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**Communicating the Union: an examination of
how three trade unions communicate with youth**

(Master Thesis, 15 credits)

**Media and Communication Studies: Culture, Collaborative Media, and Creative
Industries, Master's programme (One-Year)**

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Malmö University**

Spring 2016

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Abstract

This thesis examines how trade unions are meeting the two-fold challenge of a fall in youth unionisation and a changed media usage amongst youth. The researcher attempts to answer this question by examining how three different trade unions (*Sveriges Ingenjörer, SI, Kommunal* and *Hotell och Restaurang facket, HRF*) are communicating with a younger generation for the purpose of recruiting them. The thesis is based on a theoretical framework derived from communications theories and practices specifically aimed at youth, as well as theories about union recruitment strategies, civic engagement and the logic of collective action (since unions represent collective interests). The researcher has applied a qualitative approach where the thesis rests on in-depth interviews with different respondents. The findings of the thesis reveal that all the unions have started to face up to the challenge of falling youth unionisation (by applying the advice put forward in literature on youth and health communications, and union recruitment literature). However, the findings note that the unions have applied the advice to varying extent, with *Sveriges Ingenjörer* being furthest ahead. In addition, the findings illustrate that the unions seem to be responding to the challenge of a changing media usage amongst youth. Yet, the researcher believes that the unions might do well in exploring a more participatory style of communication, since youth today have started to expect a higher degree of participation in their communication online.

The findings also highlight that both *Kommunal* and *HRF* seem to be facing tougher challenges than *Sveriges Ingenjörer* in communicating with youth for the purposes of recruiting them because of differences between the sectors the unions organise. Finally, the findings reveal that the unions communicate with youth in accordance with Olson's theory of logic of collective action (Congleton, 2015), which highlights that individuals will only join a union if there is an individual gain to offset the union fee.

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1. Introduction

The level of unionisation in Sweden today is at its lowest since the 1970's. Only 69 percent of the total work force are union members (*Arbetaren*, 2016-02-26). The drop in membership is most pronounced for traditional workers' unions (unions uniting workers in sectors such as hotel, restaurants, industry, transport etc.) while the unions uniting civil servants have seen their membership numbers levelling out (ibid).

The fall in union membership seems to suggest that unions (at least the traditional workers' unions) are somehow failing to attract new members. Especially youth seem to be opting out of joining the union altogether (*Sveriges television*, 2013-05-19). This trend can be seen as very alarming for the unions since they are dependent on new members (especially young people since older members will eventually retire) to keep their organisations going and to maintain their position as negotiators in the labour market.

Turning this development around can in fact be seen as one of the major challenges facing unions today, yet it seems as if up to now, unions have somehow failed in reaching out to youth, and to make themselves relevant to this generation. This notion seems to be in accordance with union researcher Kurt Vandaele's findings that youth representatives across Europe find their union confederations' responsiveness to youth, and commitment to organising new young members, to be inadequate. (Vandaele, 2012).

Based on these observations, one can argue that communications will be a key factor in tackling the recruitment challenge, since communicating the benefits of union membership to youth can be seen as the first step in the process of recruiting (and reaching out) to them.

Simultaneously, the communications behaviour and media usage of the younger generations, are going through a seminal change (Graffman, 2016, *Medieutveckling*, 2015), characterised by a more individualistic media usage based on personal interests and preferences, a digital marketing and advertising fatigue, and a move towards more closed forms of communication online (Graffman, 2016).

This development seems to add a further layer to the challenge faced by the unions: not only do they have to make themselves relevant to youth through communicating

the benefits of being a member of the union, they also have to figure out how to communicate in a fast changing media landscape where youth's media usage is becoming both more individualistic and increasingly shaped by personal interests and preferences.

1.1 The Aim of the Research Project

The aim of this thesis is to examine how trade unions are meeting these challenges. This will be done by answering the following research question: how are three different trade unions (*Sveriges Ingenjörer, SI, Kommunal* and *Hotell och Restaurang facket, HRF*) communicating with a younger generation for the purpose of recruiting them? Since the two latter are workers' unions it will be interesting to see how they are communicating with youth (taking into account that workers' unions have seen their membership decreasing) in comparison to the civil servant union. Also of interest will be to examine if their practices diverge since they target different groups of youth.

In my thesis, I will draw on a theoretical framework derived from communications theories and practices specifically aimed at youth, as well as theories about union recruitment strategies, civic engagement and the logic of collective action (since unions represent collective interests). I have chosen a qualitative approach where the thesis rests on in-depth interviews with different respondents.

2 Context

In this section, I will outline a more detailed context for the thesis, including information on unionisation, youth unionisation and media and communications usage amongst a younger generation. This will provide a background to, and serve to inform, the discussion of my findings.

2.1 A Note on the Drop in Unionisation in Sweden

As mentioned above, the level of unionisation has decreased in Sweden. This trend is also mirrored in Europe and in the U.S, in fact, Sweden is actually one of the countries with the highest percentage of unionisation (*Sveriges television*, 2013-05-19).

The decrease is most notable for the traditional workers' unions (hotel, restaurant, labourer, builders, transport etc.), while the civil servant unions and the private sector unions have seen their membership numbers levelling out (*Arbetaren*, 2016-02-26).

The reasons for this trend can be traced back to a steep rise in fees for unemployment benefit funds in 2006 and 2007 which affected the traditional workers' unions more negatively in terms of the total cost of union fees than the civil servant unions (*Fackling anslutning*, 2015). Even though the fees were subsequently adjusted in 2014, the unionisation level has not increased (something which can be explained by a psychological effect, it is harder to go from no fee to any fee, even if the fee is quite low) (*Arbetaren*, 2016-02-26). In addition, the drop in membership can also create a vicious circle whereby the local trade union becomes weak and unable to affect any changes in the work place. This in turn can have an impact on new members' willingness to join (*ibid*).

However, it also seems as if traditional workers' unions have been less successful in recruiting new members in comparison to the civil servant unions (*Arbetaren*, 2016-02-26).

2.2 Youth unionisation

Youth are increasingly turning their backs to the union. Only 37 percent of workers aged 16-24 are union members (for civil servants this number is 43 percent). These numbers represents a drop of around half since the 1990s. For the slightly older age group 25-29, the numbers are 55 percent for workers and 63 percent for civil servants, (these numbers also represents a substantial decrease in membership from the 90's). However, the fall in membership have stabilised over the last three to four years. (*Facklig anslutning*, 2015).

There are a number of reasons for this trend: for example young people tend to work in more temporary positions, (and workers in temporary positions are often less likely to join a union), or in the low wage private sector where the trade unions are weak and less visible in the work place (Lidberg, 2016, Vandaele, 2013).

Moreover, some workers opt out of joining a union altogether since they can still reap the benefits of the collective labour agreements that the trade unions negotiate for

their workers such as salaries and other benefits in the work place. This phenomenon is called free-riding. (*Sveriges television*, 2013-05-19).

Another reason for not joining could be a lack of union knowledge. In a recent survey of about 2000 15-24 year olds, 45 percent of youth aged 15-16 had no knowledge of the union. Amongst 17-18 year olds this number was 30 percent. For older age groups the numbers were: 17 percent for 19-20 year olds, 12 percent for 21-22 year olds and 10 percent for 23-24 year olds (*Ungdomsbarometern*, 2015). In addition, many university students did not know what central organisation that their union belonged to (70 percent of around 2000 people surveyed) (*Studentbarometern*, 2015).

Young people's more individualistic orientations, and lack of interest in collective engagement for civic causes, have also been considered as an explanation for the opting out trend (Lidberg, 2016, Vandaele, 2013). Yet, Vandaele notes that there seems to be little evidence for this claim since studies show that youth are quite positive to trade union work and values (Vandaele, 2013, *Unga röster om facket*, 2009).

2.3 Potential Impact on the Labour Market and on the Individual of Opting Out

There are both societal and individual impacts arising from youth not joining the union.

On a societal level, a drop in union membership can over time come to threaten the trade unions' position in the labour market: without new members to build a strong organisation, they will eventually come to have less and less influence in negotiations with employer organisations. Over time work places might be without a local trade union because of low membership, which means that the company has no counterpart to negotiate with. This in turn can make it seem less relevant for the company to sign a collective labour agreement. Weakened trade unions can also become more aggressive (something which has happened in southern Europe), and this in turn can create tensions in the form of strikes and demonstrations (*Sveriges television*, 2013-05-19).

There are also individual impacts (for young and old alike) arising from opting out. As mentioned, some people do not see the point in joining a union since they can still

reap the benefits of say salary negotiations. However, they do not have any security in the labour market if they become unemployed: they get no legal advice if they bring a case to the labour court, and they cannot sign up for an income insurance etc.

The above sections on unionisation, youth unionisation, and potential impacts on the labour market makes it clear that recruiting youth is a question of survival for the unions. It is also clear that communications will come to play a key role in this work since the statistics show that many youth are not actually familiar with the union at all (and communicating with youth is a first step in reaching out to them). In addition, it highlights that workers' unions have a steeper challenge to overcome than the civil servants' unions (remember that more workers have opted out of union membership).

2.4 Media Usage Amongst Youth and a Changed Media Landscape

As mentioned above, the way youth use media today seems to add a further layer to how trade unions will tackle the challenge of reaching out to a younger generation.

Below follows a short overview of how youth communicate and use media today. The overview is based on various studies on media usage. Some of these look at quite young teens. However, I thought it was important to include this information since this group will eventually grow up and become a target group for the unions to reach.

Today, almost all young children and youth have access to the Internet and they get introduced to internet at a younger age (*Unga och medier, 2015*). The most popular pastimes on the internet include listening to music and using social media (for 13-18 year olds). Younger age groups (12-15) tend to use a variety of social media (the most popular being image-based media such as Instagram, Snapchat and Kik), whereas Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat and Twitter (in that order) are most popular among 16-25 year olds. (*Svenskarna och Internet, 2015*). Social media is also used for different purposes: for example: 16-18 year olds are using Snapchat and Whatsapp for keeping in contact with close friends, Twitter and Instagram for a wider friend network and Facebook for family, extended family and wider friends (Graffman, 2016). Time spent on social media (*Svenskarna och Internet, 2015*) has also increased year on year, 16-25 year olds now spend around 10 hours a week on social media (an increase of 1.5 hours since 2014).

Younger age groups (12-25) are also more active on social media, with 52 percent updating their status, and 33 percent posting content a couple of times a week (*Svenskarna och internet, 2015*). This development mirrors communications researcher Chris Wells' (2014) argument that there is an emerging expectation amongst youth that communications online will come with participatory opportunities (opportunities to contribute personal ideas to information in circulated by organisations).

It is also becoming more common to use Youtube rather than Google to find information online (Graffman, 2016).

Another significant change is that media consumption amongst this group (0-18) has become mobile: reading, listening, watching and gaming are now practised using smart phones. Media usage has also become more individualistic since it is no longer bound by time and space, and it is becoming more and more common that youth create and shape their media consumption according to their own tastes and interest (Graffman, 2016, *Medieutveckling, 2015*).

One can also see tendencies amongst this group to move away from public updates and public forms of communication to a more closed way of communicating (by using iMessage available on the iPhone for example). These forms of communications are not open to the public and only involve a select group. Moreover, younger age groups want to find and seek out information themselves, and they do not like to be disturbed by commercials (however, it is not advertising per se, it is the experience of disturbing commercials they do not like) (Graffman, 2016).

The above overview of how youth use media today makes it clear that trade unions have to adapt to this new media landscape in order to reach out to youth. Since youth spend a lot of time on social media, it seems logical that the trade unions should have a strategy to engage with them through these channels. Yet, it also seems clear that many youth does not like advertising, something which can make it harder to reach this group via bought ads with information about the trade unions on Facebook and Youtube.

The information outlined above will serve to inform the discussion of my thesis.

3 Literature Review of Theory and Existing Research

In this section, I will outline the theoretical framework I will draw on for my research question. Since I'm arguing that communications can be seen as key in the work to inform youth about the benefits of joining the union, I will lean on theories and ideas on youth communications. Yet, one thing to note is that I, surprisingly, did not find a wealth of literature directly related to youth communications and youth communications strategies. Therefore I decided to include theories on youth and health communications (because this type of communications often target youth, see safe sex, alcohol and driving etc.), and civic communications and youth. I have also included sections on trade union recruitment strategies and theories on collective action and organisation (since unions represent collective interests).

I decided to specifically focus on theories and arguments drawn from literature/experts highlighting best practice in communicating with a younger demographic. I have refrained from a detailed description of theories of communication models (such as one way and two-way communication models, symmetrical and a-symmetrical models) and various type of communications strategies (outside in strategies, inside out strategies, two step flow of communication strategies, influencing strategies etc.) (Larsson, 2008, and Jarlbro, 2010). Instead, I will refer to these strategies when and if they become of relevance to the discussion of the research results and the overall scope of the thesis.

Also, since I'm not assessing how youth are interpreting the trade unions' communication (a study which would have complimented this thesis), I have refrained from describing how messages are received and interpreted by the receivers. Yet, I do want to highlight that communication from one organisation to a target group cannot be seen as a linear process (a fact that is widely established amongst both academic and communications professionals today). (Larsson, 2008). This means that regardless of how the trade unions choose to communicate, they cannot be certain as to how their messages will be interpreted by every targeted individual. However, what they can do is to conduct evaluations (and count the number of new recruits) amongst the target group: something which will give them a notion of how a message or campaign is received (Larsson, 2008).

3.1 Youth Communications from a Professional and Expert Approach

Anthropologist Katarina Graffman has studied how youth use media. She advises organisations on how to reach out to a younger age group and has held a number of seminars on youth communications (Graffman, 2016).

Her main arguments centre on the notion that youth today see the digital world, or digital devices, as an extension of their own identity (see also Wells, 2014 who argues that digital communications have permeated all aspects of digital life). Graffman argues that it is important for organisations to respect youths' identity online: for example be mindful of not communicate too much and too often with this group.

In order to reach this group, organisations should focus on making their communication relevant to them: they need to have an understanding for what role the brand or organisation play in the lives of youth. According to Graffman, youth use brands to create an identity, which means they will only share information from, and interact, with a brand that in some way reflect who they are. The best way to reach out to youth is to work with so called beacons: people who can help point youth in a certain direction online (say to an organisation's website, or highlight a message). Beacons can be either friends, trusted celebrities or other influential people, and family (especially for a younger age group). Yet, Graffman also advise against focusing too much on age: according to her credibility and authority are more important than using a beacon of the same age as the group.

She also argues that it is becoming increasingly important to use the various social media channels in a correct way in order to reach youth (as we saw above, youth use different social media platforms for different reasons). According to her, one can no longer talk about a "social media strategy" since one have to have different strategies for different platforms (Graffman, 2016).

Her arguments and ideas are supported by the communication's industry. The professional network, the Swedish Communications Experts, also highlights the importance of using influencers in youth communications such as vloggers for example (these are people who shares personal video clips about themselves and various topics). The network argues that vloggers are gaining an increasing role as influencers since these people are trendsetters who gain a loyal following among youth. Therefore companies and organisations should try to link in with them in order

to communicate: by having the vlogger communicating your message, organisations can reach out with their message through a person, and a channel, that is already trusted and respected amongst a younger generation. (*SverigesKommunikatörer.se*, 201-03-15).

Another advice on how to communicate with youth centres on working together with the specific target group in order to create relevant messages. (*Allastudie.se*, 2015-02-05).

Although the above youth communications strategies are not scientifically valid (since they are not derived from academic articles), the advice seems applicable and relevant. While one should be careful with assuming a simplistic notion that all youth are doing everything online all the time (Wells, 2014), the statistics highlight that youth today spend an increasing amount of time on the internet, and specifically on social media, such as Youtube, Facebook and Instagram, a fact which makes it plausible that using these channels would be of importance to organisations today. Also, since youth's media usage has become increasingly individualistic, it seems advisable to collaborate with people who this group might already like or respect.

3.2 Youth Communications from a Health Information Perspective

Many of the ideas and advice put forward by Graffman and other communications specialists are mirrored in literature on health communications targeting youth (Potente, McIver, Anderson and Coppa, 2011 and Jarlbro, 2010). For example, Sofia Potente, Jackie McIver, Caroline Anderson and Kay Coppa (who all work for the Cancer Council NWS) point to the benefit of using a well-known celebrity to channel a health message to a younger demographic. They also note that peer-to-peer messages are very effectual in engaging youth, and that social media lends itself very well to this type of communications (Potente et al, 2011). Communications researcher, Gunilla Jarlbro (2010), similarly, argues the importance of choosing a person related to the target group as the sender of information. By choosing an equal or peer to deliver a message, one can assume that this person will be familiar with abiding norms, values and attitudes amongst the receiving group. Yet, Jarlbro cautions against assuming that all youth are similar and that they will be swayed by the same messages and type of communications.

Health communications literature also highlight other key factors in communications targeting youth (and other demographics). Jarlbro (2010) notes a list of features that characterise effectual strategies and campaigns (these characteristics were defined by a group of researchers who analysed a range of campaigns as well as conducting an interview study). The campaigns analysed were chosen because they had an intended effect on the receivers. The characteristics of a successful campaign include (for an extensive list, see Jarlbro, 2010): the use of a range of media such as internet, TV, radio etc; a combination of mass communication and interpersonal communication (for example small group activities, advice sessions); a thorough analysis of the target group (see Larsson, 2008 and Jarlbro, 2010 for information on how to conduct a target group analysis), and the use of a famous person to raise awareness of the issue.

Other characteristics of a successful campaign are: a repetition of simple messages (see Larsson, 2008 and Jarlbro, 2010 for information on how to establish key messages), engaging key personnel from media and authorities, and to evaluate the campaign during its run. Jarlbro also notes the importance of setting goals in the form of changed behaviour, to use of both commercial and non-commercial marketing, to coordinate the campaign with other activities such as advice, personal meetings, and to use a psychosocial demographic approach to target groups. Finally, the campaign should target people with a strong interpersonal influence on the target group, base its messages on the attitudes and beliefs amongst the target group, and focus on the benefits the group will gain from adopting a certain behaviour (in this case joining the union). It should also pre-tests its messages on the target group. (Jarlbro, 2010).

While the above characteristics apply to all type of health communications campaigns, I would like to argue that they can have bearing on the research results of the thesis, especially because many health campaigns target youth. They can thus be used to analyse the trade unions' communications practices: will it be the case that I can identify some of the characteristics (making their communications align with best practice), or will it be the case that the trade unions have overlooked to include some of the key features of a successful campaign?

3.3 Youth and Civic Communications

Communications researcher Chris Wells has written extensively on civic communications and youth (2014, 2015). Writing from an American perspective, he

argues that digital media can play a crucial role in the re-engagement of youth. What is novel about his approach is that he takes a communicative approach: rather than looking at how digital media can enable social movements, he looks at the communication relationship between youth and civic organisations (and one can argue that trade unions are civic organisations since they are so called special interest organisations). He argues that even though many civic organisations have started to communicate with youth through online platforms such as Facebook, many of them are still communicating in a manner of an older mass-media information style, a style that is non-participatory and authoritative, for example, using Facebook to distribute news style notices to followers and links to self-referential content (Wells, 2014).

This way of communicating, according to him, does not reflect how youth use and communicate through media today. He argues that civic organisations therefore should try to readapt how they communicate with youth by adopting what he calls an actualising style of civic information. This type of communication is characterised by participation: appeals to fans to share information, ideas or action ideas, and by bricolage and networked information sharing (links to content that is not affiliated to the organisation itself). This way of communicating, he argues, has the potential to spur further interest in the organisations, and in their work to engage young people.

Even though Wells' writing takes an American approach, and the fact that this thesis does not include any formal analysis of the social media posts and internet activities of the trade unions, I still believe that his arguments can be brought to bear on the thesis. For example, can one detect tendencies of the trade unions to communicate in a more "actualising information style"? Or are they still communicating in an authoritative way more in line with a mass-media information style of civic information?

3.4 Trade Union Recruitment Strategies

Also of interest to the thesis is to include literature on trade union recruitment strategies. Even though my approach is communicative in nature, I believe it can be of value to see if the trade unions' communications practices align with this literature. This will highlight whether trade unions have adopted strategies seen as effectual in the sector.

Management and marketing researchers Leanne Griffin and Michelle Brown (2011), in a study of university students, illustrate that family, study major, and friends' union attitudes have a positive impact on young people's union attitudes. And positive attitudes have been shown to be useful predictors of willingness to join a union.

Therefore, they argue that unions should engage with young people during their university studies since it provides an opportunity to affect them before they start a career. Since their study demonstrates the importance of social contacts in the development of young people's attitudes the trade unions should attempt to use social networks more effectively (for example finding a way to feed into digital forms of communications amongst youth) and they also need to use technology to find out what is important to young people when it comes to unions and union membership (ibid).

Griffin and Brown's study aligns with the arguments put forward in both youth communication and health communication. For example, the study highlights the importance of friends in affecting how youth feel and think about an issue (in this case union membership).

Employment relations researchers Janis Bailey, Robin Price, Lin Esders and Paula (2010) adopt a social marketing approach, and argue that union membership can be seen as an experience good (an experience that must be sampled to convey its benefits to the consumer). The experience good, however, is unsought (not wanted) according to the authors (because of the costs of joining unions, or because youth has no knowledge of the union). Because union membership is seen as an unsought good they argue that unions have to: start differentiating their product (the union and union membership) through branding; through reducing the intangibility of union services (for example by physically meeting youth, and through virtual meeting places such as chat functions on the website), by offering positive low-cost "sampling experiences" (such as special student union memberships) and through operating a website that is relational rather than only informative. Trade unions also need to start to communicate using language, visuals and messages that resonate with youth. These measures can help unions to recruit youth.

Their arguments also seem to align with common themes highlighted above (by illustrating the importance of interaction through digital communications, and by focusing on how the union can make a difference to the life of youth etc.).

3.5 Logic of Collective Action

Finally, I think it could be of interest to include literature on group organisation and collective action. Economist Mancur Olson has coined (a now famous) theory called the logic of collective action, (Congleton, 2015). He assumes that men and women are mainly self-interested which means that they focus on their own costs and benefits when opting to engage in collective action. He then assumes that the private costs and benefits are affected by group size and the type of interests that a group wants to advance. Some groups try to advance collective action for which the “more the merrier” rule holds: and these groups benefit from increases in membership because the effectiveness of collective action increases with more members (ibid). He divides groups into categories according to membership (small groups, intermediate groups and large groups).

Large groups, according to Olson, tend to remain unorganised (and thus latent) because they require a more sophisticated organisation to advance common interests. A person’s individual contribution has essentially no detectable effect on average costs and benefits. Therefore members are hard to organise even if the benefits they gain from collective action are far larger than the actual organisation cost they have to bear themselves (Congleton, 2015).

He goes on to argue that collective action requires organising private rewards/punishments adequate to motivate individual members (these he terms *selective incentives*). If there are no selective incentives, unorganised members will not contribute voluntarily to help the group achieve a collective end (such as higher wages for example). Instead they will free ride (see the section on youth unionisation above), since broad policy interest are public goods that are freely available (like salaries etc.) to all group members, whereas participation in say trade unions that work to secure them is costly to the individual. Thus, without selective incentives, no class promotion or public interest activities would take place. He concludes that (other things being equal), that the “larger the group and smaller the average benefits associated with membership, the less likely a group is to be organised or effective at advancing shared interests.” (Congleton, p.219, 2015).

I believe Olson’s theory is of great relevance to trade unions today: as shown above, youth will probably not join for a collective good but rather on the back of selective

incentives: i.e. the trade unions need to show that the benefits of joining are worth the cost of the membership. In addition, I would argue that his theory can be brought to bear on the actual communications practices of the trade unions: will it be the case that they will centre their messages on selective incentives of joining the union? Or will it be the case that they focus on highlighting the solidarity aspects of organising?

The above sections outline the theoretical framework I will draw on in my discussion of the research question. I will now turn to a description of the methodological approach I will use.

4 Methodology

Since the thesis is exploratory in nature (examining the communications practices of trade unions), I have applied an inductive research approach (where the focus is on characterising a phenomenon, and on understanding the nature of a problem or occurrence (in this case how the trade unions are communicating). (Collins, 2010). In this approach there is less need to generalise results, something which suits my thesis since I cannot generalise in relation to how *all* trade unions should communicate: I can only discuss and analyse how the chosen trade unions are communicating today. However, I might be able to offer some highlights as to how this work could be done in the future. In addition, I hope that other trade unions might still find the results relevant.

I have used qualitative methods for the data collection in the form of interviews. This approach was chosen because an interview setting allows for the researcher to find out in depth information about a subject (complex situations can be explained, and information can be supplemented by the researcher) (Kumar, 2005). I chose to use semi-structured interview questions (see Appendix 1), since it allows for some flexibility when it comes to changing and editing the questions (something which is useful for interviews: the researcher might want to change the order of the questions asked, or maybe add additional questions. The researcher might also want to add additional questions in future interviews, (Collins, 2010). As a help in designing the research questions, I turned to academic literature (Collins 2010, Kumar, 2005).

4.1 Data Collection

The thesis rests on interviews with respondents from three trade unions: Kommunal, Sveriges Ingenjörer, SI, and Hotell och Restaurang facket, HRF. The representatives (communications and member/recruitment professionals) were chosen because of the nature of the thesis (examining the communication practices of the trade unions), and I got hold of their contacts either through reception (HRF) or by first contacting the head of the communications unit (SI) who then passed on my interview query. In the case of Kommunal, I had to email my query a number of times before they got back to me. I also interviewed two respondents in HRF since one of them was responsible for recruiting and the other for communications.

Kommunal is the largest union in Sweden: a workers' union uniting more than half a million workers in sectors such as elderly care, disability care, schools and pre-schools, health and primary care, transport, kitchen and food, building maintenance, and the fire and rescue services. HRF is a workers' union with around 31 000 members uniting workers in the hotel and restaurant sector, and SI is a civil servant union with around 144 000 members, which unites university educated engineers.

The unions were chosen because they represent workers from two out of three central union organisations in Sweden: LO (Landsorganisationen i Sverige) and SACO (Sveriges akademikers centralorganisation). I had also intended to include a civil servant union from the third central union organisation, TCO (Tjänstemännens centralorganisation) but the unions I approached declined involvement in the thesis (due to time pressure and work restructuring processes).

I consciously included two workers' trade unions because, as noted above, the traditional workers' unions have seen a greater decrease in membership (which is also mirrored amongst youth). Therefore, I was especially interested in examining how they are communicating with a younger demographic, and I specifically wanted to include HRF, since this union has seen the greatest fall in numbers out of all the workers' unions. I also chose to include Kommunal because this is the largest workers' union. Important to note is that this union has recently experienced a loss of confidence amongst workers, with many workers leaving the union, because of mispending of money (*Sveriges television*, 2016-01-16).

I included SI because it is the largest union in the SACO central organisation, and it also targets a very specific group: engineers and would be engineers. I wanted to compare its communications practices to the workers' unions in order to see how they compared and differentiated.

The unions were also chosen because they differ in size (see above). I was interested in examining if this too would make a difference in how they communicate with youth.

I conducted all the interviews (which I recorded) over the phone during the union representatives' working hours. I would have preferred to do the interviews in person, but all the representatives are based in Stockholm (I live in Malmö). I sent them the questions by email prior to the interview. I also asked a family member to review the questions beforehand to make sure they could be understood by the union representatives. Each interview lasted for approximately 30-50 minutes. I interviewed the representatives in this order: SI, HRF, and Kommunal.

The interviews were conducted over a time period of a week and half, this allowed me to add on additional questions for the later interviews. I also let the conversation run free during the interviews in the sense that I omitted some questions if the respondent had already submitted the information.

The interviews were then reviewed and analysed for concepts and themes relevant to the research question, using the theories and advice outlined in the literature review. This approach seemed relevant to the context of the thesis since I'm examining the trade unions communications practices: by exploring how their communications align with the literature, I will be able to discuss how the trade unions are tackling the challenge of communicating with a younger demographic.

4.2 Limitations of Research

There are some limitations with the research. For example, the thesis does not contain an analysis of how a large civil servant union (see above) communicate with youth, this inclusion would have made the results of the thesis more relevant to Swedish trade unions. It could also have made for a more interesting thesis since it would have included more data to inform the discussion. My intention was to interview the largest

civil servant's trade union, Unionen, but they declined (and so did another civil servant union called Vision).

Another limitation with the data is that it only analyses how the trade unions themselves communicate, not how youth interpret and receive this communication. This means that I can only analyse how the trade unions work, and not how effectual their communication is/was in terms of desired effect on the target group.

A third limitation is that I have only analysed the respondents' description of their union's communication practices. I have not included an analysis of the actual communications outputs by the unions. This means that my data might not describe the full range of communications practices carried out by the unions.

A fourth limitation is the weaknesses of a qualitative interview method for data collection. While I would argue that this approach is most suitable to this type of thesis, I also want to highlight that there are some weaknesses. For example, one major weakness is one of interview bias; how does one avoid that one's views as a researcher will not affect the interview respondent or have an impact on what questions one includes in the interview schema? (Kumar, 2005). Another issue is that of the skills of the researcher; the more one knows about the subject, and the more skills one has as a researcher, the more interesting and usable the data will be. Other weaknesses with interviews are that they are time consuming and that the interaction between the researcher and interview respondent can affect the data collected.

Nonetheless, I have still settled on an interview approach since I believe that this is the best method to use in order to examine how trade unions are communicating with youth in order to recruit them.

4.3 Ethical Considerations

Since this is a thesis concerned with professional communications I cannot identify any specific ethical considerations relating to the data collected. In addition, the data does not contain any sensitive material or content. The interview respondents also participated in the interviews willingly and had been informed about the nature and aim of the thesis beforehand (see Appendice 2).

4.4 Validity of the Data

“Validity is defined as the degree to which the researcher has measured what he has set out to measure” (Kumar, p. 153, 2005). I have attempted to create valid data by establishing a link between the questions asked in the interviews and the objective of the thesis: for example, each question must have a logical link with an objective (in this case to examine how trade unions are communicating). This is defined as face validity. I have also tried to cover the full range of the issue being covered. This is called content validity. Content validity is also judged on the basis of which questions represent the issue they are supposed to measure (as judged by the researcher). (Kumar, 2005). This way of establishing validity – face and content – felt like the most suitable approach in light of the aim of the thesis and the small sample (four interviews).

However, this way of measuring validity is subjective in the sense that another person might have a differing opinion about the face and content validity of the research (and there is also the issue of researcher bias and researcher skill, see above). The validity might also vary if questions change from interview to interview (something which I have done) since the logical link might be altered.

Nonetheless, I do hope that the data will be valid in the sense that it can be used in a description, discussion and analysis of how the trade unions are communicating today. Moreover, the data will not be used to make generalisations of how *all* trade unions should communicate, only to comment on the studied ones.

5 Research Results and Analysis

In this section I will describe and analyse my research results relating to how trade unions communicate with youth for the purposes of recruiting them. The analysis will draw on the theoretical framework set out in the literature review and on the information highlighted in the context section.

I will now turn to the literature on youth communications and health communications: how will the communications practices of the chosen unions align with how the literature argue that organisations should communicate with a younger demographic?

5.1 Sveriges Ingenjörer

I will begin by analysing SI's communications practices (for the purpose of recruiting new members).

“The personal meeting is also really important.” (Respondent from SI)

SI's main arenas for communicating with youth for the purposes of recruiting them are in the universities, a way of working which can seem in contrast with the literature with its focus on the use of digital channels (see Graffman, 2016). However, as the respondent explains, SI can only target engineers and would-be engineers since you have to be either a student studying to become an engineer or a qualified engineer to be a member. This means that SI does not benefit from targeting any youth: it has to focus on would be engineers; and this group is best found in the universities offering engineering degrees.

The union focuses on meeting new students physically every year in order to communicate with them for recruitment purposes. SI also hires students who are already union members to work for them for a couple of hours a month. These students function as ambassadors for SI and help organise and run various activities aimed at students. This approach to communicate with youth to deliver a message is in accordance with the literature, which highlights the importance of using peer-to-peer messengers who are familiar with the norms of the target group, and so called beacons in the form of friends (see Graffman, 2016 and Jarlbro, 2010).

Yet, while the personal meeting is important, SI also uses a range of other digital channels to communicate with youth (and its other members). “We show what we do on Facebook and the webpage...this is recruiting in itself.” This two-fold way of reaching out to a younger group is also in line with the literature (compare Jarlbro's, 2010, aspects of a successful campaign).

Digital channels are in fact SI's main communication channels, once the students become members, the communication moves online. The union newsletter is the most important channel. This illustrates that SI aligns its working practices with youth's preference for digital media and internet usage.

The respondent also points out that SI is very careful to not overload the students and other members with communication, and it seldom uses advertising: “This is a

sensitive target group” (referring to both student members and all the members in the union). This is very much in accordance with Graffman’s (2016) argument of respecting youth’s identity online by not posting too much and too often.

The respondent highlights that SI is now moving towards incorporating more interactive and individualised features in its communication, for example salary chats and other services, possibilities to for members to create their own news feeds etc. This development again fits nicely into how youth use media today.

SI has also done extensive work in segmenting its whole membership (and student members are included): “We know what our [members] want.” This way of working can be seen to be in line with the literature which highlights the importance of analysing target groups (see Jarlbro, 2010). It is also a way for SI to ensure that its members stay in the union: “Recruiting/keeping is one to us”, as the respondent explains.

“Unions have a journey [to make] ...[it needs to] deserve its member, deserve its customer in every meeting, be relevant.”

This quote sums up the *type* of messages/communication that SI communicates to student engineers in order to recruit them. The main focus for SI is to be relevant to its members (throughout both their student experience and future careers). For the student group, SI achieves this by focusing on communicating what type of service it can provide to student union members (i.e. on the benefits of being a member). These services include: help with CV-writing, networking seminars, opportunities to meet engineers, fake recruitment interview services etc. This way of working aligns with Graffman (2016) who argues that the idea of relevance is one of the most important features of successful youth communications (and I would say most communication).

For the other membership groups, SI also communicates about various benefits of being a member (and the members’ needs and wants are measured in yearly evaluations). For example, SI works in various ways to make sure that the members stay in the union once they have joined: by for example sending out tailored newsletters catering to various segments, offering income insurance, various courses etc. This way of working can also be seen to correspond to youth’s preference for a more individualistic information flow based on needs and preferences.

Apart from the practices highlighted above, SI also seems to heed other features of the literature on how to create a successful campaign as put forward by Jarlbro (2010): SI has based its analysis of the target group on a demographic approach, its messages are based on the attitudes amongst the group, and the messages are centred on the benefits the group will gain from adopting a certain behaviour (in this case joining the union). SI has also conducted evaluations of its various activities.

Yet, in contrast to the literature, it does not appear as if SI has tested its messages/ways of working on the target group (students) beforehand. According to the respondent, SI is very familiar with what this group wants and needs. Neither does SI work with influencers or celebrities (something which the literature highlighted could be of benefit in reaching youth).

Based on the above outline, I would argue that SI seems to closely follow the arguments/advice put forward in the literature. It is clear that it has a thorough understanding of the target group and a very clear vision of what it wants to achieve, and how to achieve it. SI also knows how to reach its target group (students) and has a strategy in place to recruit them. And even though SI seems to eschew social media for recruiting purposes, I would argue that this seems like a strategic choice: SI neither can nor want to reach all youth which makes the student setting into the most relevant arena to meet potential new members. SI's way of working (by looking at motivators and personal drivers) also points to an understanding that age in and of itself is not the most suitable variable for its communication goals.

I would also argue that SI's overall communication strategy might sway student members to stay in the union since its way of communicating can be seen to suit a younger demographic (increasingly individualised features, relevant content etc.).

The next thing to ask is whether SI's communications practices are effective? The answer to this has to be yes. The membership numbers of SI are increasing year by year, a fact that illustrates that the communications probably have had the desired effect (since I'm analysing the communications from a recruitment perspective). It also suggests that SI has found an effective way to reach students and to keep them as members once they join.

I would argue that SI's success in communicating with, and recruiting youth, has a number of explanations. To begin with it is easy for SI to reach the target group with

communication since the majority of them are to be found in the universities, a fact that can help SI get around the problem that many youth do not know about the union. This means that SI can focus all its attention on meeting them physically and has less of a need to reach them digitally for recruitment purposes. Also, this group is quite uniform when it comes to education levels and needs: SI has established that this group is interested in networking, career advice, CV-assistance etc. This means that it is relatively easy for SI to respond to these needs. It is also a way of working that will make the union seem relevant to the students and entice them to join. As the respondent herself says: “We only drive issues affecting the engineer”, which highlights that SI can focus all its attention on this group and its role in society.

Moreover, and this is a very important point, the students that SI is communicating with have settled on a future career in engineering (by applying to do an engineering degree, although not everyone finishes), and in this sector there is very little unemployment and few temporary positions. This is a factor that helps SI get around that some youth will otherwise refrain from joining a union because of temporary employment. These circumstances suggest that it might be easier for SI to highlight the benefits of becoming a member, since it can press on how it can make a difference throughout the students’ future careers as engineers.

In addition, working conditions in the sector are generally good, and the level of income is relatively high, which suggest that the union fee will not be a hindrance to joining. Those good conditions suggest that SI needs to focus less on negotiating salaries and improving working conditions. This is, I would argue, is a key factor in SI’s success. Qualified engineers are highly sought after which means that SI only have to convince students of the added benefit of joining the union (not of joining the sector itself) through highlighting what SI can offer, which can help SI get around the problem of free-riding (see Congleton, 2015).

But, even though SI’s communication practises can be seen to have the desired effect, I think a reflection on the type of overarching strategy it uses is relevant. Larsson (2008) argues that essentially there are two types of communications strategies, inside out and outside in strategies. The first one denotes strategies where the organisation initiates and sends information to its target groups solely on its own terms: either by mass-communication or by creating communication methods for feedback from the

target group. The latter strategy denotes strategies that are focused on attending to the needs and wants of the target group and on making the receivers a part of the communication process. Outside in strategies are also often focused on dialogue with the group members and also on creating various types of support and services that the group or individual can access when he or she wants. (Larsson, 2008). I would argue that even though SI has individualised its communication to highlight different aspects of its work and services (and is moving towards more interaction and services that can be accessed when one needs), it is still deploying an essentially inside-out strategy whereby it is (through various means) trying to either convince students to join, or its existing members to stay. More specifically it seems as if SI is making use of a two-way form of “persuasion” strategy (since it bases its work in the needs of its members) (Larsson 2008). This type of strategy is based on the idea of the famous AIDA-formula whereby an individual will be convinced to act through attention, interest, desire, and action (ibid). It can be illustrated by SI’s practices: it gets the students’ attention at meetings in universities, it maintains their interest through relevant status updates and information about its work in social media, and events in the universities, it creates a desire to join through offering a special student membership (by which the students can access services such as CV-assistance, networking events), something which will lead to action, i.e. joining the union.

While it is nothing wrong with this type of strategy one could ponder whether this way of communicating could potentially be detrimental in the future? As we have seen above in the context section, today youth are starting to expect a certain degree of participation and collaboration in their communicative relationships (something I will discuss below, see Wells 2014). SI does not seem to encourage this type of collaboration and participation in their communications: it seems very much grounded in giving the target group what they want based on the needs SI has defined through evaluations and segmentation. This makes me reflect on whether this way of communicating will be seen as sufficient and enticing by a younger demographic in the future: will it be the case that they will demand a stronger collaborative involvement in SI’s communications practices (maybe by creating videos, message boards, other interactive features)? Then again, one could also argue that there is no need or reason for SI to move in this direction since it is already successful in gaining new members, (and its communications activities seem to satisfy the students).

Yet, it is important to note that SI is aiming to encourage more interaction with its members through for example salary chats on the website, possibilities to choose personal news feeds etc. But, these features are again based in the needs that the members have expressed, and do not seem to be centred on collaboration between members and members or members and organisation.

5.2 Kommunal

We now turn to Kommunal's communications practices.

“We have not looked into what motivates this group” Respondent at Kommunal.

Currently Kommunal has no specific communications strategy (or recruitment strategy) to reach a younger demographic. This fact is quite remarkable since it is not a new development that youth are turning their backs on the union (Vandaele, 2012). It also corroborates Vandaele's survey which highlights that union efforts to reach and engage youth have been inadequate (Vandaele, 2013).

Reaching out to, and recruiting youth, will be key to Kommunal's survival according to the interview respondent (especially since the union will see many of its members retire in the coming decades).

“We are an organisation that has seen communication as a print ad”

Up to now, Kommunal's efforts targeting youth have not been carried out in accordance with a strategic marketing approach (according to the respondent).

It also seems as if the current communications and recruitment practices (as described by the respondent) are in contrast with how the literature argues that organisations should work to reach out to youth. For example, the union has not done a proper assessment of what a younger age demographic wants and needs, and this is something which all literature on communications highlight as crucial.

Kommunal is also communicating about its work in a very “broad fashion” (i.e. not very specific to the various sectors that Kommunal organises): “We are very broad...Many [of our members] feel that they only see the union paper.” This way of communicating does not align with how youth uses media today, and with how the literature suggests organisations should structure their communication. In fact, one of

the main features of youth communication centres on the importance of organisations making themselves and their information relevant (see Graffman, 2016).

However, Kommunal is using digital media such as Facebook and Twitter but according to the respondent the union has not done this with a view to reach youth or based on a recruitment strategy. This contradicts Graffman's recommendation to create different strategies for different social media channels. One can also note that Kommunal's Facebook page has around 46 000 likes while the union as a whole unites around half a million; in addition, not everyone who likes the union page is necessary a union member.

Moreover, the main arena for recruiting has been the work place and up to now Kommunal has not made use of specific messages (according to the respondent) to reach out to youth (something which again is crucial according to the literature). Moreover, this work has not been carried out in a systematic way: "Recruitment has just been a part of the work of the elected union representative" according to the respondent. In addition, this work has been carried out by the various districts, and not organised centrally.

Yet, Kommunal does work in high schools as part of an information campaign run by the central organisation LO to recruit youth, and it also make use of youth communications professionals, a way of working which the literature highlight as effective in reaching out to this group. Yet, according to the respondent, Kommunal has not based these communications efforts on what a younger age group wants and needs. And, *Ungdomssbarometern, 2015* highlights that many youth have no knowledge of the union which seems to suggest that this communication has not been fully effective.

Also, Kommunal has not evaluated its working practices since, according to the respondent, it has not based its strategies on marketing communications, and this is another key factor in successful communication campaigns according to the literature.

Yet, as the respondent points out, Kommunal has done a survey among its members in order to see how they perceive the union. This survey highlights that Kommunal has many challenges: for example, the union is not perceived as relevant in the day to day lives of its members and it is perceived as invisible, where members only get the union paper and have no contact with elected local union representatives. It is also

seen as a union that is old fashioned and traditional. The survey results corroborates that Kommunal up to now seems to have worked in contrast to the literature (as noted by Graffman, 2016, it is crucial that organisations make themselves relevant to its target group); something which Kommunal has not done according to its members; it is also perceived as old fashioned and traditional, something which does not sit well with a younger demographic who are shaped and influenced by friends and peers' opinions.

“Old strategies [of recruiting]...with a focus on responsibility. I do not see these as relevant to a younger age group. It has to be about the individual. I see this as a challenge for all unions today.”

Kommunal is aware of the challenges it is facing, and the respondent interviewed is now working to create a new strategy to engage members. So how does this new strategy compare to the literature?

While the new strategy is not finished; for example, the main communications channels are not yet decided and key messages and concepts need to be worked out, it seems to include (as described by the respondent) many of the key features of a successful campaign (see Jarlbro, 2010, and Graffman, 2016). The strategy will presumably be based on an analysis of the target group, it will pre-test its messages on youth; it will make use of the results of the survey they conducted in its communications (in creating key messages), and it will use a range of different channels such as Facebook, Instagram etc., and the webpage to reach youth. It will also explore the idea of working with influencers in conveying its message, and it will also focus on communication in social media channels such as Facebook, Instagram and Youtube (see Graffman who points out that digital media is now part of the identity of youth) (Graffman, 2016).

Above all, the new strategy will focus on how Kommunal can become relevant to its members (something that will entice new members to join). According to the respondent: “Its about being relevant...about gain and benefit...”. The focus on relevance is as we have seen one of the most crucial features of youth communications (see Graffman, 2016). This aim will be achieved (according to the respondent) through adapting the website so that it contains more user-friendly features such as tools and checklists, by focusing on sharing knowledge, and by making use of targeted

messages to be used for recruiting in workplaces, schools and other channels. Kommunal will also tailor its information so that it becomes more branch specific (compare this to youth's preference for more personalised information). Relevance will also be achieved by talking about the membership in a new way, a more youthful way: "We have to become more youthful" says the respondent. There is no other way forward for the union: the respondent emphasises that the young will not be swayed by arguments centred on collective action and the "red" flag of solidarity since surveys show that many youth today care mainly about themselves, their family and friends (even though they can of course organise around issues). Many of them are also too young to remember the landmark victories won by the unions (according to the respondent).

Based on the above outline, I would argue that Kommunal's new strategy seems to heed most of the advice/best practice outlined in the literature. Yet, I want to make a point of pressing on the fact that Kommunal should focus specifically on digital channels (with a different strategy for each channel, compare Graffman, 2016) since its target group is geographically spread out (in contrast to SI) both in the work place and other arenas. It would also be advisable for Kommunal to make use of Youtube specifically since youth have started to increasingly use this channel (see Graffman, 2016). I also want to argue that the union could do well in linking in with influencers to convey its message, especially since the union is so large. By linking in with various influencers, it can highlight the benefits of joining to different target groups of youth.

I would argue that Kommunal seems to be on the right track to engage and recruit youth to become union members, for example, by continuing to use schools as an arena, and by making use of digital channels in a focused way, it can overcome the fact that many youth do not know of the union; and by increasingly highlighting the benefits of union membership it can (hopefully) get around the problem of free-riding.

But, there are still many aspects of the strategy to be decided. How will it use the various channels, what content and messages will it use, and how will it practically reach youth? Will Kommunal use advertising on social media, how will the union tailor the messages it uses in schools as part of the central organisation campaign, and how will it adapt the union website?

Since the strategy is still on the concept stage it is hard to predict whether Kommunal will be successful in increasing its membership numbers, yet, what is clear is that the current ways of working have not been seen as sufficient. It is also difficult to say anything about the type of overarching strategy the union will make use of: i.e. will it be designed more as an inside out strategy (along the lines of a two way persuasion strategy) or outside in strategy (with a focus on dialogue and making the receivers part of the communication process) (Larsson, 2008). While the above appears to be based on best practice in the literature and a knowledge of the target group, only time will tell if the union will be successful.

Yet, I would argue that one already now can identify a number of factors which suggest that Kommunal is facing quite steep challenges in implementing its strategy (if compared to SI). For example, it has to contend with structural challenges related to the fact that many union officials are markedly older than the youth Kommunal wants to recruit, a factor that can make it harder to reach out to youth in spite of a new communications strategy.

I would also argue that other factors can come to have an impact (and one important factor is of course the recent scandal centred on misspending which I have noted). For example, since Kommunal is a large union it is quite difficult for it to individualise its information to suit each and every individual, a circumstance that could lead youth to feel that Kommunal's approach is too broad and not relevant. This fact can also make it harder to create selective incentives which youth feel are relevant: the larger the union, the less focus on creating specific courses and services tailored to specific groups of workers. In addition, Kommunal is trying to reach a group which is geographically spread out which makes it harder to reach them with information (even via work places). Moreover, even if Kommunal recruits in high schools, those students are quite young and can come to change their plans for a future career many times before starting in their first job (even if they are eligible for work after leaving high school). In addition, the average pay in the sector is quite low, a fact which means that it could be more difficult for Kommunal to convince members of the benefits of paying the union fee.

5.3 Hotellr och Restaurang facket, HRF

Finally, we turn to HRF's communications practices targeting youth. Similarly, to Kommunal it has no set strategy to recruit and engage youth, something which again corroborates Vandaele's study (2012).

HRF is also working with creating a new communications and recruitment strategy.

“Before we had good ideas which we implemented but we have not worked holistically.” Respondent 1 at HRF

Before we turn to how HRF plans to work in the future, I want to examine how its current practices compares to the literature. Similarly to Kommunal, HRF also engages with youth via the high schools (as part of LO's campaign) and also works with youth communications professionals. This is a way of working which the literature highlights as useful in reaching youth (see the use of peers and friends in impacting on attitudes and opinions, Jarlbro, 2010). Yet, this work might not have been fully successful (compare *Ungdomsbarometern, 2015*).

In addition, the union's elected officials are present in places where youth work in temporary jobs in summer and winter (also in line with the literature which highlights the importance of personal meetings as part of a campaign, Jarlbro, 2010). Yet, respondent 1 (responsible for recruitment) notes that HRF has not systematically encouraged youth to become student members.

HRF has also focused on recruiting and communicating with youth via the work places (through elected union officials): this way of working is also in accordance with the literature which highlights the importance of peer-to-peer messages (which applies here since in the sector many members are quite young) (see Jarlbro, 2010). Yet, according to the respondent, HRF has not carried out this work in a holistic way before.

“I go on intuition. I use myself as a reference” Respondent 2 (responsible for communications) at HRF

HRF also makes use of social media such as Facebook and Twitter. Yet, this work is not based on any strategy specifically aimed at youth, something which Graffman (2016) highlights as important, in fact, she argues that organisations need to have different strategies for different social media channels. One can also note that the HRF

Facebook page has around 4000 people who has liked the page while there are around 30 0000 members in HRF; in addition not everyone who likes the page is necessary a member. In addition, the content updated on the page is not based any specific messages. Neither has HRF formally analysed the target group nor pretested any of its messages (which is in contrast with the literature, see Jarlbro, 2010).

HRF does not advertise its union to youth via Facebook to any extent (it has done some campaigns to market its website). Yet, respondent 2 does emphasise that she aims to post information that is relevant to the members (compare to Graffman, 2016), and that she attempts to use a youthful tone in the communications: “We try to communicate in a direct and easily understood fashion”. And, the respondent highlights that HRF is mindful of not updating too much to not alienate followers (heeding Graffman’s, 2016, advice).

HRF does not have a Youtube account, and neither does it work with any influencers or celebrities to convey its message (and these are elements seen as successful according to youth communications professionals). According to the respondent, HRF does not have the resources to have a Youtube account.

Moreover, HRF has not evaluated its work in social media channels, which is in contrast to the literature, which highlights the importance of evaluating communications (Jarlbro, 2010).

Based on the above, I would argue that the current practices seem to diverge from many, but not all, of the aspects highlighted as essential in youth communications. The exceptions are the work in schools and in work places, and the focus on relevance in social media channels etc. Moreover, the decreasing numbers seem to suggest that this approach has not been sufficient up to now.

Similar to Kommunal, HRF is aware of the challenges it is facing. HRF is now working on a new communications and recruitment strategy. I will now compare the main elements of this new strategy to the literature.

“Youth are really important” Respondent 1 at HRF

“I try to not refer back too much to what has been. Because of the young age group. I try to talk to them about the here and now.” Respondent 2 at HRF

“Everyday relevance.” Respondent 1 at HRF

As with SI and Kommunal, the main focus of the new strategy is on making the union relevant to its members (and through this entice new members). The messages it will create will focus on the everyday issues that can affect its members (and this is of special importance to youth as we have seen, Graffman, 2016). HRF will also continue to use social media to highlight its work and post about issues that matters to the members (and through this entice new members). Moreover, it will adapt its website for mobile which aligns with how youth access internet today. It is also thinking of setting up a Youtube account.

“HRF should have the work places as the nave for recruiting.” Respondent 1 at HRF

“You are not born as a member of the union.” Respondent 1 at HRF

The nave of the new recruitment strategy will centre on working through the local union representatives (they will be used as ambassadors for HRF and they will inform the workers about HRF). For example, HRF will continue to hold courses in how union members can entice others to join. This way of communicating with a younger demographic seems to align with the literature, since the majority of the members are young, using them as ambassadors, heeds the advice on using peer-to-peer messengers to reach out to youth. In addition, HRF will continue to work via schools and work places with many temporary youth workers.

Based on the description of the new strategy, it seems as if HRF has a clear vision of how it wants to work and communicate to recruit members, for example, use work places, school settings and social media to combat the problem that youth do not know of the union, and aim to highlight how the union can make a difference to the working life of youth to combat the problem of free-riding.

Since the strategy is not yet set, it is hard to predict whether it will be successful or not. It is also difficult to say anything about whether this strategy will focus on an inside out approach, or an outside in (Larsson, 2008), and whether this will come to matter to the youth HRF is recruiting. Yet, I would argue that HRF might do well in looking into using digital channels (with different strategies for each channel, see Graffman, 2016), as one of its main arenas (not only the work place and schools) as well as using vloggers and influencers since it is targeting a group which is spread out more geographically (and in a sector that is characterised by a high turnover), and

digital channels can reach people in any physical location. Using Youtube would also be advisable since youth have started to increasingly use this channel.

However, I would like to again highlight that HRF (as with the case of Kommunal) seems to face tougher challenges than SI when it comes to implementing a successful communications campaign. For example, the youth that HRF targets often works in temporary positions, a fact which makes youth less keen to join the union. Moreover, many youth only work in the sector while they are studying for other professions, another factor which might impact on willingness to join. In addition, the whole sector is characterised by high turnover of staff which means that HRF might recruit members who will then leave shortly after. Also, the wages in the sector are generally quite low, a factor that might impact on the willingness to pay the union fee. This in turn means that it is harder for HRF to convince new members of the benefits of joining its union. Moreover, HRF is targeting a more diverse group (since you can work in the sector without any specific qualifications,) a fact which makes it harder to make its information relevant to each individual (and relevance is key as we have seen).

Finally, HRF is quite a small union (only 31 000 members) and it has less resources for communications and recruitment, for example, HRF only has one person working with communications. And this can also impact on the success of implementing the new strategy.

The above factors then suggest that HRF will always have a steeper challenge to face than SI and Kommunal when it comes to recruiting members since it is hard for the union to change the actual nature of work in the sector (temporary jobs, low wages, etc.). The above can also explain why it has been so difficult to recruit new members.

5.4 Recruitment Strategies Amongst Unions

So how well do the communications strategies align with literature on union recruitment of youth? I would argue that all three trade unions to varying degree follow some of the advice put forward in the literature. However, one thing to bear in mind is that the studies included above look at university students, and HRF and Kommunal do not target this group. Yet, they do target high school students which could be seen as somewhat comparable.

For example, all three trade unions use the school/university arena to recruit new members (Kommunal and HRF do this as part of LO's information campaign), which corresponds to Griffin and Browns (2011) advice that unions would do well in connecting with youth during their studies. Yet, both Kommunal and HRF have not based this work on any specific strategies aimed at recruiting youth, and the fact that many youth do not know of the union suggest that this work has not been so successful.

Griffin and Brown also highlight that unions should find ways of feeding into social networks that youth use (digital and physical), and that they should use technology to find out about youth's attitudes to the union (something which all three unions do via evaluations). All three unions make use of youth communications professionals via high school and universities, which could be seen as a way of feeding into social networks, and SI and HRF aim to engage youth via their Facebook pages. But, Kommunal does not yet have a strategy to reach out to younger demographics via social media. And it could be argued that HRF's current social media approach is not based in a designated strategy.

I would like to argue that use of social networks could be developed for all unions with a stronger focus on participation and collaboration amongst the students themselves, something which might entice interest and engagement (see Wells, 2014). Based on how the respondents have described their communications practices, I would argue that the majority of their communication seem to be about the union work itself, and on the benefits of joining, albeit based on responding to the needs of their members and would be members.

If we look at Bailey et al (2010), we can see that some of the unions' practices corresponds to their arguments: for example, all unions work to "reduce the intangibility" of the union services by meeting with youth via schools and universities, and through social media sites such as Facebook, in the case of SI and HRF (which uses the chat function to communicate with youth). All three unions also offer sample experiences through offering free student membership, however, HRF has not been consequent in marketing this opportunity in the high schools. They can also be seen to be branding their union through university/school presence, social media, and visibility in places where youth work in the summer/winter. However, so

far this way of communicating has not been enough in the case of Kommunal and HRF since both of these unions have failed to attract youth (for reasons mentioned in the analysis above). Yet, neither of the unions today have so called relational websites. All respondents mention that the webpage is something that need to be developed in the future. Finally, when it comes to using language that resonate with youth, one can argue that, by making use of student communications professionals (all trade unions) and by centring their messages on everyday matters (in the case of HRF), they also attempt to use language that will resonate with youth.

I would like to argue that SI seems to have come furthest in aligning its practices with union literature (supported by their increasing membership numbers). Yet, as highlighted above, SI seems to face a somewhat easier challenge. Clearly, HRF and Kommunal have so far not succeeded in reaching out to youth through branding, sampling experiences, reducing the intangibility of the service etc. Yet, as argued there are a number of reasons for this.

5.5 Civic Youth Communications

Even though I do not formally analyse the trade union's social media updates, which Wells (2014) does in his study on civic communication and youth, I still wanted to relate his arguments to the three trade unions' communications. Hence, I did a brief content analysis of their Facebook pages for the purpose of assessing Well's theory (I reviewed content posted on their pages from April 1st to May 20th 2016). This non-scientific analysis highlights, that in the main, the trade unions use their Facebook page to drive traffic to its own website and to highlight its own work. However, the time period reviewed was also the time of year when the trade unions negotiate for better salaries/conditions for their members which might have affected the content updated. Moreover, even if the respondent from Kommunal did not want to discuss how it worked today via social media, its Facebook page did ask people to share and like its posts. SI's posts also included links to other pages as well as to its own website.

While the observations above might not do the trade unions' communication completely justice, it is still a pointer to how they communicate. I would argue that their communication seem to align more with a mass-media information style (Wells, 2014) (albeit with communicative ingredients) than a fully actualising communication style.

According to Wells (2014), civic organisations should move towards adopting a more actualising way of communicating with youth. I would agree that it might serve the trade unions well to move in this direction since it corresponds to youth's expectation of communication and participation, which in turn can serve to spark an interest and a reengagement with this group. On the other hand, this type of communication practices might not serve the trade unions aims since their ultimate goal is to highlight how they work and what they do in order to maintain their membership and to recruit new members.

5.6 Solidarity Versus the Logic of Collective Action

“You have to earn your customer...you need to be relevant in each meeting”
Respondent at SI

“It is about being relevant...the benefit and value of being a member” Respondent at Kommunal

“We are going to base our messages in the everyday issues that can affect our members”
Respondent 1 at HRF

As noted throughout this section, all of the three unions' communications centres on the individual relevance for joining (and the benefits of being a member in) the union. The above quotes again highlight that it is the individual gain that the unions want to press on in order to make themselves relevant to youth and to ensure that they join, and stay, in the union. This way of communicating seems to be at odds with the founding idea of the trade union, with its focus on collective organising and a shared will to advance a common interest, say salaries or improved working conditions. However, all of the unions seem to have moved away from using this idea as a key message for recruitment. As the respondent from Kommunal notes: “The traditional union strategies of highlighting a form of responsibility [to join] does not seem relevant to this group, now the focus has to be on an individual level”. Yet, the idea of organising as a group in order to make it better for the majority still seem to be important to all the unions, but is not at the forefront anymore.

I would argue that highlighting the individual gain of being a member also seems to be in line with the literature's advice on focusing on individual relevance. It is also a way of communicating that is key to overcome the problem with free-riding. As noted

some youth refrain from joining the union since they can still reap the benefits from the trade unions' work (since organised and unorganised workers tend to get paid similar wages for example). This means that unions need to highlight the individual gain from being a member, and this gain needs to offset the trade union fee.

This way of communicating directly corresponds with Olson's theory called logic of collective action (Congleton, 2015). The trade unions are using what he terms as selective incentives to motivate youth to join and stay in the union. SI offers student memberships which includes services such as CV-assistance, tailored seminars, networking events, fake interview training. HRF also offers free student membership and aims to create selective incentives by highlighting how the union can be of use in everyday matters such as working overtime etc. Kommunal also offers free student membership as an incentive and the respondent notes that Kommunal will aim to create other benefits in the shape of salary statistics, check-lists of advice and other type of services.

While I would argue that SI has come the furthest in the use of selective incentives, something that is supported by their increasing membership numbers, all three trade unions do focus on how to make the fee of union membership seem worthwhile to new and old members since the students/ high school youth have to pay a fee once they are in employment.

This way of communicating also seems to be effective (if one looks at SI for example), and it seems to support Olson's theory (Congleton, 2015) that people will free ride if there are no selective incentives; if his theory was wrong, the trade unions might not choose to highlight the individual benefit to such an extent.

Finally, I would argue, that this way of communicating on the part of the trade unions seems to herald a move away from an ideological position of solidarity to a position of individual benefits and gains that seem more at home in a company selling a product than a traditional trade union organisation. It is also a position quite at odds with Wells' (2014) ideas of how civic organisations should reengage youth.

I will now turn to a discussion of the main points arising from the analysis above.

6 Discussion

In this section I will discuss my analysis in greater detail and expand on a number of points.

I want to begin by making a special mention of the fact that Kommunal and HRF have not had a dedicated strategy to reach a younger demographic. I would argue that this is quite remarkable since it is not a new development that youth turn their backs to the union. It also supports the findings of the study conducted by Vandaele, 2012.

I will now turn to how the trade unions have structured their communications practices as outlined in the above analysis. I believe that it is of interest that all of the unions, even though they face different challenges, are working in quite similar ways. This suggests that their communication practices (and here I include HRF and Kommunal's new strategies) might be first and foremost related to the type of organisation a union is, and to the type of information it is trying to communicate. For example, while their practices are aligned with many of the key aspects of youth and health communications, they are not in accordance with *all* of them. This is also supported by the fact that they align (albeit to varying degree) with most of the literature on union recruitment.

For example, all the unions focus on the school/university as an arena for reaching out to youth (Griffin and Brown, 2011), and they all make use of youth communications professionals to deliver their messages (and to reduce the intangibility of the union membership) (see Graffman, 2016, Jarlbro, 2010 and Bailey et al, 2010). The unions also recruit in the work place albeit this is of slightly less importance for SI since it engages most of its younger members in the universities.

The above ways of communicating (for the purposes of recruiting) are based on personal meetings between the union and its target group. I would like to argue that the focus on the personal meeting can be partly explained by how unions are often structured, with its focus on local recruitment and decentralised districts, even though the merits of this approach is also highlighted in the literature (see Jarlbro, 2010).

In addition, none of the unions use advertising in social media as a way of reaching out to youth for the purposes of recruiting to any great extent. This seems to be in contrast with the literature on youth communications which highlights the importance

of using digital channels, and in contrast to youth's media usage, (even though the literature highlight that youth dislike disturbing advertising). Yet, I believe, as outlined in the analysis, that this approach seems to serve SI better than HRF and Kommunal which could do well in exploring this option.

In contrast to the literature, none of the unions seem to make use of vloggers or influencers in order to recruit youth. I believe that this circumstance can also be related to the type of an organisation a union is, it might not be suitable for them to link in with influencers since they are not selling a product (even if they seem to communicate about the membership in accordance to how a company would sell a product). Yet, as argued in the analysis, I believe both Kommunal and HRF could benefit from exploring the options of linking in with people who can communicate about their unions to youth since they target larger, more diverse groups than SI.

The unions also align in terms of the information style they use, at least on social media (see Wells, 2014). As noted above, it seems as if they communicate more in line with a mass-media style of information whereby the trade unions use their Facebook page mainly to drive traffic to its own website and to highlight its own work as opposed to an actualising information style which might be more in line with how youth today communicate. Again, I believe this fact can be related to the type of organisation a union is: its ultimate goal is to highlight how it works and what it does in order to maintain its membership and to recruit new members. I do think, however, that making use of an actualising style of communication could be an approach that the unions could explore since it might spur interest and engagement in union work and membership (see Wells, 2014).

It also seems as if the unions align in terms of the strategies they use: they seem to be more based in an inside-out approach than and outside-in (see Larsson, 2008) (even if it is too early to tell for sure in the case of HRF and Kommunal who are developing new strategies). Again, I believe this circumstance can be related back to the union organisation (since the union wants to recruit new members, and thus this type of strategy might suit the union better). Yet, as mentioned, this way of communicating could potentially alienate a younger demographic that have come to expect more participation and dialogue online (see Wells, 2014). I also believe that moving

towards a more inclusive approach could be of benefit to unions in engaging and recruiting youth.

Finally, and most importantly, the unions also align in the type of communication messages they use for recruitment purposes. They all base their messages on selective incentives (see Olson's theory, Congleton, 2015), as a means to recruit new members and to ensure that the members stay in the union (student membership, courses, tools on the website etc.). However, the respondents do not use the word selective incentives, but instead talk about relevance: they all press on the importance of relevance, of highlighting how the union can make a difference in the everyday lives of its members (and remember that relevance is key to successful youth communications, as pointed out by Graffman, 2016).

Again, I would like to argue that the reasons behind the unions' use of selective incentives (as the basis of their communication) can be related to the type of an organisation a union is: it is dependent on new members in order to maintain its position in the labour market. And as Olson argues, people will only join if they feel that their union fee is offset by the individual gain of being a member. Therefore, unions need to use selective incentives as a mean of convincing people to join (otherwise they will not get around the problem of free-riding). This way of communicating can seem at odds with the founding idea of the labour unions with its focus on solidarity, but all the respondents highlight that there is no other way forward for the unions: the focus has to be on relevance, and individual gain of union membership above all. It also seems to be more in line with the literature advice organisations to communicate with youth: by highlighting the individual relevance.

In the above sections, I have outlined how the three trade unions' communications practices align, and I have also argued that this fact can be related to the type of an organisation a union is (i.e. they seem to apply the communications practices most suited to their aims and goals as a union). Yet, I also believe that the fact that their communications practices aligns to such an extent points to a sense of consensus in matters of youth communications (i.e. this suggests that the unions see these practices as effectual in reaching out to youth).

Yet, can the above outlined communications practices be seen as effective in recruiting youth, and in overcoming the reasons as to why they opt out of the union

(remember the issues of freeriding, lack of knowledge etc.?) I would argue that it will depend on how they are implemented. To begin with, many of the communications practices highlighted above (and in my previous analysis) can be seen to be in accordance with the literature. This suggests that the unions could be on right track in turning the downward trend of youth unionisation around since the literature is based on research and studies of youth (yet SI does not have this problem). Moreover, the fact that SI has come the furthest in heeding these communications practices, and is increasing its membership numbers, is a proof in point that they can work when applied to reality.

Yet, as noted above, the strategies to be created by Kommunal and HRF are still in the making (even if they are already making use of some communications practices). This means that it is quite difficult to predict whether they will be successful, and leads one to ponder how they will be implemented practically.

Finally, I would like to make the argument that it is harder for both Kommunal (especially in the light of the recent misspending scandals) and HRF to implement these strategies successfully. As we have seen in the analysis, both Kommunal and HRF face much steeper challenges than SI. This is because the two former unions have to communicate with a more diverse group (something which makes it harder to individualise the information). In addition, both Kommunal and HRF organise workers in lower paid sectors, something which can make it more difficult to highlight selective incentives (remember that the incentives need to offset the fee of the union membership). Moreover, it can be harder for these unions to reach out with information in schools since high school students tend to be less sure of what their future career might be and so are harder to recruit as future paying members. In the case of HRF, the union needs to communicate with a group that is often working in temporary positions (a fact which impacts on unionisation), it also has to recruit members in a sector characterised by high turnover, a circumstance that can make it harder to build relationships with youth for recruitment purposes. Finally, HRF also has to contend with little resources in terms of money and personnel in implementing the strategy. SI, on the other hand, seems to have less of a challenge, for example, it communicates with a group of youth that is more uniform and at a later stage of their career choice, this mean that the union can focus solely on communicating the engineers' issues. In addition, the youth are to be found in a set place, a circumstance

which makes it easier to reach them with union information. The engineering sector is also characterised by full employment and good conditions (which means that union fees will not be a hindrance to joining). These circumstances can also make it markedly easier for SI to create selective incentives since it can focus less on improving working conditions for example.

The reviewed statistics also highlight that it is workers' unions such as HRF and Kommunal that are most effected by decreasing membership numbers (as opposed to civil servant unions such as SI), a circumstance which seems to support my arguments above.

7 Conclusions

In order to conclude my thesis, I want to return to my original question posed in the introduction: how are unions today meeting the two-fold challenge of youth opting out of the union coupled with a changed youth media usage? I set out to answer this query through an examination of how trade unions communicate with youth today for the purposes of recruiting them.

Based on my discussion and analysis, I would like to argue that it seems as if all of the unions have started to face up to the challenge of falling youth unionisation (by applying the advice put forward in literature on youth and health communications, union recruitment literature and so forth, see analysis and discussion above). However, it can be noted that the unions have applied the advice to varying extent (with SI being most ahead) and it is also notable that Kommunal and HRF are only waking up to this challenge now (which seems quite late in the day since it is not a new occurrence that youth are opting out of the union).

It also seems as if the unions are responding to the challenge of changing youth media usage by focusing on social media and digital channels in their communication with this group (even if the physical meeting seems to be the main arena for communication for recruitment purposes). However, I do believe that the unions might do well in exploring a more actualising style of communication since youth today have started to expect a higher degree of participation (see Wells, 2014).

Also, since Kommunal and HRF's strategies are not yet implemented only time will tell whether they succeed in engaging and recruiting a younger demographic (and in

the light of the recent scandals at Kommunal, it seems as if the union has a long way to go in building up trust again).

Yet, as I have argued above, I also think it will be a much tougher challenge for Kommunal and HRF to turn the downward trend of youth unionisation around since they are facing very different challenges than say SI, something which will most probably have an impact on the success of implementing the strategies, even if they by now are aware of the need to do so.

But turning the fall in youth unionisation around will be a key question going forward for all unions, since without youth, the unions will over time decimate and in the end cease to be (in the very worst case). In a world without unions, the workers of the future will be left with no structured support in maintaining their workers' rights in the labour market, and the playing field will thus be left open to corruption and greed on the part of the companies.

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Appendix 1

Interview schema

1. Does your trade union have a specific strategy/strategies to communicate with a young audience?
2. Why?
3. What is the aim of this strategy: what do you want to achieve?
4. Can you tell me in detail about the strategy/strategies`?
5. What are the main ideas behind the structure of it?
6. What channels/ways of working does your trade union mainly use and why?
7. How does the trade union use the various channels?
8. Does the trade union`s strategy/strategies encourage youth to engage with your trade union (i.e have opinions on your work, share your information etc.).
9. Has the trade union evaluated its strategies?
10. Are the strategies successful in your opinion?
11. The numbers of youth joining trade unions have fallen – have you noticed this?
12. Why do you think youth are opting out of joining the union?
13. Do you think it is harder to reach young people today than say ten years ago?
14. What do you think are the main challenges in communicating with a younger generation?
15. Today, algorithms affect the type of content we can access online, what are your thoughts on this?
16. Can you see these tendencies affecting your work in any way in the future?
17. Many young people today would prefer to opt out of commercials online. Have you noticed this tendency, and does this trend affect the trade union`s work in any way?

Appendix 2

Cover letter (translated from Swedish)

Dear,

I'm contacting you because I'm writing a master thesis in the area of creative communications at Malmö högskola.

I'm looking at how trade unions communicate with a younger age group (for the purposes of recruiting them). The aim of the thesis is to highlight how trade unions work today (and to discuss how this type of work might be structured in the future).

I now wonder if you, or any of your colleagues, can conduct a telephone interview with me next week. It would take around 45 minutes and your participation is voluntary.

I would really appreciate if you could participate.

Thank you in advance.

Kind regards,

Noomi Egan