touch in their content to support credibility further. Beekenkamp effectively presents facts, is perceived as reliable by the interviewees, and uses the hashtag #samengroeienweverder [#togetherwegrowfurther] to depict growth and facts. The sharing of verifiable facts about Beekenkamp is appreciated by interviewees, who find such information credible since it can be easily confirmed online. However, while these facts establish trust, interviewees express a preference for insights into the company's future vision. As GA4 notes, understanding the company's forward-looking strategies and goals would be more valued, providing potential employees with a sense of direction and purpose. Nonetheless, caution is advised in how they present themselves to avoid implications of impersonality, as noted by GA2, GA3, and GA4 regarding the number of employees (content 11).

These insights emphasize the significance of authenticity, transparency, and relevant presentation in employer branding to attract and engage different target audiences effectively.

4.4 Strategic integration

This section identifies strategies behind the integration of the selected elements.

4.4.1 Interview experts

The results for this section are based on transcripts from the interviews with experts, found in Appendix G. To come to the findings the data is analyzed, see Appendix K. Several companies, including The Valley, Schenkeveld, SV.co, and Daily Fresh Radish choose to outsource their marketing efforts. The expert from the marketing agency BQurius,

emphasized on the good results of paid advertising on Instagram. As advertiser you can choose to pay and target a specific audience. Thus, paid advertising boosts a post to reach more people. According to the expert, organically people don't often search for horticultural companies, which results in less views (see Appendix J, p. 37). This approach helps the employer brand maintain top-of-mind by potential employees. Overall, Instagram is seen as a low-cost tool to promote an employer brand. However, the expert recognizes a return on investment through increased brand recognition and applicant numbers. Thus, it is worth the investment to employ paid advertising on employer branded content as you reach more people.

The utilization of various social media channels caters to different demographic targets: Instagram is positioned to attract the younger generation through visuals, Facebook targets the older generation, as the parents of work students, and LinkedIn aims to build on the employer brand and create a competitive advantage by communicating a company's uniqueness. The expert of BQurius underscores the need for multiple posts to effectively recruit new employees:

I believe that you need to read several messages before applying somewhere. This should be done by consistently showing engaging posts. First, a bit about the company culture, then what work activities you can expect, the opportunities available, the experiences of employees, showing other employees who work there. There's just such a big process behind it. And it can't all be shown by just one post. Therefore, every post needs to be interesting. (see Appendix J, p. 42)

This highlights the importance of having a strategic approach to posting employer-branded content. The content creator from SV.co, reinforces this idea: "We are viewed both on the website and on socials. So, I think you need to maintain an online reputation." (see Appendix J, p. 53). The expert of BQurius further defines the aim of sharing employer-branded content as to attract more employees by showing the uniqueness of the company. The employer-branded content helps to create recognition, for example as the expert from the company BQurius described:

That is really a cool company to work for. They do this and this. They want to achieve this and this. It's a really fun atmosphere to work in. And because of that, people start talking to each other. And you stay on top of mind. (see Appendix J, p.38)

4.4.2 Interview target audience

The findings below are based on the transcripts found in Appendix J. Appendix K provides the findings done through analyzing the transcripts. Interviews reveal that most job seekers initially find positions through recommendations. Subsequently, they use Instagram to learn more about the company. The first impression is essential as it determines whether a social media user will continue engaging with the content. As interviewee GA3 points out, the visual element should convey the entire narrative, as people first look at the visual, moreover, the caption should provide further details. WS2 also emphasizes the importance of complete information, he needs more than just one video before applying for a job, the next step would be visiting the website and later check the salary (see Appendix J, p.108). Despite its unique and cool feed, interviewees indicated that they would be reluctant to apply for a job based the Instagram posts shown. As the visualization of shapes per individual post looks unprofessional.

Instagram is considered the most effective social media channel for reaching potential employees, but TikTok and Facebook are also successful according to the target audience. The older generation mainly uses Facebook, which is significant since many work students are encouraged by their parents to seek employment, and these parents often find jobs for them on Facebook. Social media is acknowledged as a potent channel for sharing employer-branded content. WS1 notes, "Suppose, I don't work yet. Then I can save a video, favorite it, or like it." (see Appendix J, p.98). However, social media posts should include a link to the company's website for more information, as less text in a post's caption is preferred. Furthermore, creating multiple posts is necessary to maintain an individual's interest, as indicated by WS3, "Not just one Instagram post. Maybe two? Then you can look further." (see Appendix J, p.129) GA2 adds, "This is, of course, just one post, so I don't see it very well." (see Appendix J, p.176) and GA4 confirms, "Yes, multiple posts are needed." (see Appendix J, p.225).

In summary, while Instagram is a powerful tool for reaching potential employees, the findings suggest that the effectiveness of social media posts relies heavily on the quality and completeness of the visual content and captions, the provision of direct links to more detailed information on the company's website, and the strategic use of multiple posts to maintain interest.

5 Conclusion

This concluding chapter uses the findings of the previous chapters, addressing the sub-research questions to answer the main research question comprehensively. It also provides a critical discussion of the theoretical implications, societal and practical implications, limitations of the study, and relevant suggestions for future research. This conclusion integrates all aspects of the research, creating new insights by combining the sub-conclusions and addressing unexpected outcomes.

5.1 Answering the Sub-Research Questions

To answer the main research question: *What elements of employer-branded content, and strategic integration of these, on social media are key for building a strong employer brand and at the same time engaging potential employees?*, four sub-questions needed to be addressed in order to give an consistent and clear answer.

The first sub question that has been addressed; *How do visual elements of employer-branded content, such as images and videos, contribute to engaging employees through social media?* To find the answer to the question a three-step approach was used. Whereby the content of employer-branded content found on the social media platform Instagram is analyzed, the intentions of employer-branded content, in specific of the selected posts, are explored by expert interviews with the creators, and the reception and impact of employer-branded content by the targeted audiences through conducting interviews with them.

Visual elements are crucial in engaging employees through social media, serving as the primary means of capturing attention and conveying key aspects of the employer brand. Content analysis revealed that companies employ **specific color schemes and logos to enhance brand recognition** and **engaging videos to showcase the work environment and employee experiences**. The interviews with the target audience concluded that these visuals help potential employees visualize themselves within the company, fostering a sense of identification and alignment with the company's values and culture. Expert interviews highlighted the importance of **professional quality visuals** and **strategic text placement** in enhancing the brand's image and engaging with the audience effectively. Experts emphasized that this not only enhances the viewer's understanding and engagement but also strengthens the overall brand identity within the competitive landscape of horticultural employment. They particularly noted the use of **color for recognition and logos** as essential for brand consistency and immediate identification. Interviews with the target audience underscored the

critical role visuals play in forming a company's first impression and facilitating self-identification with the potential workplace. However, interviewees pointed out that companies often do not recognize the strategic importance of **displaying employees** in their content. The content analysis confirms the lack of employee visibility. The target audience indicated to appreciate seeing employees featured in visuals, as it aids in self-identification and relatability. This feedback highlights the need for a more strategic approach to visual content, emphasizing personal touches and employee representation to enhance relatability and engagement. Additionally, the interviews with the target audience confirmed that **high-quality images and videos** are particularly effective in creating memorable impressions. The interviews with the target audience revealed that different types of visuals resonate differently with various target audiences. Work students, for example, preferred engaging videos that depicted a fun and interactive work environment, often highlighting casual and social interactions among employees. Graduates in horticulture, on the other hand, valued visuals that emphasized professional growth and stability, often set within the contextual background of the workplace to highlight career development opportunities. General individuals were drawn to a mix of both videos and images that balanced professional insights with personal touches, providing a comprehensive view of the company's culture and work environment.

The Visual Communication Theory reinforces these findings by emphasizing the impact of visual elements, such as emotional content, color scheme, logos, etc. in enhancing the perception of the employer brand. The theory suggests that including certain visual elements can create strong associations with the employer brand making it more attractive to job seekers. The findings of this study, conclude that the visual elements from Figure 4 influences the employer brand.

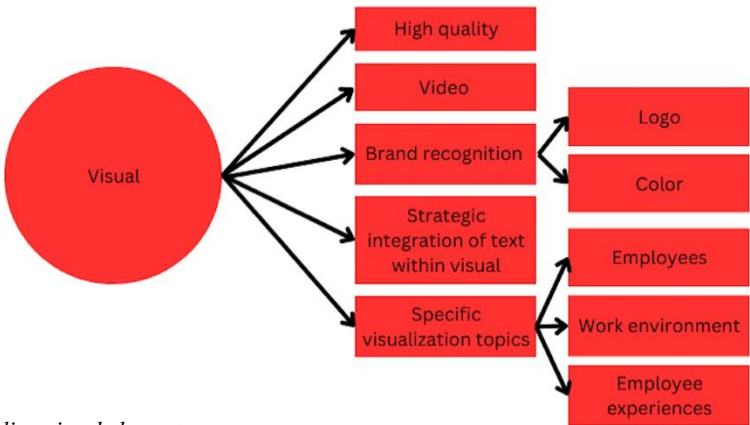


Figure 4 - appealing visual elements

Figure 4 shows the visual elements that were seen as most prominent in the interview data. The strategic use of the visual elements, specific color schemes and high-quality production

values, relate to the visual communication theory. The theory states that these elements help convey information more quickly and make it memorable, as a result influence the application decision. The interview data validate this findings. Additionally, the Visual Communication Theory states that individuals need to feel connected and identify themselves with the visual to be interested in the content. The findings from the interviews show that the visuals can trigger emotional responses and foster a deeper connection with the content through the usage of engaging videos that showcase the work environment, and employees and their experiences. But also, visuals give the audience a first impression of the company facilitating self-identification with the potential workplace.

To answer the following sub-question, *to what extent do narratives and storytelling techniques influence the engagement and interest of potential employees?*, a three-step approach is used. Whereby the content of employer-branded content found on the social media platform Instagram was analyzed, the intentions of employer-branded content were explored by expert interviews with the content creators, and the reception and impact of employer-branded content by the targeted audiences through conducting interviews with them.

Narratives and storytelling techniques are powerful tools for engaging potential employees, primarily by creating emotional connections and making the employer brand more relatable. The content analysis showed that companies used the **personal and professional journeys of employees** to engage their audience. For instance, narratives about employees' career progression highlighted personal growth and long-term commitment, while stories of employee experiences emphasized a fun and dynamic work environment. Companies consistently use **engaging openings, such as attractive hooks, questions, or statements, emojis, and relevant hashtags**. These tools help to retain attention and enhance visibility and engagement on social media platforms, verified in the interviews with the target audience. The content analyses concluded that narratives are communicated **visually** and supported by captions. The interviews with the target audience members showed that often they formed their first impressions based on the visual content alone. The interviews with the target audience indicate that each group favors **clarity and directness** in narratives, however, the specific content and style preferences can vary significantly across different target audiences. Work students are particularly drawn to visual content; therefore, narratives should be told through visuals, and direct information about job roles and remuneration. In contrast, graduates in horticulture and general individuals look for narratives that offer insights into

company culture and personal growth opportunities. Interviews with the audience show that diverse narrative techniques, for example combining direct and descriptive language, serves a broader audience and offer both clarity and engagement. These insights suggest that companies need to adapt their narrative techniques according to the preferences of their target audience to enhance engagement and attract potential employees effectively.

However, there is a risk of narratives becoming standard and losing their impact over time. Companies need to originate continuously in their storytelling techniques to maintain interest and engagement and **stay unique** in the competitive labor market. This involves **balancing detailed personal stories with factual information** to avoid perceptions of inauthenticity. The research highlighted that narratives should be tailored to the specific preferences and interests of different target audiences to maximize their effectiveness, as the study of Wilden et al. (2010, p. 64-73) claimed. For instance, work students responded well to informal and engaging narratives that highlighted social aspects of the work environment, while graduates in horticulture valued detailed narratives that emphasized professional growth and career development.

The Storytelling Theory and Narrative Persuasion Theory support these findings. The Storytelling Theory posits that narratives can create a connection between the audience and the brand by presenting experiences, challenges, and successes in a relatable manner. The fact that a tailored approach per target audience is more effective, verifies this. The Narrative Persuasion Theory further adds that storytelling can evoke emotional responses, making the content more engaging and memorable.

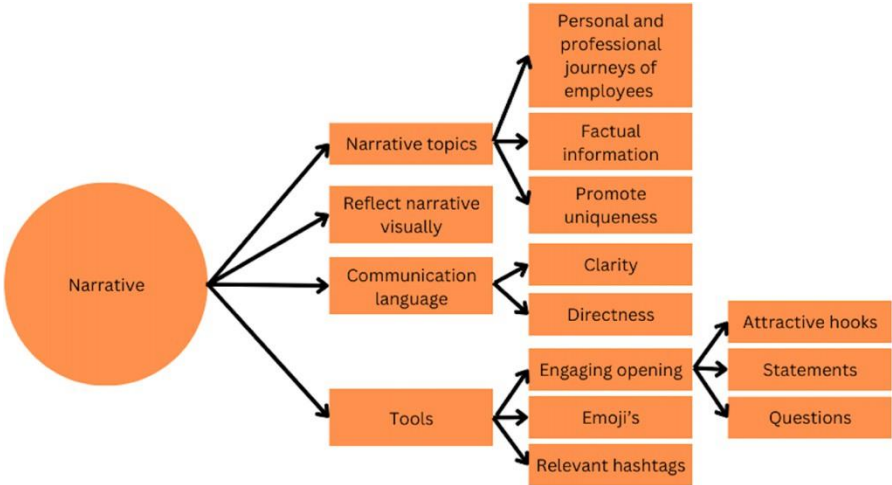


Figure 5 - appealing narrative elements

However, evoking emotions is very challenging, it can be done by using the elements depicted in Figure 5, although only the audience that feels relatable to the content will evoke emotions. This relates to the Social Identity Theory, potential employees must recognize

themselves in the narrative or visual, so the content must be relatable. By showcasing personal and professional journeys, companies can humanize their brand and create a sense of belonging among potential employees. According to Social Cognitive Theory, testimonials, success stories, and day-in-the-life features serve as effective role models for prospective employees, influencing the perceptions of the sector and motivating them to consider careers. According to the Social Cognitive Theory, these narratives should align with the interests of the target audience to make the content persuasive. The target audience interviewees mainly labeled day-in-the-life vlogs as the best way to attract them, although each target audience desired a different perspective. Work students wish to see the work environment, horticultural graduates' career growth potentials, and general individuals' personal related success stories.

To answer the following sub question, *what role does authenticity play in the perception and engagement of employer-branded content on social media?*, a three-step approach was used. The content of employer-branded content found on the social media platform Instagram was analyzed, the intentions of employer-branded content were explored through expert interviews, and the reception and impact of employer-branded content by the targeted audiences through conducting interviews.

Authenticity plays an essential role in the perception and engagement of employer-branded content. Authentic content builds trust and credibility, making the employer brand more appealing to potential employees. The interviews with the target audience revealed that **transparency** and **genuine portrayals of the work environment, employee experiences, and company values** were crucial for building this trust. Additionally, sharing **verifiable facts** and **future visions** was perceived as reliable and attractive to potential employees. Authenticity helps individuals self-identify with the company. Transparent content, such as detailed employee experiences and company visions, fosters a sense of belonging and alignment with the organization's values. Each target audience must be approached differently to effectively communicate authenticity, as Wilden et al., (2010, p. 64-70) already confirmed. For instance, work students appreciate fun and engaging content that showcases a relaxed work environment, while graduates in horticulture and general individuals value detailed narratives that emphasize professional growth and company culture, which all require companies to be transparent. The content analysis confirmed that the level of authenticity varies for companies. Some companies excelled in maintaining transparency and authenticity, while others struggled. For instance, some companies build trust through employee portrayals of day-to-day activities and open communication about company processes and employee

experiences. Others emphasize personal stories that underscore the collaborative nature of their work environment or be transparent by sharing a relaxed and enjoyable work environment, which was appealing to a different segment of the job market, which we can connect to the Social Identity Theory.

The Social Identity Theory supports these findings by suggesting that authenticity helps individuals categorize themselves within social groups based on shared characteristics and values. Transparent and genuine content allows potential employees to see themselves as part of the organization, aligning their personal values with those of the company. This sense of belonging is essential for enhancing engagement and satisfaction.

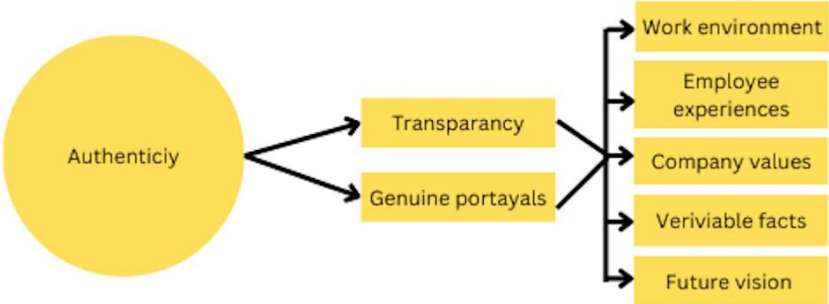


Figure 6 - appealing authenticity elements

The interviews showed that a sense of belonging was related to the elements shown in Figure 6. Although also the other elements as visuals and narrative help individuals categorize themselves as part of the company.

To answer the following research question, *how does the strategic integration of elements from employer-branded content enhance employee engagement on social media platforms?*, a different approach than with the previous RQ was used. Based on the interviews with experts and the target audience a fourth important theme was discovered, strategic integration of different types of posts. The opinions of experts and target audience gave a complete overview of how potential employees wished to be approached.

Figure 7 provides an overview of two factors that contribute to making employer-branded content more appealing. Companies are advised to integrate these factors into their employer branding strategy.

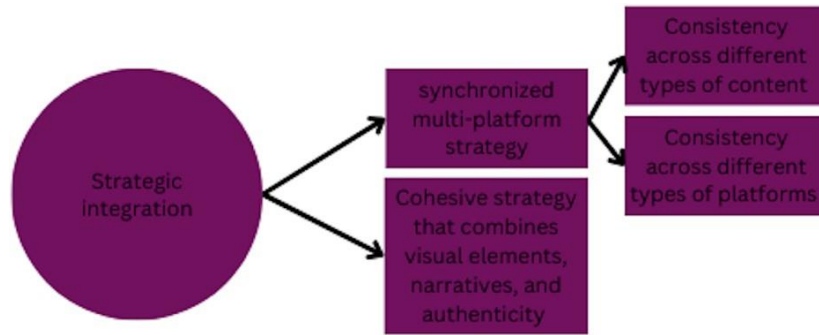


Figure 7 Strategic integration of appealing elements

The strategic integration of visual elements, narratives, and authenticity is seen as important for enhancing employee engagement on social media platforms. The interviews with experts and the target audience members demonstrated that a **cohesive strategy that combines these elements** is more appealing than focusing on individual components in isolation. Integrating high-quality visuals, engaging narratives, and authentic portrayals is the best formula for creating a compelling employer brand to attract employees. This integrated approach ensures that the content resonates with different target audiences, enhancing engagement and recruitment effectiveness. For instance, high-quality visuals capture attention, engaging narratives create emotional connections, and authenticity builds trust and credibility. By strategically combining these elements, companies can create an attractive and recognizable employer brand that attracts and retains potential employees. A comprehensive approach that ensures employer branding remains consistent and effective involves **leveraging visual media** to communicate a desirable workplace culture that resonates with existing and potential employees alike. This approach highlights the importance of professional quality visuals and strategic text placement in enhancing the brand's image and engaging with the audience effectively. The interviews with the target audience and experts suggest that **maintaining consistency across different types of content and platforms** is essential for appealing employer branding. They claim that Instagram is applicable for visual storytelling, Facebook for interacting with the older generation, as parents from the work students, and LinkedIn could be better utilized for professional narratives. A **synchronized multi-platform strategy** could enhance the overall effectiveness and reach, ensuring that the employer brand is communicated consistently across all channels.

Based on the answers to the sub-questions, the main research question can be addressed; *What elements of employer-branded content, and strategic integration of these, on social media are key for building a strong employer brand and at the same time engaging potential employees?* The key to engaging potential employees with a stronger employer

brand through employer-branded content on social media lies in the combination and strategic integration of high-quality visual elements, compelling narratives, and authenticity. The key insights derived from the research will be detailed below.

Concerning high-quality visuals, it can be concluded that professional-quality images and videos are essential for capturing attention and creating memorable impressions. These visuals should align with the company's branding and be tailored to the preferences of different target audiences. For instance, work students respond well to engaging videos that showcase a fun work environment, while graduates prefer visuals that highlight professional growth and stability. Consistent use of color schemes and logos enhances brand recognition, helping potential employees quickly identify the company. This consistency is crucial for building a cohesive brand image across different platforms. Including employees in visuals helps potential candidates see themselves within the company, facilitating self-identification and enhancing relatability.

Stories that highlight the personal and professional growth of employees make the brand more relatable and create emotional connections. Detailed narratives showcasing employee experiences and career growth are particularly effective. Using attractive hooks, questions, or statements at the beginning of narratives, along with relevant hashtags and emojis, enhances engagement and visibility on social media platforms. Narratives should be adapted to the specific preferences and interests of different target audiences. Work students prefer direct information about job roles and remuneration, while graduates and general individuals look for insights into company culture and personal growth opportunities.

Authentic portrayals of the work environment, employee experiences, and company values build trust and credibility. Transparent content allows potential employees to align their personal values with those of the company, fostering a sense of belonging. Each target audience should be approached differently to effectively communicate authenticity. Work students appreciate fun and engaging content, while graduates and general individuals value detailed narratives that emphasize professional growth and company culture.

Maintaining consistency across different types of content and platforms is essential for appealing employer branding. A synchronized strategy that leverages the strengths of each platform, such as using Instagram for visual storytelling and LinkedIn for professional narratives, enhances overall effectiveness and reach. Companies need to continuously refresh their content and storytelling techniques to maintain interest and engagement, while staying unique and picking up global trends. This involves balancing detailed personal stories with factual information to avoid perceptions of inauthenticity.

Applying the elements above in a strategic approach ensures that the employer branding remains consistent and appealing, leveraging visual media to communicate a desirable workplace culture that resonates with existing and potential employees. Highlights the importance of professional quality visuals and strategic text placement in enhancing the brand’s image and engaging with the audience effectively. In summary, the combination of high-quality visual elements, compelling narratives, and authenticity, integrated into a cohesive and strategic multi-platform approach, is key for building a strong employer brand and engaging potential employees on social media. Additionally, individuals should be able to recognize themselves in the content to make it more appealing, as indicated by the Social Identity Theory. Transparency of the work environment, for example by showing employers on the work floor within visuals or by describing the work environment or characters working for the companies within narratives, makes it easier for individuals to recognize themselves in the content. Additionally, the content should be tailored to the target audiences’ preferences to be relatable. Based on the findings, Figure 8 provides a synthesis and visualizes the preferences per target audience.

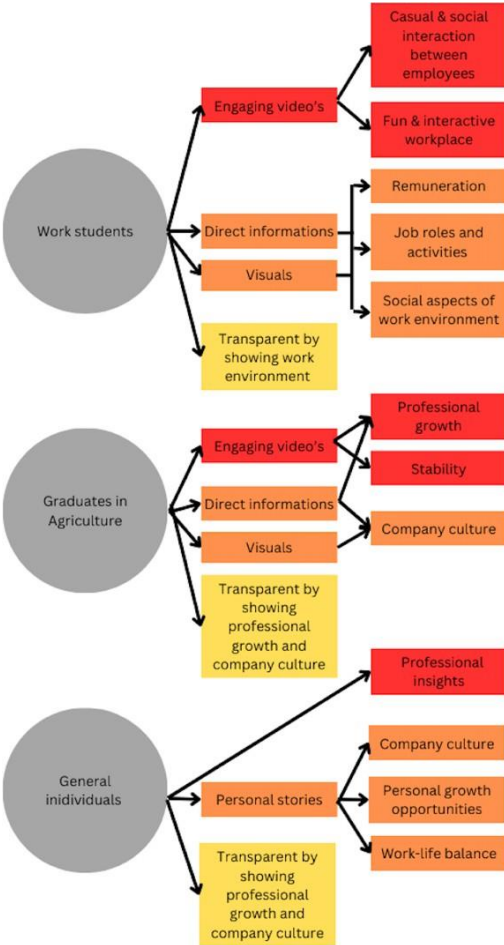


Figure 8 – interests per target audience

To create a strong and attractive employer brand that stands out in the competitive job market a company should embrace the framework from Figure 8 and to strengthen the tailored content, elements named in Figures 4, 5, 6, and 7 are advisable to apply. This strategy will leverage the company's employer branding strategy on social media, in particular on Instagram. To give an example of the application of these frames, the company wants to attract more work students. To do this they have to adjust their employer branding based on the interest of this target group. As Figure 8 advises to approach them through video's, showing social interaction between the employees within a fun workplace, for example through fun activities. Work students prefer to be approach through direct language, by naming what they will earn or provide the direct job description. Elements that could leverage this content is using a color scheme for brand recognition, text within the visual to give context to the visuals and using emojis in the caption. To attract work students, it is advised to be transparent by visualizing the work environment in a video. Additionally, synchronize the content on social media platform Tiktok as work students engage with content on this platform or Facebook as parents frequently support work students to go work for an employer, as discovered during the interviews. Building a strategy based on the frames from Figures 4 to 8 will strengthen each posts, and element of the post. Making recruitment through social media more appealing and still cost-efficient for business applying social media solely for B2E orientated communication, as the horticultural sector.

5.2 Theoretical Implications

The theoretical framework outlined in Chapter 3 proved to be suitable for this study. The Visual Communication Theory effectively explained the impact of visual elements in employer-branded content. The Narrative Persuasion Theory and Storytelling Theory provided a solid foundation for understanding the influence of narratives and storytelling techniques. The Social Identity Theory highlighted the importance of authenticity in building trust and engagement. These theories collectively supported the interpretation of the findings and demonstrated their relevance in the context of employer branding on social media.

The Visual Communication Theory was particularly useful in explaining how high-quality visuals can create strong associations with the employer brand. The theory suggests that effective visual communication, including the use of compelling images and cohesive visual design, can enhance the perception of the employer brand, making it more attractive to

job seekers. This was evident in the research, where high-quality visuals were found to create memorable impressions and facilitate self-identification with the company.

The Narrative Persuasion Theory and Storytelling Theory provided a strong framework for understanding the impact of narratives and storytelling techniques. These theories suggest that effective storytelling can create emotional connections and foster a deeper engagement with the content. The research confirmed this, showing that detailed personal and professional stories significantly enhanced engagement. However, the findings also highlighted the need for continuous innovation in storytelling techniques to maintain interest and avoid perceptions of inauthenticity.

The Social Identity Theory was helpful in explaining the role of authenticity in building trust and credibility. The theory suggests that transparent and genuine portrayals of the work environment, employee experiences, and company values can help potential employees categorize themselves within the organization. This sense of belonging is crucial for enhancing engagement and satisfaction. However, the Social Identity Theory proved to be applicable within all three concepts, as each concept leverages elements that support individuals in identifying themselves with the content. As visuals provide footage that helps individuals to get an idea of the work environment or co-workers and the narratives, describing a job or the work environment gives the individuals inside information. Although to do this companies need to be transparent. The research supported this, showing that authenticity is a critical factor in the perception and engagement of employer-branded content.

During the interviews with the target audience, it was frequently mentioned that the content should be reliable. So, it should represent the exact portrayal of reality and content that is being bloomed to engage more employees. To discover how companies look against this standpoint, the Theory of Authentic Leadership could have been applied. This theory highlights the importance of leaders being genuine, transparent, and ethical (Avolio & Gardner, 2005, p. 321 - 322). Questions related to this theory could have been asked during the expert interviews to analyze how reliable the content is portraying the work environment or professional journeys etc.

5.3 Societal and practical implications

The findings of this research have significant societal and practical implications. In the context of the labor market, particularly within sector where social media is mainly used for recruitment purposes such as the horticulture sector, appealing employer branding can address labor market shortages by attracting and retaining employees in a cost-efficient way. Social

media offers a cost-effective and wide-reaching medium for promoting employer brands, as users can publish content for free, and the number of daily users is high. Although in order to keep social media communication cost-effective, an appealing content strategy should be behind the posts. As making content also includes expenses, therefore, the content made should be appealing to see results. The insights from this study help companies adapt their employer branded content strategy to better engage potential employees, thereby enhancing recruitment outcomes. Moreover, by showcasing genuine employee experiences and company values, companies can build stronger relationships with their audience.

The practical implications of this research are far-influential. Companies can use the findings to refine their social media strategy, ensuring that they effectively combine visual elements, narratives, and authenticity to create a compelling employer brand. This can help them attract and retain employees, enhancing their competitive advantage in the labor market. Additionally, insights into target audience preferences can help companies tailor their content to resonate better with different audiences, thereby increasing engagement and recruitment results. The research also highlights the importance of maintaining consistency across different types of content and platforms. By adopting a synchronized multi-platform strategy, companies can ensure that their employer brand is communicated consistently, enhancing overall reach and appeal. This can help them build a strong and cohesive employer brand that stands out in the competitive job.

5.4 Limitations and further research

While this study provides valuable insights, it is important to acknowledge its limitations. Emphasizing the finding that the content needs to be tailored related to the interest of the target audience to be appealing and acknowledge interest from the receiver, the limitation can be addressed for only analyzing the horticulture sector as a case study. The study's scope was limited to Instagram posts within the horticulture sector, which may not be generalizable to other sectors or social media platforms as content needs to be tailored to its audience to receive the best results. Additionally, the qualitative nature of the interviews may introduce subjective biases. Future research could expand the scope to include other platforms such as Facebook and LinkedIn and apply quantitative methods to validate the findings. For example, setting up diverse employer branded posts and test them with an experiment. This method will validate or reject the findings of this study and will increase the outcomes' reliability. Furthermore, the complete Instagram account of a company needs to be researched in order to draw valid conclusions, instead of each post separately. Initially, only the content

was used for identifying elements, but later it became clear that determining the strategy, schedule, and timeline of social media posts is also crucial for supporting employer branding. Lastly, during the research, we focused on four different theories that forecasted the response on the three concepts, visuals, narratives, and authenticity. The theories were the foundation for the interview guide and coding scheme, which might have led to certain conclusions. Therefore, it could be interesting to also consider other theories in future studies, such as the Authentic Leadership Theory. Focusing on the authenticity of leaders, thus companies, emphasize the importance of leaders being genuine, transparent, and ethical (Avolio & Gardner, 2005, p. 322). Thus, analyzing if companies share reliable, genuine, transparent, and ethical content that is true to their normal work environment. This comprehensive approach can provide a more detailed understanding of how different elements contribute to building a strong employer brand.

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