Attracting Employees

A Critical Analysis of Gender in KMD's Employer Branding

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Resume

In this thesis, I have chosen to research how gendered organizational norms, values, culture, and associations depicted through external employer branding affect an organization's ability to attract female job candidates. Acker's Gendered Organizations theory (1990) argues that organizations are inherently gendered structures that reproduce gender structures through formal and informal organizational practices. By analyzing how these gendered representations manifest in external employer branding, the study explores the potential impact on women's perceptions of organizational fit and their willingness to apply.

In this thesis, I have chosen to focus on the male-dominated IT organization KMD. Their female-to-male ratio stands at 32.6% female to 67.4% male in 2023, making them a good candidate for my research (KMD 2023). The theoretical framework, consisting of Employer Branding by Kristin Backhaus and Surinder Tikoo (2004) and Gendered Organizations theory by Acker (1990), will guide my analysis of my data, which consists of KMD's 2020 video *KMD - Where ambitions meet experience* (appx. 2). The data, produced in 2020, is an external piece of employer branding published on YouTube, touching on subjects of employees, organizational culture, success, professional ambition, and more, and is designed to attract more job candidates. Their high female-to-male ratio should warrant employer branding efforts targeted toward neutral or more female employees if they wish to meet their goals of more than 38% of total female employees by the end of 2026 (KMD 2023). To examine their employer branding efforts with a critical feminist lens, I formulated the research question;

On the basis of Employer Branding and Gendered Organizations theory, how can KMD attract more female employees?

To answer this, I applied Multimodal Analysis (2007) by David Machin (2007) and Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis by David Machin and Andrea Mayr (2023).

Here, I found that KMD gender themselves through masculine coded ideals, including utilizing gendered language (such as ambition, leading, etc.) and portraying men in active roles important to carrying out the narrative and women as passive observers who support the narrative. In my discussion, I found that further research for solving this issue is needed, but I also found that viewing employer branding through a critical feminist lens can provide a tool for avoiding or minimizing gendered employer branding.

Indholdsfortegnelse

1 Introduction

An employer brand is the combined perception of multiple elements that an organization offers its employees. It includes tangible elements such as functional benefits (including salaries, paid leave, opportunities for honing professional skills, and career advancement) and abstract elements such as symbolic benefits (including feelings of oneness, belonging, and prestige) (Backhaus and Tikoo 2004). A desirable employer brand will result in higher employer brand loyalty, employee attraction, and employee productivity, generating skilled and more devoted employees in and into an organization (Backhaus and Tikoo 2004). Consequently, many organizations and companies focus on creating stronger and more positive employer brands, targeting the desired potential employees.

KMD is an organization with the goal of increasing its number of female employees to create a more gender diverse organization (KMD 2023). To do this, producing an employer brand attractive to the female potential employees is important. Creating the employer brand through a feminist perspective can be used as a tool for avoiding creating employer brand associations that women are less valued than men in their organization. Specifically, Gendered Organizational Theory by Joan Acker (1990) argues that organizations are inherently gendered, and she presents five mechanisms of gendering within an organization that can be used to identify an organization's hidden gendered biases.

The problem this thesis presents is relevant because many organizations today have goals of increasing the number of female employees, specifically in managerial and higher positions. Organizations that are male-dominated, such as STEM fields (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics), have strong associations with "men's work," and organizations within these fields face challenges of changing their perception to attract more women (Nosek et al. 2009). However, some organizations have been able to break out of industry gender stereotypes and attract more women than what is the industry average. For example, NASA has built an employer brand that includes, celebrates, and values female engineering talent, and as a consequence, has a lower female-to-male gender ratio than the engineering field's average (nasa.gov 2025; Peachman 2024).

By integrating feminist perspectives and addressing the underlying gendered structures, organizations can move beyond surface-level diversity branding and produce more gender-inclusive external employer branding. This thesis aims to explore how to identify and reshape gendered discourse and imaging in employer branding that define the employer image and, in

turn, affect employee attraction. In doing so, KMD's case aims to contribute to a broader understanding of how employer branding can be crafted to attract female employees. Ultimately, this thesis' focus can be seen as part of what it means to redefine which kinds of workers and identities are viewed as belonging within male-dominated professional fields.

1.1 Research Question

On the basis of Employer Branding and Gendered Organizations theory, how can KMD attract more female employees?

2 Philosophy of Science

In this chapter, I will present my philosophy of science, social constructivism, and explain how the key components of my thesis align with this approach, both scientifically and methodologically. The key components will be presented in the following order: Employer Branding by Backhaus and Tikoo (2004), Gendered Organizations theory by Acker (1990), Multimodal Analysis by David Machin (2007), and Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis by Machin and Andrea Mayr (2023). I will end the chapter by explaining my ontology and epistemology.

2.1 Social Constructivism and Theoretical Foundation

Social constructivism is a philosophy of science that believes all things abstract, concrete, tangible, and intangible are constructions of social interactions, language, collective thinking, and social practices between people. Things, practices, language, etc., exist and have names because people created them, named them, and found use for them through a general agreement and acceptance between groups of people (Collin 2021). For example, language is a social construction that is evolving all the time as new words come into use and old words fall out of use to make room for new definitions and concepts. Employer branding is one of those words that did not exist until the 1990s when a tangible concept of the practice was made; thus, a word for it was needed. However, the concept and name for employer branding had to be recognized and approved by other people for it to be accepted into use for organizations, as well as for the academic field.

Social constructivism becomes controversial when philosophers, social scientists, and more claim that concrete things are also a social construction (Collin 2021). For example, a social constructivist would also claim that not only language and scientific theories but also beliefs about the natural elements are a construct of social interaction. For example, beliefs about the sky, grass, rocks, etc., only exist because groups of people have agreed on them. The belief that grass is green is a social construct that people agree to be true. However, the decision to label the color green as green is a construct of how groups of people perceive the color and name the color (Bosten 2022). People who are red-green colorblind will perceive the color of grass differently, but they will know that grass is described as green. This highlights how shared meanings like the grass being green are not purely based on individual perception but on social agreement. Even if someone with red-green color blindness does not see green the same way, they still learn and adopt the socially approved label. This example illustrates how much of

what we take for granted as "natural" or "objective" knowledge is shaped through social processes rather than universal experience (Collin 2021).

This thesis will only concern itself with the social variables within social constructivism, as it is the focus of the thesis to research employer branding attractiveness for female employees. Employer branding as a theory and practice can be argued as social constructivist because the basis of the theory depends on the social consensus of desirable traits of an organization in society, in social groups, professional groups, etc. Furthermore, analyzing and concluding whether an organization's external employer brand is successful depends on the specific groups of people the organization is trying to attract, as different social groups will find different things attractive and important when applying for an organization (ballisager 2025).

Furthermore, I will work with the concept of critical feminism and the theory of gendered organizations by Acker (1990), who argues that gender is a socially constructed concept that changes and evolves throughout time and location (see section 3.4.3). I will use it to reflect on the analysis results concerning how KMD represent themselves through a gendered lens. Furthermore, I will use it to evaluate and discuss how KMD's gendering affects its employer brand and, in turn, how it affects the employee attraction of women to KMD.

2.2 Analytical Tools within a Constructivist Paradigm

In my analysis, I will analyze the external employer branding of KMD (Kommunedata), a Danish male-dominated organization (KMD 2023), with Multimodal Analysis by Machin (2007) and Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis by Machin and Mayr (2023). The analysis methods will be utilized to uncover the discourses and associations surrounding male and female employees created with imaging, language, connotations, framing, and more. Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis will provide a framework for the textual and discursive analysis (Machin and Mayr 2023).

Within a social constructivist project, discourse and multimodal analysis align with the philosophy because the objects of analysis are believed to create, reproduce, and be influenced by socially constructed concepts (Collin 2021). Discourses are powerful tools for creating or shaping social norms, identities, hierarchies, beliefs, morals, etc. Analyzing the discourses in a text or video will reveal these matters, help deconstruct them and expose the motivation or biases behind creating or reinforcing them (Fairclough 2010). Multimodal analysis is used similarly because multimodal elements, such as scenery, color, framing, and text, are tools that,

in combination, can create certain images and associations in the audience's mind (Machin 2007). These will either create, reinforce, or challenge the socially constructed concepts.

2.3 Ontology and Epistemology

This thesis adopts a social constructivist perspective, which ontologically centers on how I, as a researcher, perceive and interpret the world (Kastberg 2016). My academic background has played a central role in shaping this worldview. During upper secondary education, with a focus on languages and social sciences, I was first introduced to the idea that knowledge and meaning are socially constructed. This understanding was further developed during my bachelor's degree in International Business Communication, where I came to view knowledge as produced through social interaction and shaped by subjective interpretations of concepts such as right and wrong within different social groups.

In the context of employer branding, what is considered important or desirable is inherently subjective and dependent on how individuals and potential employees perceive the world based on their lived experiences and social environments. These perceptions, dependent on the group, influence how employer branding messages are received, interpreted, and evaluated. For example, the values of a brand play a significant role in employer branding and need to align with the potential employees' values for the employer brand to be attractive to potential employees (Backhaus and Tikoo 2004). This means that if a brand's key values reflect certain aspects of equality and sustainability, potential employees will see this and apply with this information in mind. However, some people may also refrain from applying because the values do not align with their belief system. This thesis focuses on how employer branding shapes employee attractiveness, specifically for women who perceive and interpret things differently from men based on lived experiences (Backhaus and Tikoo 2004).

It is also noteworthy that had I pursued a different academic path, my approach to the subject matter might have been significantly different. For example, an education with more positivist approaches would have focused on individual elements within a larger data pool, such as how equal or unequal visibility (in terms of the number of women and men represented) impacts the attraction of female potential employees, rather than how the portrayal of men's and women's agency affects the associations that in turn affect the employee attraction of women. My choices are as is because my interest lies in how modes of communication affect (weaken or strengthen) each other to affect the audience rather than in how individual elements are and can be used to convey a message.

My current perspective on gender in the workplace has been shaped by beliefs that while women possess the same competencies as men, they often encounter fewer opportunities due to social constructs surrounding gender roles and characteristics. Moreover, as a member of a generation that has witnessed increasing awareness and discourse around gender equality in professional contexts, I recognize that some organizations and industries continue to fall behind in the area of gender equality in the workplace (Siddique 2021).

Growing up in Denmark has also informed my perspective on this thesis. While Denmark is widely regarded as a progressive nation that has prioritized gender equality, it paradoxically ranks among the Nordic countries with the greatest gender disparities in areas such as pay, women in management, and career advancement (Segaard, Kjaer and Saglie 2022). My understanding of equality is different compared to other nationalities; thus, my and other Danes' expectations of equality are higher than countries that score low on equality issues. My time at university has provided both the perspective and the motivation to address the issue of the female-to-male employee ratio in this thesis, although people of other countries, cultures, or educational backgrounds will not find the issue relevant.

My thesis is epistemologically shaped by a qualitative research design focused on meaning-making processes women make of work environments shaped and dominated by men. Qualitative analysis methods are useful in research demanding nuance and depth, where several factors have to be examined in a limited set of data. The analysis will allow for revealing the biases hidden in KMD's employer branding and determine how these impact women's level of employee attraction. This is achieved through an analysis of KMD's external employer branding. Specifically, my analysis will examine data chosen through a process of carefully applying criteria and making sure the data lives up to them. The data consists of a video branding KMD toward potential employees. The data and data criteria will be presented further in chapter 6.

As part of the research, my approach to the thesis is conducted inductively and employs Multimodal Analysis by Machin (2007) and Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis by Machin and Mayr (2023) as the framework for textual interpretation. These analysis methods ensure the conclusion will reflect the nuances of external employer branding and how female employees perceive it. The analysis results will create data to insert and apply to my theories, which in turn will provide me with the necessary information and perspective to answer my research question.

3 Literature Review

In this chapter, I will review the main theories within the scope of employer branding, including Tim Ambler and Simon Barrow's conceptualization in 1996, Kristin Backhaus and Surinder Tikoo's contribution in 2004, and Richard Mosley's contribution in 2014. Furthermore, I will review the feminist perspectives of gender at work to determine an appropriate approach to answering my research question. These include liberal feminism, radical feminism, and critical feminism. Theories within these feminist perspectives will also be presented and assessed.

3.1 Employer Branding by Ambler and Barrow

Employer branding is a concept within the academic and professional fields that, since its rise in the 1990s, has become increasingly important for organizations wishing to attract and retain the best quality employees. First introduced as a theoretical concept, employer branding was coined by Tim Ambler and Simon Barrow in 1996 in their article *The Employer Brand*, published in the *Journal of Brand Management*. They define employer branding as: "*the package of functional, economic, and psychological benefits provided by employment, and identified with the employing company*" (Ambler and Barrow 1996). This definition categorizes employer branding into three distinct components:

(1) The functional benefit: The functional and practical advantages of employment within an organization, including leadership quality, career advancement opportunities, training programs, remote work options, and flexible working hours.

(2) The economic benefit: The financial aspects of employment, such as competitive salaries, paid leave, and other monetary incentives.

(3) The psychological benefit: The sense of belonging, oneness with the organization, professional purpose, and personal fulfillment that employees derive from their roles and organizational leadership.

(Ambler and Barrow 1996)

These benefits originate from human resource (HR) practices, and Ambler and Barrow introduced the concept of applying HR practices to marketing, particularly in the shaping of the brand through marketing (Ambler and Barrow 1996). In other words, employer branding should exist in and be consistent with the brand image; from product, marketing, and customer experience to employee experience (Ambler and Barrow 1996). For example, merging

relationship marketing with the functional, economic, and psychological benefits of HR to create a desirable employer brand will have a positive impact on the retention of employees and attraction of applicants, similar to how traditional relationship marketing helps retain customers and results in higher customer satisfaction (Ambler and Barrow 1996).

If an organization succeeds in building a strong employer brand following the findings of Ambler and Barrow's paper, it will attract more and better applicants, which in turn creates better employees, business, and reputation. This cycle keeps going, enhancing and developing the employer brand.

Ambler and Barrow laid the foundational work for employer branding, which is still relevant and useful today. Their definition of employer branding provides a concise understanding of the factors that play into creating and maintaining an employer brand. Furthermore, they highlight the need for both external and internal marketing, utilizing existing marketing tools (relationship marketing), as well as emphasizing important objectives such as employer branding being consistent with the entire brand experience. However, their theory also lacks a concise framework for carrying out external employer branding.

Ambler and Barrow do not focus specifically on employee attraction and which factors or benefits create attraction. Their arguments for more attraction are taken from the theory of relationship marketing (Ambler and Barrow 1996). As my thesis research focuses specifically on employee attraction, I will not be using it.

3.2 Employer Branding by Richard Mosley

Mosley published his book *Employer Brand Management: Practical Lessons from the World's Leading Employers* in 2014. The book provides a theoretical foundation for the framework in the first half before presenting a "how-to" guide for managers on employer branding (Mosley 2014). The framework focuses in large part on internal employer branding efforts, including the onboarding experience, employee engagement and retention, and planning and strategizing the employer brand, which includes external employer branding elements such as choosing channels of communication, such as events, advertisements, or social media (Mosley 2014). Through this, Mosley vouches for and underlines the importance of integrating human resource management (HRM) and marketing into one. Specifically, the framework continuously mentions the significance of the EVP in the development, implementation, and marketing thereof (Mosley 2014).

Mosley's emphasis on integrating HR and marketing functions, particularly through the development of an Employer Value Proposition (EVP), offers a clear and practical theoretical framework for managers. The EVP is a tool for appealing to the "right" workforce, meaning the employees they wish to employ and retain. This is done through careful consideration of how to convey the benefits that attract the desired workforce.

Organizations will need to decide on the defining qualities of employment they most want to be associated with. The EVP serves as a concise description of the key components that make up and differentiate the brand (Mosley 2014). This is showcased through the organization's work practices, including organizational culture, managerial culture, current employee quality and wellbeing, employment image, and service and product quality. These elements work together to create the value that organizations offer employees through external and internal marketing and communication (Backhaus and Tikoo 2004; Backhaus 2016).

However, as this thesis is concerned specifically with external employer branding and its impact on employee attraction, Mosley's focus on the internal dimension of employer branding falls outside the scope of the analysis. While elements of KMD's organizational values and culture can be inferred from the data, the focus is on how these values are presented externally and the types of employer brand associations they create among potential employees. The thesis does not examine how the organizational culture and values function or are experienced internally within the organization. Instead, the analysis is limited to the visual and discursive communication strategies KMD uses to attract talent, and how these strategies shape women's perceptions of the organization as a potential employer.

3.3 Employer Branding by Backhaus and Tikoo

Kristin Backhaus and Surinder Tikoo published their contribution to the academic field in 2004 with their journal article *Conceptualizing and researching employer branding*. Their theoretical foundation is built upon Ambler and Barrow's (1996) definition as well as the Conference Board's (2001) definition of employer branding: "*the employer brand establishes the identity of the firm as an employer. It encompasses the firm's value system, policies, and behaviors toward the objectives of attracting, motivating, and retaining the firm's current and potential employees*" (The Conference Board 2001, in Backhaus and Tikoo 2004, p. 502). Backhaus and Tikoo highlight that this definition involves promotion both internally and externally to the organization (Backhaus and Tikoo 2004). Their definition simplifies the other two, boiling it down to "*[...] the process of building an identifiable and unique employer*

identity, and the employer brand as a concept of the firm that differentiates it from its competitors" (Backhaus and Tikoo 2004, p. 502). This definition of employer branding highlights the need for organizational brands to differentiate themselves from other brands besides making themselves identifiable. The brand needs to offer something else or more than other brands for the employer brand to be successful in attracting and retaining employees. For example, NASA has built an employer brand that differentiates itself in terms of attracting female talent by its history of female engineers excelling at NASA, as well as better benefits in terms of work-life balance, among others (nasa.gov 2025; Peachman 2024).

In their 2004 paper, Backhaus and Tikoo introduced their framework for which elements create the employer brand. The framework is divided into external factors and internal factors. The external factors consist of the employer brand associations that create the employer image, which in turn generates the degree of employee attraction. The internal factors include the organizational culture and identity, which create the degree of employer brand loyalty that generates employee productivity (Backhaus and Tikoo 2004). They explain that the employer image, and ultimately the employee attraction, are led by the functional and symbolic benefits marketed to the audience. They also describe these as the "product" and "nonproduct" related attributes of a brand. Translated into employer brand terms, the functional benefits are the objective information about what it is like to work at the organization. This includes compensation, benefits, working hours, career advancement, etc. The symbolic benefits are the prestige or social approval that an employee is perceived to experience and get working at the organization (Backhaus and Tikoo 2004). This consists of abstract concepts such as innovativeness, competence, competitiveness, integrity, and other organizational values (Aboul-Ela 2016). From a perspective of attraction of women, the symbolic benefits that make an organization attractive differ from those of men. For example, women may find a commitment to employee well-being more attractive than men, as they experience more stress in their jobs (ballisager 2025).

Backhaus and Tikoo's categorization of functional and symbolic benefits can be compared to Ambler and Barrow's categories of functional, economic, and psychological benefits, with functional benefits covering Ambler and Barrow's definition of both functional and economic benefits, and symbolic benefits covering psychological benefits (see section 3.1).

In 2016, Backhaus reviewed the employer branding field. She argued that employee attraction is generated through the perceptions people have of an employer's image. A well-made employer brand, targeted through the desired symbolic and functional benefits, will enable job seekers to apply because they respect, understand, and identify with the image

presented, creating a perception of a good person-organization fit. Backhaus compares this with customers shopping at a selection of "approved" brands that align with the customer's morals and values (Backhaus 2016). For example, some people avoid shopping with the fast fashion webshop Shein because of the mass production process and product quality standards and choose to shop more sustainably (Rajvanshi 2023). Likewise, some potential employees would not apply to Shein because its morals and values do not align with theirs.

       The cons to this theory are that the framework is a simplified version of which elements determine the factors of the framework, and this may lead managers and scholars to approach employer branding less nuanced than is needed for their specific employer brand.

       This theory is suitable for my thesis because it divides internal and external factors of employer branding into two branches that each determines (1) employee attraction and (2) employee productivity. As I focus exclusively on external employer branding within my thesis, their separation of external vs. internal employer branding fits well, as I separate only external employer branding and employee attraction. Furthermore, their focus on employer brand associations as a defining factor of employee attraction is useful within my methodological framework to identify elements within KMD's employer brand that influence how positively or negatively the employer image will be perceived by female potential employees. Therefore, I will use Backhaus and Tikoo's framework to support my thesis and determine KMD's external employer brand as well as their employee attraction to women. To gain a feminist perspective, I must first find which feminist concepts and theories are the most relevant to my thesis.

3.4 Feminist perspectives on organizational communication

Since the mid-19th century, women have claimed their rights in various issues, starting with voting and property rights before moving into issues concerning reproductive rights, marriage, domestic violence, etc. The feminist movement in the 1960s especially highlighted the issue of women's exclusion from certain workspaces, such as upper management and politics (Mumby and Kuhn 2019). Since then, including women in these fields has had a larger focus in society, as well as in individual organizations, as a result of changing societal expectations for workspaces. However, women still meet challenges compared to their male counterparts. In this section, I will present the three main types of feminism and their perspectives on gender at work.

3.4.1 Liberal Feminism

The liberal feminist approach to gender issues at work focuses on creating a level playing field for women, largely focusing on topics of pay inequalities and unequal opportunities for career advancement.

Some of the phenomena women experience include the "glass ceiling", meaning they reach a certain level in an organization and find themselves not receiving further advancement opportunities, even if they are the best candidates compared to their male counterparts (Buzzanell 1995). Rosabeth Moss Kanter is an American sociologist who researched gender at work and identified several factors that may cause the glass ceiling phenomenon and prevent women from advancing in the organizational hierarchy.

In 1977, Kanter's study found that women were often perceived as tokens of their group in the organization. Tokens refer to a person within a minority group, which women are not in a societal sense. However, women in the organizational workspace, especially in higher positions, are a minority within the organization. This gives them token status (Mumby and Kuhn 2019). This status hinders advancement because the visibility that comes from representing a group creates more focus and criticism whenever a mistake is made; thus, they are judged more harshly than their male colleagues. Furthermore, their competent performance is often overlooked because the expectations of performance are much higher when given token status. Because of this, women have to work much harder than their male colleagues to move up the organizational hierarchy (Mumby and Kuhn 2019).

Kanter also found that male members of organizations prefer to hire and work with people who are similar to themselves. She coins this "homosocial reproduction" and explains it by the predictability and comfortable nature of work likeness created in the workspace. This phenomenon does not just affect women but also other minorities, as most higher-positioned employees are white, straight men (Mumby and Kuhn 2019).

A large part of the liberal feminist approach to these challenges is to overcome them with hard work, asserting themselves at work, and making sure they are heard and respected. This approach seeks for women to change their approach to work and their male counterparts and not to change the foundational causes of women being treated and evaluated differently at work. It ultimately puts the responsibility on women (Mumby and Kuhn 2019).

This approach, while providing insight into the reasons behind challenges for women in the workplace, does not seek to solve the issue from the root but rather from the top. Because of this, I find that the approach does not fit my thesis, as external branding is carried out by and

represents the organization rather than individuals. Therefore, the individual woman cannot change how an organization portrays her in external employer branding.

3.4.2 Radical Feminism

Radical feminism is rooted in the same movement of the 1960s as liberal feminism, but it developed and moved in a different direction. Contrasting with the liberal feminism perspectives of gender at work, where genders should be equal, radical feminism is, in a large sense, women-centered (Mumby and Kuhn 2019). Traditional feminine qualities are given greater value; as a result, female-dominated professions such as nursing, teaching, childcare, and hairdressing are also more highly valued. The qualities required in these jobs have traditionally been viewed as less important than those valued in male-dominated jobs, which emphasize traits such as rationality, competitiveness, and independence. Radical feminism highlights the differences between men and women, asserting that each has natural qualities in which they excel but emphasizing that women's qualities should be valued equally to, or even more than, male qualities. Their goal is a matriarchal society over the long-standing patriarchal society (Mumby and Kuhn 2019).

This approach to feminism and gender at work is, as the name suggests, radical and not conceivable in the near future, even though some organizations, such as fitness centers, do accommodate this by offering women-only fitness centers or women-only train carts, for example (Lawford-Smith 2021). I will not be utilizing this perspective, as I focus on a traditionally male-dominated industry while trying to uncover how they can attract more women. Furthermore, my scientific approach, social constructivism, does not align with this type of feminism. In social constructivism, characteristics of women and men are not believed to be natural but rather socially constructed and imposed on men and women (see chapter 2).

3.4.3 Critical Feminism

Critical feminism is a perspective that, in contrast to both liberal and radical feminism, strongly believes that gender is a social construct that is subject to change (Mumby and Kuhn 2019). For example, dresses or draped garments were common clothing items for both men and women for centuries before they came to be seen as feminine (Hwang 2024).
Joan Acker is an influential sociologist within critical feminism who, in 1990, introduced her theory of gendered organizations. She defines her concept of gendered organizations as:

"To say that an organization… is gendered means that advantage and disadvantage, exploitation and coercion, action and emotion, meaning and identity, are patterned through and in terms of a distinction between male and female, masculine and feminine. Gender is not an addition to an ongoing process, conceived as gender neutral. Rather, it is an integral part of those processes, which cannot be properly understood without an analysis of gender" (Acker 1990, p. 146).

In other words, Acker explains that organizations are not gender-neutral when they shape their structures. This is evident in hospitals, where an overwhelming percentage of nurses are women, in contrast to doctors, who are mostly men (Yang 2024). The qualities patients look for in doctors are traditionally associated with men, such as rationality, analytical skills, etc., whereas a nurse's primary job is to care for patients. As such, they are expected to possess empathy, nurturance, and caretaking qualities; qualities often associated with women. Men and women who exhibit qualities not typically associated with their gender in their profession are often perceived negatively in their roles. This means men and women are continuously expected to uphold the gendering of their profession by acting in ways that align with both their gender and job expectations (Mumby and Kuhn 2019).

Critical feminism and Acker reject the idea that women and men have natural qualities, instead asserting that society imposes expectations according to gender. Through this lens of gender, as well as Acker's conceptualization of gender within organizations, I can identify gender codes within KMD and organizational structures and/or values, culture, etc., that disadvantage women or discourage them from the application process. This will allow me to determine which factors need to change to attract more women according to Gendered Organizations theory. This will be carried out to determine KMD's employee attraction within Backhaus and Tikoo's (2004) framework.

4 Theory

In this chapter, I will present and explain the theoretical foundation of my thesis, including Backhaus and Tikoo's theory of Employer Branding (2004) and Acker's Gendered Organizations theory (1990). These theories are useful for my research question, which seeks to answer how KMD can attract more female talent into their organization. I will start by introducing an overview of the employer branding field before presenting Employer Branding by Backhaus and Tikoo (2004), their framework for the components that make up an employer brand. After this, I will present Acker's Gendered Organizations theory and explain which elements I will particularly focus on throughout my thesis.

4.1 Employer Branding by Backhaus and Tikoo

Employer Branding is a theoretical concept and professional practice within organizational communication that argues that employers need to brand themselves to potential and existing employees to gain and retain the desired candidates for employment. Ambler and Barrow created the first conceptualization in 1996, subsequent to Backhaus and Tikoo's contribution to the theory in 2004 with their framework for employer branding as a practice for HRM for carrying out successful employer branding, internally and externally (Backhaus and Tikoo 2004).

Employer branding is, in its simplest form, a set of practices under the umbrella that is employer branding. Under this umbrella exist practices such as developing an employee value proposition (EVP), external marketing, and internal marketing. The EVP is a set of propositions for potential and existing employees that embody the organization and the benefits of employment within an organization in exchange for professional skills, capabilities, and commitment to the organization. Backhaus and Tikoo explain that the propositions include the organization's culture, management style, current employees, employment image, impressions of the organization's product(s), and service quality (Backhaus and Tikoo 2004). However, financial benefits such as salary, bonuses, sick days, etc., as well as the perception of work-life balance, flexibility, career advancement, and job security, also play a role in attracting and creating loyal and motivated employees in an organization (Ambler and Barrow 1996).

Using specific information about the organization and the benefits it offers, HR and marketing managers develop an EVP in their external branding messages to attract the desired employees (Backhaus and Tikoo 2004). This proposition can be communicated using different

methods, such as directly on a career webpage or indirectly on their general website through different modes of communication.

The EVP is included in and parallel to the organization's general branding. For example, if an IT organization generally brands itself on ethical business practices, such as developing systems with consideration for the impact on the environment, its treatment of office workers should be ethical as well. This, among other factors, includes whistleblower schemes, following national labor legislation, etc. However, for an employer brand to truly stand out, an organization must differentiate itself within its industry, focusing on different aspects than its competitors or going the extra mile in certain organizational areas (Backhaus and Tikoo 2004). Take Google, for example: the organization is widely recognized for the unique benefits it offers employees. The functional benefits consist of things such as nap pods, treadmill desks, and free meals (CBS News 2013). The symbolic benefits of Google also play a huge role in their employer brand. First of all, it is an extremely well-known large organization that offers services that many people use each day, multiple times a day. The prestige of working for one of the most famous brands in the world appeals greatly to the symbolic benefits (Faria 2024). These are just examples of elements that make up Google's EVP and make it an attractive employer to many people.

The last aspect of employer branding is internal employer branding, which is the organizational culture, identity, goals, etc., that the employees were "promised" as candidates before and during the recruitment process into the organization, meaning the external branding should align with the internal branding to retain employees after recruitment (Backhaus and Tikoo 2004). An employee whose experiences differ from what was promised will be less motivated and result in worse job performance because they feel cheated into employment. Thus, they will also be more likely to quit. This phenomenon is described as the psychological contract between employee and employer, consisting of employment expectations. To reduce violations of the psychological contract, the organization needs to present accurate and sufficient information about the organization to the candidates before employment (Backhaus and Tikoo 2004).

My thesis will not focus on the internal marketing aspects; consequently, I will not be examining the consequences of a breach of the psychological contract, but rather the contents of the contract that the external branding creates by brand association and employer image. In 2004, Kristin Backhaus and Surinder Tikoo contributed to the field of employer branding with their framework for HR and marketing managers. The framework consists of components to understand employer branding from both a marketing and HR perspective (Backhaus and

Tikoo 2004). According to Backhaus and Tikoo's framework, employer branding is created based on a set of factors that is divided into external and internal employer branding. These factors all play a part in creating the organization's general employer brand. The external factors consist of:

Employer brand associations: the thoughts, ideas, and feelings a brand evokes in a person's mind (Backhaus and Tikoo 2004). For example, a person may associate a brand differently depending on the industry they reside in because the industry evokes associations as well. An IT organization may be associated with men because the skills and abilities of the IT profession and industry are normally associated with male qualities of being rational, analytical, logical, etc. (Withisuphakorn and Jiraporn 2017; Mumby and Kuhn 2019).

However, the brand association is limited to the individual organization and can differ from the industry profession association based on branding efforts. For example, engineering is also considered a male-dominated industry. The National Aeronautics and Space Administration's (NASA) employer brand associations evoke thoughts of gender equality because they brand themselves on providing better opportunities for women, proven by their higher female-to-male ratio than the industry average at 29.52% to 26.9% in 2023 (eeoc.gov, n.d.; swe.org, n.d.). Employer brand associations create and shape the following:

Employer image: ideas, beliefs, and feelings about the employer brand, whether negative or positive, determine the attractiveness of the employer brand, which will lead to more or fewer applicants (Backhaus and Tikoo 2004). For example, large corporations with a desirable employer image, such as Google, will attract more candidates because of their employer image, which includes the status or perceived status that comes with employment, benefits, perceived organizational identity and culture, etc. (Ng 2022).
Employer attraction: The degree of employee attraction the organization has is dependent on external employer branding factors, including brand associations and the employer image (Backhaus and Tikoo 2004).

The following can be categorized as the internal factor(s) of employer branding:
Organizational identity and organizational culture: the determining factors for the degree of employer brand loyalty and, consequently, retention of employees and employee productivity. A positive organizational culture can foster a supportive and creative environment for growth. Moreover, when employees can identify with the organization's identity, it strengthens their sense of belonging and unity with the brand (Backhaus and Tikoo 2004).

The external factor, employer image, is, as mentioned, made up of the employer brand associations created through an organization's marketing efforts. Backhaus and Tikoo argue

that these employer brand associations can be divided into perceived functional and symbolic benefits of working in a specific organization, and that they ultimately create the employer brand associations that shape the employer brand. The functional benefits are described as the objective and factual benefits an employee gains from working at an organization (Backhaus and Tikoo 2004). This includes salary, vacation, sick days, working hours, career advancement, development of professional skills, etc. The symbolic benefits are described as the prestige or social approval of an organization as an employer (Backhaus and Tikoo 2004).

The more prestige or the more a potential employee approves of the employer, the more likely they are to apply there. Factors that determine these are the perceived organizational culture, values, goals, success, etc., that create an image of a desirable employer in more abstract aspects, such as feeling oneness, belonging, being valued, etc., in the organization (Backhaus and Tikoo 2004; Aboul-Ela 2016). I will focus on the external aspects of their framework in my thesis and analysis, as my academic interest lies in employee attraction rather than retention of existing employees.

Backhaus and Tikoo provide managers and scholars with an equal focus on both external and internal employer branding. This framework allows for analyzing employer branding and categorizing the result into the framework, whereas whether the factors within the categorizations are positive, negative, or executed well is irrelevant to the framework but used to determine the success of the employer branding goals, according to known variables within the target group. For example, a 2025 survey of graduates shows that 48% of women find good colleagues important in their job search, compared to 39% of men (ballisager 2025). For my thesis, the internal employer branding is irrelevant because I focus on how KMD can attract more female employees through their external employer branding efforts in their video *KMD – Where ambitions meet experience* (appx. 2). Therefore, I will not focus on internal employer branding, and, consequently, I will only analyze the perceived organizational culture and identity through employer brand associations and determine how these associations impact the employer image and the employee attraction of women. To provide a foundation for the gender perspective, I use Gendered Organizations theory by Acker (1990).

4.2 Gendered Organizations Theory by Joan Acker (1990)

Gendered Organizations theory is a theory described by Acker in 1990. It is based on the concept of critical feminism, which holds that gender is a social construct that changes and evolves over time. Furthermore, critical feminism views gender as a defining factor of

organizations and organizational life (Mumby and Kuhn 2019). Acker supports this in her paper *Hierarchies, Jobs, Bodies: A Theory of Gendered Organizations* (1990), where she states:

"*To say that an organization… is gendered means that advantage and disadvantage, exploitation and coercion, action and emotion, meaning and identity, are patterned through and in terms of a distinction between male and female, masculine and feminine. Gender is not an addition to an ongoing process, conceived as gender neutral. Rather, it is an integral part of those processes, which cannot be properly understood without an analysis of gender*" (Acker 1990, p. 146).

She identifies five different mechanisms of gendering in organizations:

(1) The process of division along lines of gender, including division of labor by gender, allowed behaviors by gender, physical and power-based divisions, meaning men hold the majority of higher positions, and structures within the labor market, families, and the state that allow and maintain these divisions (Acker 1990).

(2) The process of symbolic representations of gender divisions, including language, culture, and imagery that support or resist those divisions. These are typically found in media (advertisements, branding, TV, etc.), culture, fashion, and organizational imagery (such as masculine stereotypes in the imagery of leadership) (Acker 1990).

(3) The process of social interaction between genders often consists of unconscious behaviors and communication patterns between women and men, women and women, and men and men. Communication patterns create and reproduce gender roles and hierarchies. The focus is on how dominance and submission are enacted in social behaviors and not imposed by organizational structures. For example, how men take initiative in meetings or interrupt others, while women are pushed into listening and supporting roles (Acker 1990).

(4) This process focuses on how gender becomes part of individual identity shaped by the three other processes. For example, gender in organizations is internalized and expressed through language (meaning how assertively or formally one speaks), clothing (meaning dressing in a way that aligns with gender expectations), and self-presentation (behaviors that align with gender expectations within an organization) (Acker 1990).

(5) The process argues that gender shapes organizational structure and logic through gendered rules, practices, and values. It is essentially the hidden framework within an organization that determines how the organization and tasks should function. For example,

employees described by terms like logical and efficient reflect masculine gender stereotypes about emotional detachment and control, while employees described as thorough and attentive reflect feminine stereotypes about being caring and nurturing (Acker 1990).

Acker argues that the seemingly neutral concepts of a "job" and a "worker" are gendered in and of themselves because they were carried out by men before women; thus, the attributions and qualities expected in the job are coded as male. Some of these expectations come from the idea of a worker "without a body," meaning that the worker can detach emotionally, is always available, has no caregiving needs, and is not expected to take parental leave. This is also referred to as the "ideal worker" (Acker 1990). Because of this, women are often expected to act like men and hide certain aspects of themselves to succeed, and if they do not, they will fall into the box of women destined to be unsuccessful by default because job designs and performance evaluations are based on male worker norms. This idea of a worker and jobs comes from the traditional male worker who works full- or overtime and does not have any responsibilities outside work because the wife takes care of things at home (Acker 1990). Even with the increased focus on work-life balance in the modern corporate world, the concept of the "ideal worker" with "no body" continues to play a part in what qualities organizations search for in employees. For example, pregnant women, or women of childbearing age and certain relationship status, face greater difficulties in job searching because they are perceived as "pregnancy risks" by the organization (Becker, Fernandes, and Weichselbaumer 2019). Given these challenges, applying the concept of the "ideal worker" to my data allows for an examination of whether KMD's expectations align with this concept and, as a consequence, disadvantage women in their job search.

In her 2006 article *Inequality Regimes: Gender, Class, and Race in Organizations*, Acker expands on her theory of gendered organizations by arguing that gender inequality must be understood in conjunction with racial and class-based inequalities. She emphasizes that focusing on one form of inequality in isolation often leads to the marginalization of others, as these systems are interconnected, both reinforcing and, at times, contradicting each other. Gender cannot be considered separately from race and class, as these dimensions shape one another and result in different lived experiences for the women affected. For instance, a white middle-class woman will experience the workplace differently than a Black working-class woman. Therefore, Acker argues that gender should not be treated as a standalone factor in theories of gender in the workplace (Acker 2006).

While this intersectional perspective is important when analyzing the differences women face within organizational structures compared to men, the focus of this thesis is limited

to the attraction of female employees, utilizing external employer branding initiatives, and how gendering plays an influence. As such, it does not examine the role of race or class in female employee attraction.

I will use the theory to identify the mechanisms of gendering in KMD's employer branding through multimodal analysis (Machin 2007) and Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis (Machin and Mayr 2023) of KMD's video *KMD – Where ambitions meet experience* (appx. 2) to determine how gender impacts and influences their employer brand and employee attraction.

5 Methodology

In this chapter, I will present my methodology, including the methods of analysis. First, I will conduct a method review to determine and argue for my choice of methods. The chapter then proceeds into a presentation of my methods, consisting of Multimodal Analysis by Machin (2007) and Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis by Machin and Mayr (2023). During this, I will argue for the inclusion of certain elements of analysis while arguing for the omission of others. Furthermore, I will present my theoretical approach to interpreting my analysis results within Backhaus and Tikoo's Employer Branding framework (2004) to determine KMD's external employer branding. This evaluation is carried out through a critical feminist lens, informed by Acker's theory of gendered organizations (1990), to assess whether employer brand associations contribute to a gendered organizational employer image that may discourage women from applying for positions at KMD.

5.1 Method Review

In this section, I will present my considerations regarding the choice of methods. The methods I will discuss for multimodal analysis are Gunther R. Kress and Theo van Leeuwen's Multimodal Analysis (2021), Machin's Multimodal Analysis (2007), Machin and Mayr's Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis (2023), and Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) (2010).

For analysis, I have chosen to base my analysis of the video on Machin's multimodal analysis framework rather than Kress and van Leeuwen's. I did this because Machin provides a tangible framework. Furthermore, Machin bases his framework on Kress and van Leeuwen's work (Machin 2007). Therefore, I determined that Machin's work would be appropriate for my analysis, as it incorporates both Kress and van Leeuwen's work as well as his own while providing me with a framework for analysis.

As for my discourse analysis, I chose to utilize Machin and Mayr's Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis, rather than Fairclough's CDA, because I wanted my analysis methods to relate to each other to a certain degree in order to reach a coherent result. Thus, I started searching for critical discourse analysis by Machin. This resulted in the analysis method by Machin and Mayr.

5.2 Methods of analysis

In this section, I will present Multimodal Analysis by Machin (2007) and Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis by Machin and Mayr (2023). Moreover, I will explain my choices regarding the omission and inclusion of elements of analysis.

5.2.1 Multimodal Analysis by David Machin (2007)

Multimodal analysis is a social semiotic approach to visual communication that examines how meaning is constructed through the interaction of different modes. Modes refer to the manner in which something is experienced, carried out, or communicated. In other words, meaning can be generated through various modes, such as types of participants, color choices, typography, modality, and layout, depending on how directly or subtly a message is intended to be conveyed to the audience (Machin 2007). Multimodal communication is often designed to create associations, perceptions, feelings, etc., encouraging the viewer to form their conclusions rather than through instruction on what to think. Visual communication formats that typically include multiple modes of communication are, for example, websites, magazines, brochures, video campaigns, advertisements, and other media where several modes work together to create a certain meaning, association, feeling, or belief about a product, service, or organization (Machin 2007).

In 2007, scholar Machin wrote the book *Introduction to Multimodal Analysis* (2007) for multimodal analysis based on the works of Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen (Machin 2007). I will use this book as a guide for my analysis as well as a tool for understanding Kress and van Leeuwen's approach to multimodality. Machin presents multimodality as a means of communication through visual building blocks that create meaning. The book provides a tool for breaking down these building blocks into individual components in their most basic composition and understanding how they work together to create an overall meaning gathered from the entire input (Machin 2007). The modes of communication in Machin's multimodality include seven overall components: social actors, color, typography, modality, scenography, iconography, and composition (Machin 2007). I will present each of these, explain the nuances within them, and argue for my inclusion or omission of certain components as I go through them, as well as how I use them in my analysis.

Social Actors

Social actors represent people in visual communication. They are also referred to as participants. Their presence serves to convey meaning to the audience, whether through their positioning, actions, or the depiction of specific social groups. In the following, I will explore how social actors can be used to create meaning, beginning with positioning, gaze, angle of interaction, and distance, before continuing through kinds of participants, agency and action, and finally, carriers of meaning (Machin 2007).

Positioning is a tool for aligning the viewer with the social actors in the imaging we are trying to create, according to the message we want to get across. This can be done through the gaze of the participants, which determines the extent to which we want the viewer to engage with the participant. In pictures and videos, the participant can look (gaze) at the camera, giving the impression of looking directly at the viewers. This is a tool for when the creators want the viewer to focus and listen clearly to what is being conveyed at that moment. Here, the creator wants to demand something from the viewer. The demand of the viewer will either be to give information or goods and services (Machin 2007). Of course, this is not a demand in a literal sense, as the viewer cannot provide information, but the creator demands that the viewer listens and thinks about the question asked. For example, an infomercial about misogyny in the workplace ending with a woman looking at the camera and asking, "Is this equality?" will provoke the viewer to think about the question and often reach a conclusion. This conclusion should be in line with the message of the infomercial because of other modes that complement the demanding gaze.

On the other hand, the participants can also look away from the camera and not interact with the viewer. The viewer is not called upon for a response; thus, this is utilized when the creator wants to offer information or offer their goods and services to the viewer (Machin 2007). This is often used in advertisements of goods when the participant is merely for exhibition and not represented as an individual. For example, a trade union advertisement in a women's lifestyle magazine could ask the viewer a question such as, "Are you also worried about being taken seriously in the workplace?" This question, along with no direct address to the viewer and the remaining modes of communication, will insinuate an offer rather than a demand because the trade union advertises and offers its services if the viewer is in a similar situation.

Looking at the camera or not looking at the camera can also determine whether the participants are supposed to be observed as individuals and humanized or whether they merely act as a representation of something. I will analyze the gaze to determine which kinds of social

actors are given individuality and are humanized to assess if there is a difference between the genders that supports or disproves Gendered Organizations theory (see section 4.2).

The second factor of positioning is the angle of interaction. Similarly to demand and offer, the angle of interaction between participants can determine the relationship between the participants and the viewer (Machin 2007). The angles considered in multimodal analysis are the horizontal and oblique, the vertical, and the oblique. Distance from the camera is also a factor to consider. Distance to the participant is part of individualizing and humanizing them. A close-up shot is more personal, as we can see their features more clearly, and it suggests that the participant is supposed to be humanized, recognized, and given an identity (Machin 2007). I will only analyze the distance to the camera, as other modes also determine the closeness or individuality of the participants, such as group or individual shots and gaze.

Kinds of participants

The kinds of participants refer to the people in the visual communication and how they are represented. Examining this, we look at whether they are represented as individuals or groups (Machin 2007). Individuals suggest to the viewer that they are to be related to and humanized. In contrast, collectivization is realized by a group or crowd of people who have something visually in common (clothes, race, striking the same poses). This turns the group into a type rather than individuals whose motivations we understand (Machin 2007).

Furthermore, categorization into either cultural or biological categories can also convey a certain meaning. Cultural categorization is realized through standard attributes of physical features (such as clothing, hairstyle, body adornment, etc.). For example, office workers will be dressed in suits and pencil skirts, wearing glasses and lanyards. These attributes emphasize the sophistication, class, professionalism, and authority of the office workers. Biological categorization is realized through stereotypical physical attributes to invoke negative or positive feelings toward a group (Machin 2007). For example, women might be portrayed according to traditional beauty standards, reinforcing the stereotype of women being valued primarily for their appearance.

The last option for kinds of participants is nonrepresentation, which refers to omitting an actor from an image (Machin 2007). For example, seeing a woman reacting to something negatively omits the actor from the image, which removes the agency of the hidden actor. The woman ends up having something said or done to her instead of someone being shown doing or saying something to her.

I will analyze the kinds of participants to examine how men and women are presented in the video, as well as to determine the kinds of roles and agency they are presented in. This will be carried out through a simultaneous analysis of the kinds of participants and agency and actions. Throughout the analysis, I will discuss the results from the perspective of Gendered Organizations theory (see section 4.2) in order to determine how KMD gender themselves through depictions of divisions of either labor, roles, individuality, or symbolically, for example, through differences in clothing or social interactions.

Agency and actions

Agency and actions are modes that are used to portray social actors in a specific way through the kinds of actions they perform (Machin 2007). There are six processes of agency, consisting of material, behavioral, mental, verbal, relational, and existential processes. Material processes are actions that have consequences and reactions in the physical world. They are used to show proactiveness and intention in the actors carrying them out. Examples of this are verbs like kick, push, eat, etc. Behavioral processes are actions without a material outcome and no physical reaction. Examples of this are verbs like whistle, jump, dance, etc. Mental processes are processes where an actor thinks, evaluates, or senses. Examples include verbs such as think, believe, see, feel, etc. Verbal processes are simply the action of saying or verbalizing. This is realized through verbs such as say, shout, whisper, grunt, etc. Relational processes occur when the actor is represented as being like, or different from, something else. This is realized through verbs such as to be and to have. The final process is existential, where people are represented through verbs of existence, such as is or was (somewhere), etc. (Machin 2007). I will analyze these processes to determine the agency they give women compared to men and whether it plays a role in how women are perceived and gendered. Whether women and men are portrayed passively or actively will contribute to KMD's overall image and employer brand from a critical feminist perspective.

Carriers of Meaning

Carriers of meaning refer to elements combined with the social actors, such as whether they are holding any objects or posing in a certain way to portray a meaning (Machin 2007). For example, a young girl putting on makeup may convey how children grow up too fast. This makes the girl a carrier of meaning rather than an actor with goals. I will not analyze this, as other perspectives can uncover similar meanings. For example, an analysis of iconography will reveal how poses, settings, objects, etc., impact the meaning. I will only analyze poses in

connection with the social actors. The analysis of poses, objects, and photogenia will be presented further in section 5.2.1.5.

Color

Color is a tool that can convey different associations, feelings, and meanings. For example, colors can be associated with objects, such as green with plants or white with snow. But it can also be used to convey more abstract concepts, such as green with hope or white with purity (Tham et al. 2020). This is the associative value of color. Color analysis also concerns itself with features such as brightness, saturation, hue, modulation, purity, differentiation, and luminosity (Machin 2007). I will not analyze color due to the character limitations of this thesis. Furthermore, other modes of communication will provide me with enough input to come to a satisfactory conclusion about KMD's gendering.

Iconography

Iconography concerns itself with how signs, such as sounds, things, concepts, feelings, etc., represent meanings. These signs and meanings can change depending on the culture. For example, language is a set of signs that hold a certain meaning, but these signs for the same meaning change depending on the language or geographical area (Machin 2007). Connotation is the most prevalent part of iconography because it is used to represent ideas and concepts. In advertisements and branding, the sender tries to convince the audience that they reach the thoughts, ideas, and concepts themselves rather than being told what to think through direct communication and denotations (Machin 2007). In multimodal analysis, the main carriers of connotation are poses, objects, settings, and photogenia (Machin 2007).

Every day, when people communicate, the meaning they convey comes from multiple different things, including body language. How we use our bodies to communicate is important because it can indicate if we are insecure, confident, tired, etc. Because of this, poses are used in branding and marketing as well, as they are strong connotes of meaning (Machin 2007). People often draw meaning from associations and observations they have made throughout their lives. For example, a person with their arms in the air stretched above their head is associated with happiness, excitement, freedom, and expression. We draw this connection because this pose is seen when something exciting happens (such as a team scoring in soccer or when riding a rollercoaster). I will analyze poses in my analysis because they can help me discern how the organization represents the genders, whether they are presented similarly or differently, and what this means for the message they are sending about the type of employees

they wish to attract. I will analyze it simultaneously with the analysis of social actors and agency and actions of the participants.

Objects in images are also used to connote meaning. A single object can carry meaning, but often, the objects in an image collaborate in making meaning to convey a single idea (Machin 2007). This is evident, for example, when we see a man in a suit in front of a computer, perhaps with a cup of coffee on his desk. We gather information from the objects, make assumptions based on association, and assume that the man in the photo is a businessman and office worker. If he were wearing a white lab coat and glasses, and the coffee was removed, we might assume he was a doctor or a scientist. Objects are used in various ways in media and imaging to create meaning. Thus, I will also examine the objects seen in the video because objects are often a part of actions. I want to examine the actions the people are carrying out through the video to identify if there is a difference in the actions of women and men and how they interact with their surroundings.

The third carrier of connotation I will present is settings. Settings are used to provide context and create cohesion between the people and objects in images (Machin 2007). For example, an image of a glass of milk seen in a forest during a picnic versus a glass of milk in a family dining room creates different associations. The forest setting connotes health, ecology, and freshness, whereas the family dining room signifies togetherness, domesticity, and homemade qualities. These qualities are transferred to the milk by the setting. I will analyze the settings to examine how the setting influences the audience's perception of the gender of the participants in the video, the gendering of agency and actions, and how this, in combination, portrays the organization and the people within it.

Participants are the fourth carrier of meaning. I will not be presenting this as a separate element, as I have already presented social actors and kinds of participants in section 5.2.1.1. Thus, I will carry out the analysis of participants during the analysis of social actors.

Photogenia is the fifth carrier of meaning and includes the techniques of photography and videography used to emphasize, hide, and frame the image to create meaning. Machin focuses on photography in his analysis method; thus, I will only analyze factors that can reveal information about the individuality of the participants in the video, including distance to the camera and the gaze of the participants. The analysis will uncover how women and men are portrayed and allow me to interpret these representations through the lens of Gendered Organizations theory. This will help assess how such portrayals may influence women's reactions, particularly in terms of how they perceive gender roles within the organization.

Discourse in visual communication

Discourse analysis in visual communication is the analysis of components that create or reproduce existing discourses (Machin 2007). For example, some discourses and common consensus surrounding men and women are the traditional gender roles society has put into place. Men are more logical and analytical, while women are more empathetic and caring (see section 4.2). These discourses play a role in our society, whether we try to break them or strengthen them. In visual communication, discourse is analyzed by examining the people, their actions, the circumstances, the values presented, etc. (Machin 2007). I will not conclude on the discourse of the video but rather discuss the portrayal of gender in the video. A conclusion about the discourse of the video's voiceover narration will be discussed during the Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis and the application of Employer Branding and Gendered Organizations theory (see section 7.2.2).

Modality

Modality in visual communication concerns itself with how true or real visual representations should be perceived. This is realized through different components of stylization or non-stylization (Machin 2007). For example, an image of an office worker with unstyled hair and makeup and a neutral facial expression in natural lighting would be considered a higher modality than an office worker with perfect hair and makeup, a pleasant smile, and perfect lighting. The latter is not unrealistic but has been planned, altered, and styled to fit a narrative. Analyzing modality can be used to reveal the aspects that the sender wants to highlight or conceal with a certain goal in mind. For example, low-modality imaging may aim to hide the imperfections of an organization or highlight the comedic nature of the work. I will not be analyzing this, as it does not change how gender aspects are perceived by the viewer.

Typography

Multimodal analysis emphasizes the importance of analyzing typography as a semiotic resource that contributes meaning beyond the literal content of a text. In multimodal analysis, typography is not neutral. It shapes how a message is perceived, interpreted, and valued. Machin argues that typefaces carry connotations linked to cultural and social associations (Machin 2007). For example, blocky letter fonts may evoke tradition and authority, while curved fonts suggest modernity and simplicity (Machin 2007).

Typography also communicates tone, hierarchy, and emotional appeal. Elements such as font size, spacing, boldness, and layout influence readability and emphasis, guiding the

viewer's attention and framing the communicative intent. Typography is a powerful visual mode that works with images, layout, and language to produce meaning (Machin 2007). I will analyze typography to examine how it constructs emphasis and ideology and put into perspective how potential female employees receive and perceive the messages in the typography.

Composition and Page Layout

Composition and page layout concern itself with how the placement of elements in advertisements influences the perception of the advertisement and product. Furthermore, the placement of elements must not only be placed with consideration for which element is most important and dominant, but also with consideration for how the placement of elements influences the relationship between one another (Machin 2007). I will not be analyzing this, as the components of analysis concern themselves with photography and page layout, which do not fit my data, which is a video. However, I will analyze elements that translate to videography, such as the positioning of social actors, to establish how participants are portrayed and personified in the video.

5.2.2 Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis by David Machin and Andrea Mayr (2023)

Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis (MCDA) is a set of tools to reveal messages that are less apparent to the casual audience. It provides a tool to understand what is being communicated and how it is carried out to hide or highlight certain meanings (Machin and Mayr 2023). For example, a part of Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis is examining the agency of actors, as done in Multimodal Analysis (see section 5.2.1). In MCDA, this analysis is applied to text, speech, and images. The remaining factors analyzed in textual MCDA consist of social actors, metaphors and persuasion, modality and hedging, connotations, and social context (Machin and Mayr 2023). I will only present the textual factors of Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis, as the visual modes are presented in section 5.2.1.

Social actors, as well as agency and actions, are described in section 5.2.1.1. The factors that I examine are similar to those in visual media. The main difference is how actors are described in text rather than presented visually. Furthermore, analysis of adjectives, metaphors, etc., is also part of MCDA. The analysis of social actors will focus on how the actors are presented, either individually or as a group, and whether they are humanized or not. Furthermore, the analysis of social actors will also be combined with how they are presented

using connotations through metaphors, adjectives, and their agency and actions (Machin and Mayr 2023). My analysis of social actors and agency and actions is based on the same principles as in Multimodal Analysis (see section 5.2.1). Analyzing the mentioned elements will contribute to revealing how KMD portrays itself and how it expects an employee or potential employee to be. This will be conducted through the lens of Gendered Organizations theory to contribute to the bigger picture of how KMD genders itself.

Nominalizations are verbs that are transformed into nouns. This takes the action out of the verb and changes the sentence such that actors are not present in the sentence, or the action is not linguistically attributed to the actor (Machin and Mayr, Concealing and taking for granted: Nominalisation and presupposition, 2023). For example, a sentence can be changed from "The CEO dismissed 10% of managers" to "The dismissal of 10% of managers." Here, the verb "dismissed" is changed into its noun form "dismissal," and the actor "the CEO" is taken out of the sentence. This results in no one having or taking responsibility for dismissing the managers. It is a subtle way to try and lower responsibility and lessen criticism of the CEO. In other words, they work as a tool for the abstraction of actions. It focuses on the concepts of something rather than the action (Machin and Mayr, Concealing and taking for granted: Nominalisation and presupposition, 2023). I will analyze this to determine how and if KMD uses nominalizations to construct and support a gendered discourse hidden by abstraction or conceptualization of actions.

Connotation is a tool for creating meaning indirectly. The audience will understand the meaning even if not directly referred to because the audience will draw from experiences and associations with certain words to create the meaning (see section 5.2.1). If I change the sentence "The CEO dismissed 10% of managers" to "The CEO dismissed 10% of female managers," the first sentence can seem unfair but understandable because it is sometimes a necessary evil in organizations. The second sentence speaks to the audience's values and ideology, making them feel stronger emotions about the statement and action because it connotes that the organization is discriminating against women or preferring male employees. I will analyze this simultaneously with adjectives to find how they use adjectives to create connotations to portray the social actors and KMD in the voiceover narration.

Adjectives are also a strong connoter of meaning as a discursive tool. They can frame subjects negatively, positively, or neutrally by the choice of adjectives. Furthermore, adjectives can be used to reinforce ideologies and assumptions in society, whether they are racial, gendered, class-based, or something else (Machin and Mayr, Analyzing semiotic choices: Words and images, 2023). An employee story may describe a female employee as "reliable and

caring." Both adjectives positively describe the woman, but while "reliable" is a gender-neutral term, "caring" reinforces traditional gender stereotypes associated with emotional labor (Mumby and Kuhn 2019). I will examine this to find how KMD describes and genders itself in relation to Acker's theory (see section 4.2).

When we communicate, we use many tricks in order to conceal or reveal certain information. One of them is the modality system that we use to communicate certainty, doubt, factuality, probabilities, etc., about the statements we make. This is realized through modal verbs, modal adjectives (and adverbial equivalents), as well as hedging (Machin and Mayr, Committing and evading: Truth, modality and hedging, 2023). In the sentence, "The board of directors will consist of 50% women and 50% men next year," there are no signs of uncertainty. Contrastingly, there is certainty and commitment in the statement, realized by the modal verb "will." In comparison, the sentence "The board of directors should be about 50% women and 50% men next year" signals uncertainty by hedging, using the adverbial "about," and the modal verb "should" signals obligation, but no commitment to realizing it. I will not be analyzing this, as modality does not change how KMD portrays its organization and the associations it makes through the other modes that signal connotations about gender.

Machin and Mayr also outline an approach to the analysis of metaphors and their persuasive significance. The approach includes defining the target (the object or concept we want to describe) and the source domain (the concept we make the metaphor from) of the metaphor to identify its purpose. Furthermore, the approach should include the implications of utilizing metaphors. The final step is to relate the metaphor to other communication modes and see if the context offers additional information (Machin and Mayr, Persuading with abstraction: Rhetoric and metaphor, 2023). In a corporate brochure, a female office worker is described as "the engine driving the company forward." Here, the target domain is the female employee, while the source domain is a mechanical engine. This metaphor constructs her role in terms of efficiency and productivity, potentially reinforcing ideals of human labor as machine-like. If accompanied by a dynamic image of the woman in motion and bold, industrial-style typography, the multimodal realization further intensifies the metaphor's persuasive impact. I will analyze metaphors to determine if they contribute to the gendering of KMD.

In the second part of this analysis, I will determine the discourses that KMD produces or reproduces throughout the voiceover narration and determine which discourses take hegemony based on the linguistic part of Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis.

5.2.3 Methods of Analysis Summary

To summarize, the analysis will consist of and be divided into the social actors that are seen in the video. This gives me the freedom to analyze the relevant modes connected with the specific social actors simultaneously to make a conclusion about how KMD views gender aspects. This includes kinds of participants, gaze, agency and actions, and carriers of meaning such as poses. After this, the analysis will move into the iconography of objects and settings, and lastly, I will analyze the typography in the video. The second part of the analysis is the Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis, which focuses on connotation through adjectives, pronouns, social actors, agency and action, nominalizations, and metaphors. This analysis will also be divided into social actors to determine how KMD gender themselves and their audience. To wrap the discourse analysis up, I will discuss the different discourses found in the voiceover narration.

The conclusion of both analyses will be in the form of an application of Employer Branding theory by Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) and Gendered Organizations theory by Acker (1990).

5.3 Application of the Employer Branding Framework and the Gendered Organizations Theory

The findings derived from the multimodal analysis and Multimodal Critical Discourse analysis form the foundation for applying two key theoretical frameworks: Acker's Gendered Organizations theory (1990) and the Employer Branding Model by Backhaus and Tikoo (2004). These frameworks are used in combination to evaluate how KMD constructs its employer brand and how this branding may influence the perception and attraction of potential female employees.

The application of Gendered Organizations theory enables an investigation into how KMD may produce or reproduce gendered coding, structures, and divisions through its external employer branding. This includes examining how gender is symbolically constructed through visual representation (e.g., actions, individuality, grouping, interaction) and discursively maintained through values and culture communicated in the voiceover narration (see chapters 4 and 7). The analysis considers whether men and women are portrayed differently and whether these portrayals align with traditional gender roles, such as men being portrayed as active leaders and women as passive observers. This will help determine how gender is embedded into KMD's organizational identity and how such representations may contribute to sustaining a male-dominated organizational image. In turn, these gendered portrayals inform and shape

the Employer Brand framework by Backhaus and Tikoo. They create employer brand associations with the audience, particularly women. These associations influence the employer image that potential female applicants construct in their minds and play a large part in KMD's employee attraction among potential employees. The analysis will, therefore, contribute to understanding whether KMD's employer branding helps explain the imbalance of KMD's female-to-male employee ratio (KMD 2023).

The employer brand associations will be categorized into functional and symbolic benefits to clarify the nature of the employer image that KMD projects. Functional benefits refer to tangible attributes such as career development opportunities, salary, sick days, etc., while symbolic benefits reflect the emotional and identity-based associations tied to working at KMD. By framing these benefits within a gendered context, the analysis aims to assess how inclusive or exclusive KMD's external branding is of women and female norms, qualities, etc. This combined application will be carried out in the evaluation and discussion chapter of the thesis.

5.5 Limitations

In this section, I will discuss my theoretical limitations and acknowledge my bias in approaching and analyzing the research problem.

This thesis is guided by a gender-focused perspective, specifically examining how a male-dominated organization can attract more women. Therefore, my analysis is carried out with a critical feminist perspective, informed by Gendered Organizations theory by Acker (1990). Because of this, the attention in my analysis is directed toward how gender is embedded in organizational discourses and branding. Specifically, it focuses on identifying gendered language, qualities, values, and discourses that influence women's willingness to apply for a job at KMD. Consequently, the analysis and results may present a more critical view of KMD's employer brand than would be the case in a study with a broader or neutral perspective. Had the focus only been on evaluating the overall effectiveness of KMD's employer branding, regardless of gender, the results and conclusions might have been significantly different. Furthermore, my approach to the data is much more critical than the average audience, and this may lead to me being critical of elements in the branding that the average viewer would either interpret differently or not notice.

Furthermore, due to the qualitative nature of my thesis, the analysis is based on a single piece of employer branding material. This limited data set does not allow for definitive conclusions about KMD's overall employee attraction. A broader data set, such as multiple branding campaigns, social media content, website messaging, or recruitment materials, would provide a more comprehensive basis for evaluation. However, given the qualitative nature as well as the scope and limitations of this thesis, an analysis to that extent is not warranted; thus, the selected material serves as a case study on how gendered organizational aspects impact employee attraction among women. However, it is important to note that this approach is a deliberate choice, as the aim of this thesis was not to provide a comprehensive analysis of KMD's entire employer brand but to qualitatively examine how gendering in external employer branding may impact the ability to attract female employees into an organization. Therefore, the analysis is limited to KMD's external branding materials with no insight into internal employer branding practices. KMD's external employer brand will not fully represent their values; thus, my conclusion about gendered organizational values, practices, interactions, etc., may not fully represent KMD's organization. Because of this, it is not possible to make a general judgment about KMD's gender dynamics. When I refer to gendered aspects within my analysis and conclusion, they are only based on an external perspective of the organization through KMD's employer branding video *KMD - Where ambitions meet experience* (appx. 2).

6 Empirical Data

In this chapter, I will present my data collection method, including my criteria for the data. The data for this thesis consists of a video produced by KMD as part of the organization's employer branding efforts. The video will provide insight into how KMD constructs and communicates its employer brand to attract potential employees. Given the qualitative nature of this thesis, my data collection method consisted of purposive sampling, where the data was chosen based on relevance to my research question and the criteria hereof.

The selection of the video consisted of two main criteria: (1) the data had to be produced by a male-dominated organization to align with my focus on gender and employer branding. KMD meets this criterion as seen in their diversity report from 2023, where 32.6% of employees were women (KMD 2023), (2) the data had to represent employer branding initiatives targeted at attracting new employees. This includes the use of messaging, visuals, and narratives that aim to present the organization as an attractive workplace that emphasizes organizational values and workplace culture (appx. 2).

The selected video thus provides a suitable and relevant basis for a critical and multimodal analysis of how employer branding messages are constructed and what gendered discourses may be embedded within them.

The video is a typical example of employer branding. A thorough presentation and phasal account is enclosed in the appendix. The transcription of the video with line numbering is also available in the appendix (see appx. 1 and 2). The video *KMD -Where ambitions meet experience* was released on October 16, 2020. The video is not part of a campaign; thus, I conclude it is part of their general marketing and employer branding efforts.

7 Analysis

In this chapter, I will analyze the video *KMD - Where ambitions meet experience* (appx. 2). The analysis will be carried out with a multimodal approach; specifically, I will analyze the video and visual modes with Machin Multimodal Analysis (see section 5.2.1). Moreover, the voiceover narration will be analyzed with Machin and Mayr's Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis (see section 5.2.2). Only the linguistic elements of Machin and Mayr's analysis will be examined in the voiceover narration during the Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis. A final evaluation of the employer image and employee attraction of KMD's video will be presented in the evaluation and discussion chapter (see section 8.1).

7.1 Multimodal Analysis of KMD - Where ambitions meet experience

In this section, I will analyze KMD's marketing video, *KMD - Where ambition meets experience* (appx. 2). The elements of analysis consist of social actors, including gaze, representation, agency and actors, and iconography, including poses, objects, and setting (see section 5.2.1).

7.1.1 Social Actors and Agency and Actions

The video *KMD - Where ambitions meet experience* shows us a variety of social actors. Throughout the video, we see 21 different people who either show up as individuals or as a group. In phase one of the video, the first participant we are presented to is Eva Berneke, the CEO of KMD. She appears twice throughout the video, both times as an individual (appx. 2, phase 1 and 6). She is presented as an individual to underline her status as the CEO and voiceover of the video. In other words, she is an important person for the organization and for the message to get across. Her motivation is clear to the audience as she looks directly into the camera, demanding the attention of the viewer. Looking into the camera and addressing the audience is described as a demand gaze (see section 5.2.1) and is utilized in instances of demanding information or goods and services. However, in this instant, Berneke says, "Do you wanna know what it is?" (appx. 1, l. 2), which is more aligned with the "offer" gaze, where the participant does not look at the camera (Machin 2007). However, since the method of analysis is usually reserved for still images, modes can be analyzed and used differently for video material. Thus, while the gaze is demanding attention, the function of the demand is to create attention by teasing information that follows the question.

Berneke is positioned near the camera using a closeup shot, which serves both to humanize and personify her while simultaneously establishing her authority (Machin 2007). This effect becomes especially clear when considering the combination of modes: the short distance to the camera, her demanding gaze, and the on-screen tag identifying her as the CEO of KMD. Furthermore, Berneke is the only participant whose name is revealed (appx. 2, phase 1). Her role as both the CEO and voiceover narrator gives her the authority to be identified and personified, reinforcing her position as the central figure of the message. Presenting an identifiable individual to the audience likely aims to capture the audience's attention and enhance the credibility of the message being conveyed. Additionally, she is the only participant portrayed solely as an individual throughout the video (appx. 2). She is never shown interacting with others or in frame with others, which further emphasizes her leadership role and authority within the narrative.

The CEO being portrayed as a woman challenges the Gendered Organizations theory, which argues that organizations gender themselves by division of labor (see section 4.2). CEO is a position typically held by men, especially in male-dominated industries such as the IT industry (Withisuphakorn and Jiraporn 2017). Seeing a woman in the role of CEO can be viewed as a sign of progress toward more gender-integrated leadership positions. It suggests that traditionally male-dominated roles are becoming more accessible to women. However, the discourse analysis of Berneke's voiceover narration (see section 7.2) reveals that KMD emphasizes masculine coded qualities and presents a clear image of the "ideal worker," someone ambitious, adaptable, and driven. As Berneke is not only the CEO but also the narrator and most prominent individual in the video, these traits are implicitly associated with her as well. Since KMD frames these qualities as essential for their employees, the implication is that she, too, must embody them. Consequently, although Berneke represents a female figure in a position of power, her portrayal reinforces the idea that professional success at KMD depends on aligning with masculine coded qualities and norms. This suggests that women must conform to dominant masculine ideals to succeed within KMD.

The second individual I will examine is the man who appears in the second phase of the video. His first scene presents him as an individual with a closeup shot in order to identify and humanize him. The second time, he appears with a woman accompanying him. Later in the video, he is seen as part of a group of 15 people (appx. 2, phase 2) and later as a presenter on a project in front of a table full of women. Lastly, he appears on the phone (appx. 2, phase 4). His consistent role throughout the video makes him a notable social actor. The mix of individual shots and a group shot identifies him as both an individual whom the audience is

supposed to identify with and humanize, but also as part of a team and a group to showcase the cooperation of KMD's employees. His multiple appearances also tell his story within KMD, from a notable worker to a team member and a person of importance and authority. As aforementioned, he is seen performing different tasks in his role as an important part of the story. His actions and agency can be divided into material and verbal processes (see section 5.2.1). For example, he is seen in the material process of presenting at a meeting in phase four, in front of a group of women (appx. 2, phase 4). This act is performed with an end goal in mind: first, to inform the team, and second, to prepare for organizational tasks based on the content of the presentation. Furthermore, presenting usually includes actively performing tasks (changing slides, drawing, or writing on a board). Material processes are utilized to show intention, drive, and proactiveness in the participants and are usually carried out by important participants in a piece of communication (see section 5.2.1). This furthermore highlights his role as a notable participant in the video. This process of presenting also involves verbal processes, as he is also seen performing three times, once in phase three and twice in phase four (appx. 2, phases 3 and 4). Firstly, he appears in conversation with the woman who accompanied him in phase two. Secondly, he speaks during his presentation, and finally, he is seen talking on the phone. The verbal processes of an actor can represent different attributions depending on situational context. When he presents, he is authoritative and in control because the situation calls for the full attention of the team members. But when he is seen casually talking with his coworker in phase three, he comes across as more personal and relatable to the audience. Lastly, he is portrayed talking on the phone in phase four, in what is presumably a business call. In the context of the corporate setting and his otherwise important role in the video, I can interpret that the act of talking on the phone implies that he has a certain degree of responsibility and that he is a valuable worker at KMD.

From the perspective of Gendered Organizations theory, the image of a man presenting to a meeting exclusively with women as observers is a classic example of the gendered division of labor and the process of social interaction between genders. Regarding division of labor, the man is positioned as the knowledgeable, proactive, and authoritative figure, occupying the active role, while the women are imposed the passive, receptive roles as observers. This reflects a traditional division of labor in which authority, leadership, and competence are associated with masculinity, whereas listening, observing, and emotional attentiveness are coded as feminine and subordinate (Mumby and Kuhn 2019). Presenting in a professional context typically requires emotional regulation, confidence, and strong rhetorical skills, which are traits that have historically been constructed as masculine within organizational cultures (Acker

1990). The man's position as the speaker not only reinforces these gendered expectations but also visually communicates that expertise and leadership are male. In contrast, the women are not shown engaging in any activity but are instead shown as passive observers. In other words, they are presented in existential processes of "being" rather than in material processes, thereby reinforcing their secondary status. This visual arrangement reproduces and legitimizes the discourse that leadership is masculine while women are positioned as supporters or passive participants. Despite the dominating presence of women in numbers, their lack of agency in the image aligns with Acker's argument that organizations continually reproduce gender hierarchies through organizational practices, roles, and visual symbols, even in seemingly neutral or inclusive contexts (Acker 1990).

The woman accompanying the man in the second phase makes an identical first impression. Both are introduced through individual closeup shots and appear together shortly after, facing and talking to each other (appx. 2, phases 2 and 3). This framing suggests that the audience should perceive them as equally important participants. However, in contrast to the man, the woman appears only three times in total, during phases two, three, and four, and is not shown performing any tasks (appx. 2, phases 2, 3, and 4). Her role lacks narrative development and does not contribute meaningfully to the overall storyline of the video. Her level of agency is also noticeably different compared to the man's. While he is depicted through material and verbal processes, she is shown in verbal, behavioral, and existential ones, neither of them resulting in any tangible action or visible impact on her surroundings. In the third phase, the woman is seen engaging in conversation with the man she appeared with during the second phase (appx. 2, phase 3). Engaging in the conversation on equal footing with the man gives her the same attributions as the man in this context: relatable, friendly, and personal to the audience. However, the image and the action do not give her any professional qualities or credibility. Moreover, she is seen in the fourth phase, walking toward the camera while maintaining eye contact (appx. 2, phase 4). The action of walking is categorized as a behavioral process in which the actor performs an act without any impact on the surroundings. Consequently, she is still not given any attributions that could describe her professional capabilities or give her positive qualities.

The remaining people are shown as a group throughout the video. The most obvious sign of this is in phase two, where 15 people are shown as a unit (appx. 2, phase 2). They are collectivized by their clothing, which consists of casual business dress and lanyard badges. This symbolizes that they are grouped and collectivized based on professional work, that they work toward the same goals, though the goals are unknown. They are more anonymous with

their intentions and common goals. As a result of the grouping and lack of individual perspective, they are merely identified by their roles as office workers.

The group consists of 10 women and five men, which shows that KMD is conscious about the ratio of women to men and the gender representation they wish to present. This is interesting because a quick look into their diversity report from 2023 shows that women make up less than one-third of the organization, at 32.6%, compared to men, at 67.4% (KMD 2023). Ultimately, KMD has purposely gathered more women to appear more mixed and appeal to potential employees who value gender equality. This carefully curated gender composition is not only visible in the number of individuals presented but also in how they are visually represented.

The business dress is, as mentioned, not typical office worker attire, such as exclusively suits and pencil skirts, but more relaxed and casual. The men are dressed in formal shirts, typically associated with suits; however, they are not wearing complete suits, as they all lack ties, and some of them lack suit jackets. The women, on the other hand, are wearing cardigans, blazers, denim jackets, and blouses, outfits that align with a business casual dress code while still incorporating elements of traditional business dress. For example, the blonde woman at the front is wearing an oversized blazer, an article of clothing reminiscent of the suit jackets traditionally worn by men in professional settings over the decades (appx. 2, phase 2). While the women appear to have more freedom in how they express themselves through clothing, their clothing choices still need to conform to a particular standard of what is considered appropriate for business or business casual, standards shaped by men's business dress (Casanova 2015). It is noteworthy that men's dress code functions largely as a uniform and that this uniformity also influences what is deemed acceptable for women. This suggests that although KMD allows women to express femininity, it also expects them to adopt certain masculine norms.

Looking at the stance the group is portrayed with, they are seen posing with their arms crossed and looking into the camera. The crossed arms traditionally have been thought to carry connotations of being detached and unresponsive to messages coming one's way (Baum 2019). However, this meaning is not absolute and can be altered based on situational context (Zielinski 2001). In this case, the group's direct eye contact and subtle smiles or smirks convey not detachment but rather confidence and pride that, with the body pose, shows a touch of assertiveness. The body language and facial expressions reflect how organizations construct and reinforce the symbolic representations of gender through the video (see section 4.2). The confident and even slightly arrogant expressions of some of the participants align with

masculine coded norms of professionalism, where dominance, self-assuredness, and assertiveness are valued. Although both men and women in the image express these qualities, the underlying message remains in the gendered ideal of professionalism and the professional or "ideal worker," shaped by masculine standards (Acker 1990). These expectations are imposed on women due to workplace culture. Ultimately, the women themselves are a part of reproducing the gendering of KMD.

In phases two, four, and five, different semi-close shots of the people from the group are presented while they sit at their desks or attend meetings (appx. 2, phases 2, 4, and 5). These shots appear to serve two purposes: to humanize the group and to enable the audience to identify individual members (Machin 2007). However, the similarity in framing, objects, actions, and settings emphasizes their collective identity rather than individuality. While the audience is given the tools to recognize them, their intentions and goals remain anonymous and are instead merged with those of the group. They are not assigned specific roles beyond that of office workers, an identity that is assumed due to the objects and clothing seen with them and the video's organizational context and subject matter.

In phase two, the group's members gaze directly into the camera during their individual shots, further suggesting that KMD attempts to give them a sense of identity and presence (appx. 2, phase 2). As previously mentioned, the direct gaze often functions as a demand for engagement from the viewer (Machin 2007). Yet the anonymity of the group creates ambiguity about those demands. The continuity from phase one to two could suggest that their goal and demands are similar to those of Eva Berneke, the CEO, who asserts a clear demand for attention in phase one. Consequently, it can be argued that the group's function is to sustain or reinforce the attention that Eva Berneke established in phase two, supporting her presence rather than introducing independent narratives or intentions.

In phase four, the group members are shown working collaboratively (appx. 2, phase 4). This is conveyed through a sequence of individual shots showing them engaged in tasks while looking out of frame, followed by similar shots of other members in identical settings. For instance, one shot features a man sitting and facing left, followed by a shot of a woman positioned on the opposite side, facing right but also looking left. Both are framed with the same background and are filmed over the shoulder of someone seated across from them, suggesting a circular meeting setup. Unlike in phase two, where the group members gaze directly into the camera, none of the members in phase four look into the camera. This gaze is described as the offer gaze and functions to provide the viewer with insight into KMD's collaborative work culture, subtly reinforcing the organization's emphasis on teamwork

(Machin 2007). The interaction between the group members is balanced between the genders, hence why this scene does not portray any particular underlying gender structures. However, an argument about the imbalance in the number of women to men in the meeting could suggest that women are not part of the collaborative efforts to the same extent as men, which would further underline the division of labor within the video.

Part of the group, a woman dressed in a light-colored denim jacket, can be spotted on the bottom right of the image (appx. 2, phase 2). She is seen multiple times throughout the video but always in the presence of others; thus, she is not an individualized participant in the video. In phases four and five, she is seen drawing on a transparent board, with a male coworker observing (appx. 2, phases 4 and 5). This contrasts with the dynamic in phase four, where a Black man presents while a group of women observes. Here, the woman is doing the material process of drawing, an action with a tangible outcome, thereby positioning her as an active participant with a defined role and purpose within KMD (see section 5.2.1). Notably, the man in this scene has a passive, observant role, contradicting the gender division of labor of traditional gendered organizations, as outlined in Acker's (1990) theory, in which men are usually in positions as leaders and women as subordinates.

This visual shift suggests an intentional challenge to established gender norms within organizational settings, highlighting a moment of role reversal that complicates the broader narrative of male dominance in professional contexts. However, looking at the overall picture that KMD paints with the video, they still gender themselves clearly, showing tendencies to lean toward expected masculine traits of clothing, social interaction between genders, and division of labor between genders (see section 4.2).

7.1.2 Iconography

I have discussed poses in the previous section, and in this section, I will examine the objects and settings that also contribute to the meaning potential of the video.

The video takes place within an office environment, assumed to be KMD's domicile (appx. 2). The shots shift between meeting rooms, open-plan offices, and communal areas. A professional domicile and office environment connote professionalism and work, meaning that the people within them are competent, goal oriented, and functioning within an organizational hierarchy and structure. Returning to the example of the presentation in phase four, the setting provides clear cues that the man is delivering a formal, professional presentation as part of a project for KMD (appx. 2, phase 4). The organizational context signals to the audience that this is a workplace scenario. For example, the type of display used is one commonly found in

schools, universities, and corporate settings. These associations allow the audience to find a common context for the given information: a meeting room within an office environment. Had the setting and objects been different, the interpretation would have changed accordingly. For example, if the scene had taken place in a garden and the man was holding a wand, the audience might have assumed he was performing a magic trick at a social event. In that case, the power dynamic would shift: the man would be viewed as an entertainer with limited authority, while the women observing would be positioned as those in control, as hosts or clients. However, because the presentation takes place in an office setting, with a display commonly found in professional contexts, the dynamic changes. The man holds the role of knowledge and authority, controlling the narrative, while the women are passive observers there to receive information. Thus, the office setting and objects within it are not neutral to the meaning potential but play a key role in constructing and reinforcing roles and hierarchy within the scene. In both scenarios, the presenter is the active agent; however, their interpretations differ depending on context. In the office setting, the presenter is perceived as knowledgeable, authoritative, and in control, traits traditionally associated with masculinity. While the presenter in the other scenario is seen as entertaining, fun, and under control, traits not associated with power or other masculine qualities, such as drive, resilience, etc. This comparison exemplifies Acker's argument of organizations being inherently gendered, not just through structures but also symbolically through symbolism in settings and objects (see section 4.2). The situational context legitimizes certain behaviors and traits that are coded as masculine. Therefore, regardless of the presenter's gender, fulfilling the role of a competent presenter requires the possession or adoption of masculine traits.

7.1.3 Typography

The last mode of the video I will examine is the typography appearing at the end of the video in phase six. In the very last moments of the video, the logo of KMD and a web link is displayed on a black screen, followed by the video's slogan: "*Where ambition meets experience*" (appx. 2, phase 6). The words ambition and experience are stylized in bold and capitalized letters, visually emphasizing their importance. This suggests that KMD wants the audience to notice those specific words, and the other words "where" and "meets" hold little significance in this sentence. This is also described as distributing weight in a sentence to highlight certain words and shape meanings and interpretation (Machin 2007). The bold, capitalized, almost blocky font suggests tradition and authority as opposed to curved and thin fonts that evoke more feminine associations of modernity and simplicity (Machin 2007). This suggests that KMD

wants to make an impact with the slogan and typography, but while doing so, they code their organization toward more masculine than feminine associations (see section 4.2). Furthermore, the styling suggests that KMD intends to highlight the traits of ambition and experience as core to the organization's identity and as desirable attributes in potential employees. However, the choice of using these words is not without consequence. The word ambition is a trait often expected of and associated with men in higher positions within an organization. Of course, women have ambition as well, but these words are more likely to attract men than women because they are masculine coded (see section 4.2). Furthermore, women tend to underestimate their abilities more than men when superlative words such as ambition and similar words are used, and they consequently self-select out of these jobs (Castilla and Rho 2023). As a result, by emphasizing the word ambition, KMD excludes or discourages potential female employees. This demonstrates that even subtle choices in typography and wording can reproduce gender norms in organizations, aligning with Acker's argument that even "neutral" practices or language can reflect the gender preferences or gendering of the roles within an organization (see section 4.2).

7.2 Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis

In this section, I will carry out a discourse analysis on the voiceover narration of the video *KMD - Where ambition meets experience* (appx. 2). The voiceover narration has been transcribed and is enclosed as appendix 1. The analysis will be divided into two parts. Part one will include an examination of the linguistic elements (social actors, agency and action, nominalizations, metaphors, and adjectives), and part two will examine the discursive practices that determine the discourse KMD creates with the video and the discourse that takes hegemony.

7.2.1 Linguistic Analysis

The linguistic analysis will include a breakdown of the social actors and their portrayals, the agency and actions of social actors, KMD's use of metaphors to portray messages, and their use of adjectives and nominalizations to create associations and meaning. In the voiceover narration, the first social actor presented is KMD, described by their proper name "KMD" (appx. 1, l. 1). Describing themselves by their proper name instead of a pronoun gives them a distinct identity. This naming strategy ensures that the audience recognizes which organization is being referenced, reinforcing brand presence from the outset. Furthermore, KMD presents

themselves as a group in the voiceover narration rather than individuals through the pronouns "we" (appx. 1, ll. 2, 5, 13) and "us" (appx. 1, l. 11), which are utilized throughout the voiceover narration. These are used exclusively for KMD and not used to include the viewer. This is evident by the context in which they appear. For example, the sentence "[...] we believe we have the secret recipe for success. You wanna know what it is?" (appx. 1, l. 2) implies that the "we" (KMD) knows something that the audience does not. They further underline this exclusive "we" through "We have the experience, do you have the ambition?" (appx. 1, l. 13), which describes how KMD and the audience have distinct roles and qualities. KMD possesses the experience, while the audience is challenged to bring ambition. Rather than creating a sense of unity or shared identity with the viewer, the use of "we" emphasizes KMD's institutional power and insider status, while "you" positions the viewer as an outsider who must prove their worth to gain access. The pronouns "we" and "us" are used to underline that KMD is a group of people and just a workplace. However, the group categorization anonymizes the group, meaning we do not know who they are and will automatically group them as employees of KMD or rather as KMD themselves. Their intentions and goals are also rather anonymous as a consequence of this grouping. This is further proved by the processes in which they are presented (see section 5.2.1). KMD is described mainly in relational processes that describe states, qualities, and identities (see section 5.2.1). Specifically, they are described using the verbs "is," "being," "becoming" (appx. 1, l. 1), "have" (appx. 1, ll. 2, 5, 13), and "has" (appx. 1, l. 5). The other process they are described in is the mental process, realized by the verb "believe" (appx. 1, l. 2). Mental processes and the word "believe" give KMD a role as a thoughtful actor capable of having a mind. "Believe" is used along with the pronoun "we," thus underlining that KMD is made up of people who have the abilities to think, process, understand, etc. In conclusion, KMD is described as a passive actor through the verb processes for the benefit of describing KMD's state of being and relational aspects of KMD. However, the narration also utilizes several adjectives to describe KMD and convey meaning to the audience. For example, KMD is described as a "leading" software provider (appx. 1, l. 1), a "European" software player (appx. 1, ll. 1–2), and "unique" (appx. 1, l. 12). The adjective "leading" is an adjective that connotes a positive meaning of KMD being first in areas of IT in the industry. It connotes that KMD is dominant and ranks high and consequently holds a lot of power in the IT industry. Furthermore, it implies success, innovation, and recognition by professional peers. The adjective "unique" suggests that KMD is recognizable in the IT industry with a distinct identity that separates them from the rest. However, they do not follow this up with how they are unique, keeping it very vague. The audience is encouraged to come to this conclusion

themselves, in the context of the entire message being conveyed in the voiceover narration. These adjectives "leading" and "unique" are positive either by themselves or as realized by the context in which they reside: business and the IT industry. In the context of Gendered Organizations theory, the use of the adjective "leading" to describe KMD invokes associations with traditionally masculine coded roles. Someone who leads, or a "leader," carries connotations of authority, control, and decision-making, qualities historically attributed to men within organizational hierarchies (see section 4.2). The decision to describe KMD by this term further categorizes KMD as a masculine organization, which contributes to the difference in female-to-male employees. KMD also uses nominalizations to describe themselves by association. In the narration, the noun "provider" (appx. 1, l. 1), derived from the verb "provide," is used to describe KMD as an organization that delivers services, is reliable, and delivers functional products to its clients and customers. Furthermore, the noun "player" (appx. 1, l. 2), derived from the verb "play" in a business context, connotes that KMD is a competitive business that influences the market. Here, the nominalizations are not used in order to hide something necessarily but to highlight certain aspects through associations of roles people play in different contexts. The noun "provider" evokes associations with the image of the "breadwinner," traditionally understood as the male family member responsible for securing income and financial stability. The phrase "putting food on the table" is often attributed to the role of a provider in the traditional family setting (Chesley 2016). Furthermore, the noun "player," used in competitive environments of sports, music, gaming, etc., has been attributed to the quality of becoming or remaining dominant in certain areas because of the competitive nature of the contexts in which the word is used. These two nominalizations further prove that KMD view themselves through a masculine lens. The second social actor in the narrative can be categorized as "employees." The narration does not use that word for them but hints toward them using nouns such as "people" (appx. 1, l. 7), "person," "someone" (appx. 1, l. 8), and "who" (appx. 1, l. 9). These references indirectly point to both current and potential employees of KMD, focusing on the qualities and competences they either possess or are expected to possess to be part of the organization. The "people" are categorized as a group in the narrative and not identified, individualized, or recognizable to the audience because of their broad and vague descriptions of them. It serves to create a sense of shared experiences and qualities without specifying who is included. However, contextual clues guide the audience toward the conclusion that "people" refers to employees and/or potential employees. For example, the line "Experience… Well, we have plenty of that [...]. It takes a long history of trying, failing, [...] to find the people who possess that extra level of ambition" (appx. 1, ll. 5–7) implies that

KMD's experience is the result of having already found such individuals. Thus, the reference to "people" subtly links the organization's success and organizational identity to those who possess specific, desirable traits, particularly "ambition," a quality that, as previously discussed, is often coded as masculine within organizational discourse (see section 7.1.3).

"People" is used to describe larger anonymous groups, while "person" is the individual equivalent of that. Although "person" refers to a single individual, it remains nonspecific and non-identifying, meaning it can refer to anyone. The pronoun "who" maintains this anonymity, as it does not refer to a clearly defined subject but functions to generalize. Similarly, the use of "someone" aligns with "person" in terms of usage and semantic meaning but is further anonymous because "someone" is associated with a person you or the speaker do not know the identity of. This reinforces the generalizations of the identity of the social actors being described in the narrative. The categorization of "employees" that encompasses this participant, while not recognizable or having an identity, is given different qualities to describe KMD and their organizational culture. As aforementioned, KMD credits their success to these generalized groups and describes their qualities that contributed to this as possessing "ambition" (appx. 1, l. 7), "a specific mindset," having the "will to succeed" (appx. 1, l. 8), being "willing to take on difficult tasks," and "capable of setting the standards higher" (appx. 1, ll. 9–10). These attributes position the employees within the organizational culture as symbolic figures that serve to convey the organization's culture and values rather than to function as individual people with different qualities.

The pronoun "you" (appx. 1, ll. 2, 13) is used throughout the narrative to refer to the potential employees of KMD or the targeted audience of the video. It is not tied to any specific individual but refers to a generalized audience. It addresses the viewer or reader directly but without identifying who that person is, making it a generic representation of the audience. Despite this, "you" is grammatically individualized, which works to create personal engagement from the viewer due to the nature of the direct address. The viewer is invited to engage and think about the message and narrative of the video. The actor "you" is used in combination with the word "ambition," asking, "do you have the ambition?" (appx. 1, l. 13), to reveal that the goal of the video is for the audience to consider KMD as an employer of choice. Furthermore, this reveals that the descriptions of employees, "having a specific mindset," "willing to take on difficult tasks in an ever-changing environment," and "setting the standards higher" (appx. 1, ll. 8–10), also pertain to the "you," the audience.

Examining metaphors within the text can help reveal how KMD uses language as a symbolic tool to brand themselves and how these can create gendered associations. The first

metaphor in the voiceover narration is "KMD is on a journey" (appx. 1, l. 1). KMD is not literally on a journey, as the definition of a journey involves movement or traveling physically somewhere. However, the metaphor works to highlight how KMD is a dynamic, growing, and innovative organization that is evolving. They build upon the journey metaphor with "[...] the people who have joined along the ride" (appx. 1, ll. 11–12), connoting that the employees and KMD are the "riders," or passengers on this ride, suggesting a shared focus toward the same "end destination" or goal. KMD also uses the phrase "certain person with a specific mindset" (appx. 1, l. 8), which may not look like a traditional metaphor in a poetic sense like the former "journey" metaphor, but the concept of a mindset as a fixed object that one possesses or does not is a metaphor. Mindsets are made up of thoughts and personalities, and those things are not fixed but continuous, fluid, and complex human traits, but here it is presented as a concrete tool you can possess. This connotes that the employees KMD finds desirable fit a certain mold or are a specific ideal type. In the perspective of Gendered Organizations theory, Acker describes the "ideal worker" as created on the basis of qualities associated with masculinity, such as availability and having "no body" (see section 4.2).

The metaphor "the secret recipe for success" (appx. 1, l. 2) is also used to emphasize the traits employees need to possess to create a successful business. The metaphor uses the noun "recipe" to imply that the right "ingredients" can create success. The traits are defined as ambition and experience: "It takes ambition, it takes experience" (appx. 1, l. 3). Once again, KMD emphasizes the same two traits and suggests that the lack of them is a critical problem for success. This highlights that KMD values masculine qualities over feminine. This is also evident in the metaphor "take on difficult tasks in an ever-changing environment" (appx. 1, l. 9). This metaphor suggests that "difficult tasks" are physical objects or burdens that can be physically confronted or grabbed. This meaning comes from the phrase "take on," which is often used in combat or in a physically confrontational context, such as taking on a challenger (dictionary.cambridge.org 2025). It is also used for hard manual labor, "to take on a heavy load." This suggests that tasks are something to be wrestled with or carried. Physical confrontations and manual labor are two actions that are also typically associated with men and male qualities, as they have been the gender most assigned those tasks. They further utilize the metaphor "ever-changing environment" to suggest an unstable workplace that must be navigated through changing "weather" and "terrain," implied by their use of "environment," which is borrowed from nature and ecology. This gives associations to the "ideal worker," who is portrayed as a man who can adapt and "survive" all professional challenges that are thrown

at him, including long work hours, being available 24/7, being emotionally restrained, and approaching tasks with logic rather than feelings (see section 4.2).

7.2.2 Discursive Practices

In this section, I will break down the discourses identified in the voiceover narration based on the linguistic analysis and determine which discourse holds hegemony.

The voiceover narration can be divided into two main sections: the first, which I call *KMD, People, and Experience* (appx. 1, ll. 1-7), and the second, *KMD, People, and Ambition* (appx. 1, ll. 8-13). In the first section, the voiceover narration introduces a transformational and organizational growth discourse with the phrase, "*KMD is on a journey. From being Denmark's leading software provider to becoming a European software player [..]*" (appx. 1, ll. 1-2). The sentence includes transformational language with the metaphor "journey," which acts as the nodal point, signaling travel or movement. Words like "from" and "becoming" further reinforce the theme of progression. The sentence "*[...] setting the standards higher today, every day*" (appx. 1, ll. 9-10) supports this discourse through the nodal point "higher" that reflects KMD's ambitions to expand and grow the organization to newer levels. Similarly, the adjective "ever-changing" (appx. 1, l. 9) is used to convey change or transformation, further emphasizing KMD's goals for the future. This transformation is closely linked to KMD's understanding of success, where change and expansion on a global plan are presented as key components. This is evident because KMD continuously refers to success as a result of their "journey". "*KMD is on a journey. From being Denmark's leading software provider to becoming a European software player, and we believe we have the secret recipe for success*" (appx. 1, ll. 1-2). Here, success and transformation are tied together, indicating that from KMD's perspective, one cannot exist without the other. This brings us to the success and performance discourse, which is evident in several phrases such as: "*[...] the secret recipe for success*" (appx. 1, l. 2), "*[...] our bulletproof recipe for a successful software business*" (appx. 1, ll. 3-4), and "*[...] the will to succeed*" (appx. 1, l. 8). These statements use success as a nodal point, either in noun form (success) or verb form (succeed), and link it consistently to two traits: ambition and experience. For instance, the sentence "*The recipe is simple; it takes ambition, it takes experience. And if you combine this, you have our bulletproof recipe for a successful software business*" (appx. 1, ll. 3-4) presents these two qualities as requirements for success. The following description of ambition further constructs a narrow image of the "ideal" employee: "*[...] to find the people who possess that extra level of ambition. It takes a certain*

person with a specific mindset and the will to succeed. Someone who is willing to take on difficult tasks in an ever-changing environment and who are capable of setting the standards higher today, every day" (appx. 1, ll. 8-10). This understanding and description of ambitious people create a fixed concept of employability, suggesting that only individuals with a particular mindset and ambition are suitable for KMD.

While experience is mentioned as part of the success formula, it receives less emphasis in the overall narrative. It is acknowledged in phrases such as: "*The recipe is simple; it takes ambition, it takes experience*" (appx. 1, l. 3) and "*Experience… Well, we have plenty of that. KMD has been leading the Danish IT agenda for decades, and with no plans to stop anytime soon*" (appx. 1, ll. 5-6). However, experience is primarily used to describe KMD themselves and not its employees or potential employees. This is reinforced by the sentence: "*It takes a long history of trying, failing, learning, trying again, with the challenges to find the people who possess that extra level of ambition*" (appx. 1, ll. 6-7). As a result, KMD's emphasis on experience does not pertain to employees or future employees but to themselves. This is also evident in the last sentence of the voiceover narration, "*We have the experience, do you have the ambition?*" (appx. 1, l. 13) that clearly states that KMD search for and desire employees with ambition rather than experience, as they themselves possess that trait.

This also signals an expertise and experience discourse that is supported by their statements. The phrase "*Experience… We have plenty of that*" (appx. 1, l. 5) showcases this. The nodal points that allude to the experience and expertise discourse are the words "experience" (saying they have plenty of it), "long history," and "*[...] trying, failing, learning, trying again [...]*" (appx. 1, ll. 6-7). These phrases construct KMD's credibility and authority through a narrative of trial-and-error and long-term learning. But also risks making potential employees feel uncertain and question their abilities, as the messaging may be interpreted as suggesting that extensive experience is also required of applicants in order to succeed at KMD.

The last discourse in the voiceover narration is a masculine coded gender discourse. This is not a result of a focus on gender in the voiceover narration but rather the result of associations with masculinity and men that emerge through specific words, values, and preferences highlighted by KMD in the video's voiceover narration. The linguistic analysis reveals that KMD describe themselves as a "leading software provider" and a "European software player", making associations to dominance, power, leadership, recognition, competitiveness, and the traditional "breadwinner" role. These are all qualities commonly associated with masculinity (see section 4.2). Additionally, KMD expresses a desire to attract employees who possess the masculine coded trait of ambition and align with the "ideal worker"

type (see section 4.2) as suggested by the phrase: "*It takes a certain person, with a specific mindset and the will to succeed. Someone who is willing to take on difficult tasks in an ever-changing environment and who are capable of setting the standards higher today, every day*" (appx. 1, ll. 8-10). This passage emphasizes KMD's preference for individuals with a specific, "fixed," mindset. People whose thoughts and emotions remain stable and people who will commit themselves to KMD and go above and beyond to set higher standards of operation and results.

The discourse that takes hegemony in the narrative is a business and employer branding discourse, characterized by themes and messages of professional success, experience, ambition, and transformation directed at the audience. Through this lens, KMD constructs an employer brand that aims for individuals who fit within its organizational structure and culture. People who possess the "right" qualities and who can see themselves thriving within the organizational culture. This supports the argument that the video's purpose is to appeal to and recruit potential employees.

This analysis aligns with the gendering of the visual modes of the video. However, to determine the employee attraction of female potential employees, the results will need to be applied to Backhaus and Tikoo's (2004) employer brand framework.

8 Evaluation and Discussion

In this chapter, I will evaluate the analysis results within the framework of Backhaus and Tikoo's Employer Branding (2004) and Gendered Organizations theory by Acker (1990). Furthermore, I will discuss my assumptions and how the results differ or agree with the assumptions. I will also discuss the research gaps in my thesis, as well as my recommendations for future research. Finally, I will discuss how my theoretical and methodological framework can be applied to similar casework to reveal what is preventing male-dominated organizations from attracting more women.

8.1 Application of Employer Branding Framework and Gendered Organizations Theory

Throughout the video, the associations of gender aspects in the video are dominated by male-associated roles, qualities, behaviors, etc. For example, the men are seen as the active participants, while the women are seen as observers in the video. In the analysis of the video, the most glaring example that was found was in phase four, where a man is presenting to a room full of women, not one man is in sight in the frame (appx. 2, phase 4). Furthermore, the two seemingly important individuals from phase two have two very different roles, with the man seen more often and in active processes, while the woman is seen less and presented more passively (see 7.1.1). The employer brand associations created here are of a masculine organization culture where values such as assertiveness, leadership, and initiative are valued and rewarded. The imaging also reinforces traditional gender stereotypes of men as doers and women as watchers in more supporting positions. This division of work and labor will ultimately discourage some women from applying at KMD because it creates associations of unequal opportunities and participation for women. Thus, the functional benefits presented to a female audience do not benefit the women, as the association paints KMD as an organization that, in general, does not provide opportunities to women. In the instance that they do, the women have conformed to or possess "male" qualities, as seen with the CEO, Eva Berneke (see section 7.1.1).

In phase two of the video, an image of a group (men and women) standing and posing in the same manner is seen. It gives a clear image of the expectations of dress within KMD. From the analysis, it was concluded that men and women both are under a dress code called business casual. The dress code includes elements of the traditional professional suit, such as

dress shirts, suit pants, ties, and suit jackets. These elements also influence how women are dressed in their professional attire. The women are seen wearing blazers, cardigans, denim jackets, and blouses that all have similar silhouettes or styles to traditional men's business dress (appx. 2, phase 2). This gives the audience a clue that women are subjected to the rules of men rather than the other way around, further supporting the associations of a masculine organizational culture that values male norms over female norms. The difference in colorful clothing between men and women illustrates how women are still expected to embody femininity to a certain degree while also fitting into a masculine corporate world. Another example of this is the traditional female business attire that incorporates suit jackets, dress shirts, ties, pencil skirts, and heels. This symbolizes how women, while expected to be feminine in their expressions, are also subjected to male norms. Appear too feminine, you will not be taken seriously; appear too masculine, you will be ridiculed and mocked (Elliott et al. 2016). This further underlines the value of masculine qualities over feminine qualities and, in terms of symbolic benefits, discourages women from applying because they may not feel the organizational culture benefits or fit them in terms of how to behave and express themselves (see section 4.1).

In the Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis (see section 7.2), I found that KMD positions themselves with masculine traits such as innovation, leadership, power, recognition, providers (the breadwinner), and influence within the IT industry. These descriptions further support the argument that KMD view themselves as a masculine organization that values and rewards masculine traits. Furthermore, it creates associations that success is gendered and cannot be achieved unless you have these qualities or attributes as an employee. The discourse analysis further proves this when KMD begins describing the people who work for KMD and the qualities they value in their employees. For example, they suggest the concept of the "ideal worker" (see section 4.2) when they say, "*It takes a certain person, with a specific mindset*" (appx. 1, l. 8). The concept of the "ideal worker" is based on and deeply rooted in masculine qualities, qualities that women often cannot live up to such as the idea that the "ideal worker" has "no body" meaning, they are never sick, do not get pregnant, do not get emotional, etc. (see section 4.2).

Within the framework by Backhaus and Tikoo, these employer brand associations shape an employer image within the minds of the audience. In the minds of a gender-critical audience and women who identify with traditional feminine qualities, the perception of the employer will consist of beliefs about how KMD has a masculine organizational culture that includes reproducing traditional gender stereotypes (men do, women watch), creating unequal

opportunities and participation for women, valuing masculine traits higher than female, subjecting women to male norms, being driven by power, success, and achievements, and preferring an employee reminiscent of the "ideal worker." In turn, this employer image may disadvantage women in the application process by discouraging them from the outset. If they do not see themselves reflected in the organizational culture or values, they may perceive a poor person-organization fit and choose not to initiate the application process with KMD at all.

8.2 Assumptions and Results

Approaching this thesis' problem, I had expectations of how the results would turn out. And for the most part, I did turn out that way. I assumed that KMD gender themselves through certain practices, but also that IT in itself is a gendered industry because the collective societal association and image of STEM professions are that of men and male qualities (Nosek et al. 2009). Although my assumption was confirmed, the multimodal analysis also reveals that KMD tries to be gender inclusive by the mere number of women versus men in the video (appx. 2). In the video, the image of the group consists of 11 women and five men, and with this ratio, they try to be inclusive by portraying that women are an integral part of their organization and ultimately their success, success being an important message in their video. I also found that they do use imaging that puts women as the leading or active participants in phases four and five of the video (appx. 2). Furthermore, the CEO and voiceover narrator of the video is a woman, Eva Berneke. Her CEO status and individual portrayal give her the highest level of authority and power within KMD and the video. However, this contrast to the overall video can be attributed to her CEO status, which by default makes her an important person within KMD. These representations go against the overall trend of the video, which otherwise puts men as the accelerators of work, depicted in important roles within the organization (see section 7.1). The number of women versus men in the video does not change that the women's roles and agency play a small part in the narrative of the video. Their roles are more observant and passive versus the men who play active and dominant roles (see section 7.1.1). KMD tries to be inclusive but fails to portray women in an equal fashion as men, undermining their roles within the organization. I believe the reasoning behind this is the condition known as tokenism (see section 3.4.1). Tokens often have high visibility and come to represent their minority group rather than their professional skills and qualities. Because of this, the women in the video are an example of how women are used to represent a group but are not given important or authoritative roles in the video. They are merely there to represent women and give a message

of diversity. This is even more evident because we know that women only made up 32.6% of the organization in 2023 (KMD 2023) but make up more than 75% of the representatives in the video, which was published in 2020 (appx. 2). This means that KMD deliberately went out of their way to include more women in the video than men, but the women's roles in the video reflect that KMD values masculinity over femininity, creating a clear contradiction in the message they are sending.

8.3 Future Research

My thesis is occupied with how you reveal the hidden gendered structures, practices, language, etc., in external employer branding that prevent and discourage women from applying to male-dominated organizations, specifically with KMD. This research can and should be broadened to how to prevent an organization from creating a gendered external employer brand. This is a complex task because many qualities that professional jobs require are associated with men independent of the gender that embodies them, meaning that women who embody those qualities will be viewed as more masculine than women who do not (Drydakis et al. 2018). Because of this, a more gender diverse workforce in IT requires a redefinition and change in the language used within male-dominated organizations. For example, during the mid-20th century, IT was a "women's job" that was described as requiring meticulousness, patience, attention to detail, etc. (Light 1999). These qualities align with the IT industry and are more commonly associated with feminine traits than the descriptions used in KMD's voiceover narration, such as ambition, competitiveness, leadership, and so forth (see section 7.2). Because of this, it can be argued that using more feminine coded or neutral language will send signals and invitations to female applicants, resulting in higher employee attraction.

The effect of this needs to be studied within a more comprehensive study that may include casework of individual organizations that utilize more gender-neutral or feminine coded language. Such data could provide insights into how potential applicants' gendered perceptions influence employer brand associations and, ultimately, employee attraction. This could offer a more nuanced understanding of how gendered branding, associations, and attraction affect each other.

8.4 Applying the Framework and Results in a Larger Societal Context

The findings of my analysis and application of theories exemplify how organizations such as KMD are part of reproducing gender stereotypes and gender divisions at work through external employer branding. In a larger societal context, the findings contribute to an explanation of why male-dominated organizations and academics continue being masculine coded despite an increased focus on gender equality within organizations in recent decades (Krivkovich et al. 2024). The reproduction of gender discourse and stereotyping in employer branding are part of a larger explanation of why women are less likely to pursue studies in male-dominated fields (such as engineering, IT, physics, math, and chemistry) or apply to male-dominated organizations. This can be explained by how KMD, like other organizations, does not merely communicate to current employees or potential employees; the branding and associations also communicate to society at large. Through media, advertising, or word-of-mouth communication of current and past employees, the traditional masculine associations contribute to constructing and reinforcing the image of the IT and STEM industries as male. This, in turn, may discourage women from pursuing studies or careers in these fields, perpetuating the cycle of underrepresentation in education and organizations and reinforcing structural gender inequality.

The framework of my thesis can not only be applied and used to reveal these discourses and reproductions of male-dominated organizations but also to reveal how male-dominated academics and education gender themselves in favor of male qualities. Knowing how specific modes create masculine associations with the audience can help organizations and institutions create more nuanced employer branding that represents and values both genders and in turn, more women will see themselves in these roles and apply to educate themselves and work in fields traditionally viewed as masculine.

9 Conclusion

This thesis aimed to examine how KMD's external employer branding, specifically in the video *KMD – Where ambitions meet experience* (appx. 2), influences the organization's ability to attract female potential employees. To guide this investigation, I posed the following research question:

On the basis of Employer Branding and Gendered Organizations theory, how can KMD attract more female employees?

Through Multimodal Analysis and Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis, I identified examples of how gendering occurs within KMD's employer branding. One prominent finding is the gendered division of labor shown in the video. Men are portrayed as active participants and leaders, while women are shown as passive observers (see section 7.1.1). This is particularly evident in phase four of the video, where a man presents to a room of women, visually reinforcing traditional gender roles. Moreover, the representation of gender ratios in the video contrasts sharply with KMD's actual diversity data, which reports that only 32.6% of their employees are women (KMD 2023). This suggests an effort by KMD to present a more diverse and inclusive image than what is reflected in their organizational reality. The imagery of women outnumbering men in the video appears tokenized, which is further proved by their lack of agency in the video; they are supporting characters while men drive the narrative.

The discourse analysis of the voiceover narration found that the discourse that takes hegemony is a business discourse informed by an employer branding perspective. However, a strong masculine coded discourse also appears throughout the narrative KMD paints. KMD characterize themselves using adjectives and nominalizations that convey power and dominance, such as "leading software provider" and "European software player" that conveys competitiveness (appx. 1, l. 1-2). The use of physical and confrontational metaphors, such as "take on" (difficult tasks) (appx. 1, l. 9), further reinforces a masculine ideal. The phrase "a certain person with a specific mindset" (appx. 1, l. 8) evokes the image of the "ideal worker," implying that employees must suppress emotional complexity and align strictly with a narrow set of behavioral expectations.

In the discussion, I argue that organizations like KMD can benefit from producing employer branding materials through a critical feminist lens. By consciously addressing and reducing the presence of masculine ideals in their branding, they can avoid creating gendered

employer brand associations that may disadvantage potential female employees. In turn, this can shape more nuanced gender ideals in their employer branding, increasing the likelihood of attracting more women into their organization.

In conclusion, this thesis shows that KMD's external employer branding is not neutral but carries and reproduces organizational values and assumptions, including gendered ones. If KMD wishes to attract more women, they must critically assess how gender is communicated through their branding and consider more neutral or feminine coded imaging, language, etc., that reflect a more balanced appreciation of women as well as men.

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11 Reflection

Problem-oriented competences

As the final project of my education, this thesis felt more important and pressing than any of my previous assignments. Furthermore, because of the short time between completing my internship project and submitting the subject and research problem for the thesis, I made a quick decision without fully considering whether the topic would be possible within the limitations of my education.

I later realized that my initial subject would not be possible, which forced me to rethink my approach and make minor adjustments to make it more manageable. Despite these changes, I still struggled to gain a clear overview of the project, especially when it came to identifying suitable theories and data. These challenges significantly delayed my writing process. However, as I progressed, the pieces gradually began to fall into place.

Interpersonal competences

This thesis was carried out by myself without a group; thus, the interpersonal teamwork that is normally part of my project did not play a part in this one. Furthermore, I did not make the thesis in collaboration with an organization or company; hence, this aspect has played a very minor role in my thesis. However, my meetings with my supervisor helped provide perspective on my thesis. I was open to the suggestions my supervisor made me.

Structural competences

Structurally, I initially started thinking about and planning the project approximately two months before the semester started. I also planned to begin supervision at the earliest opportunity in February, but due to unforeseen circumstances, I was unable to begin supervision until March. However, when I made it to supervision, I made a calendar with clear plans for when sections in my thesis should be written. Despite this structured plan,

sticking to the timeline proved more difficult when working independently, which led me to overrun several deadlines. Despite these challenges, I have a clear understanding of the key elements and considerations that form the foundation of a well-constructed project. The structure of my thesis reflects my personal preferences, developed within the framework of how a project can be organized.

Metacognitive competences

During this project, I worked with theories I had not previously written about, employer branding, and feminist concepts. Because my knowledge of these concepts is limited to university courses, I had to spend a significant amount of time reading and learning about the theories to choose the most relevant ones for my thesis. Despite this, given the subject of my thesis, I had some biases and assumptions about male-dominated organizations, particularly I had a bias that they mostly appeal to men and masculinity. This may have impacted my interpretation of some elements in the analysis.