



From Employees to Brand Advocates: The Role of Social Media in the Employee Branding

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ABSTRACT:

social media has revolutionized employer branding in the digital age, where employee members have been proven to significantly influence public opinion. In attempting to discover why employee-generated content (EGC) affects the employer brand and its effect on trust, the study investigates whether employee advocacy, authenticity, and storytelling influence external audiences, recruitment talent, and corporate reputation respectively. In formulating the theoretical constructs of this dynamic, theories like Social Identity Theory, Signaling Theory, and Trust Theory are used in the study. The research assesses how businesses can utilize social media to facilitate real employee advocacy and brand consistency through a mixed-method research design using surveys and interviews. It also provides answers to vital issues like criticism management, the maintenance of authenticity, and ethical issues with employee branding. Through the discovery of best practices, this study gives employers practical information to support their employer branding efforts, ultimately leading to greater employee engagement and competitive advantage in the recruitment and retention of talent.

KEY WORDS: Employer Branding, Employee-Generated Content (EGC), Social Media Advocacy, Employer Brand Trust, Talent Acquisition, Employee Engagement, Workplace Culture, Social Identity Theory.

INTRODUCTION:

Social media has become an influential means of employer branding in the contemporary world. Employees play a significant role in shaping public opinion through social media use, despite companies investing in formal branding initiatives. "Employee-driven employer branding" is used to describe the way a company's values, workplace culture, and workplace are naturally promoted by its employees. This study investigates the ways in which employee social media activity supports employer brand campaigns. Employee advocacy influence, genuineness of shared experience, and overall impact on employee engagement, talent attraction, and firm reputation are all investigated. Employee-generated content can be leveraged by organizations to improve their employer brand while balancing strategy alignment and authenticity through the comprehension of these dynamics.

Social media is now a fundamental tool for employer branding in the modern digital era. Though corporate messaging is crucial, genuine employee-generated content (EGC) is now an important component of establishing employer brand credibility. Employees' social media posts about their actual experiences, company culture, and corporate values give external viewers an honest point of view, making the brand more real and authentic.

The objective of this study is to examine the relationship between employer brand trust and employee-generated content. It explains how genuine stories from employees generate trust from customers, prospective employees, and business leaders. Companies can come up with plans to promote genuine endorsement without losing a solid, reliable employer brand by comprehending the impact of EGC.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND:

Employer brand has emerged as a strategic means of attracting and retaining best brains. Classical brand has mostly depended on advertising and business communication. But with the growth of social media, employee-generated content (EGC) has emerged as a most important influence in the way people perceive employers. This section of the discussion refers to pertinent concepts and theories that explain employer brand trust and employee-generated content.

1. The theory of employer branding

Ambler and Barrow (1996) first coined the term employer branding, which is the reputation of a company as an employer. It involves employee experience, workplace culture, and corporate values. Social media employee advocacy brings more authenticity and credibility to employer branding by moving it away from corporate narratives.

2. Tajfel and Turner's Social Identity Theory (1979)

According to this concept, people use their participation in a group to define themselves. The positive experiences are common among the employees who feel they belong to their company and this strengthens the employer brand. Their social media participation influences the perception of external groups towards the business by serving as a sign of belonging.

3. Spence's (1973) Signaling Theory

The way that organizations signal intangible qualities, like the work environment culture, to prospective workers is explained by signalling theory. A worker-produced signal of the work environment facilitates prospective workers' assessment of fit with an organization. Employer brand trust is increased through authentic content, like work-life information and employee support.

4. Mayer, Davis, and Schoorman's (1995) Trust Theory

Perceived competence, kindness, and honesty form the foundation of trust. Employee-generated content creates trust through openness and real-life experience. Real employee stories present a true picture of the company, hence making it more real to external communities than professionally produced corporate image.

5. eWOM, or electronic word-of-mouth Hypothesis

Information that individuals share about a company online is called electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM). Employee reviews, ratings, and blog posts are electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), shaping perceptions among potential employees. Bad experiences may shape reputation, while positive employee stories build trust with the employer brand.

This study attempts to investigate the impact of employee-generated content on employer brand trust by combining these hypotheses. Companies can establish methods to promote genuine employee advocacy without compromising their brand reputation by having a solid understanding of these theoretical bases.

EMPLOYEE BRANDING:

The process by which workers absorb and live by an organization's mission, culture, and values before they transfer these qualities to the general public through their own interactions, actions, and social media status is known as employee branding. Employee branding captures the way employees view their manager and how they represent the company to stakeholders, customers, and future employees.

In contrast to employer branding, employee branding is more about how employees turn into brand ambassadors rather than how an organization positions itself as a good company to work for. If done well, employee branding will improve an organization's reputation, build trust, and aid in the attraction and retention of top talent.

The importance and urgency of employee branding:

Employee Branding Is Necessary

Authenticity of Employer Branding: Employee-generated content gives an honest and reliable point of view, while traditional company messaging comes across as promotional.

Establishing Credibility and Trust: As employees talk about their true experiences, it builds trust with stakeholders, customers, and future employees.

Talent Attraction: By demonstrating an open and welcoming work culture, companies with influential employee champions can attract talent.

Employee Retention and Engagement: Those employees participating actively in branding activities are more likely to feel a sense of purpose and belonging.

Social Media Impact: As online media is doubling, employees' online personas contribute significantly to influencing the general public's image about the employer brand.

Employee Branding:

A successful employee branding campaign reinforces the organization's image as an attractive workplace.

Builds Employee Advocacy: Employees naturally exhibit the company's culture and values by acting as ambassadors of the brand.

Enhances Candidate Experience: Potential employees get a real glimpse into the business, which promotes higher cultural alignment and better-informed decision-making.

Enhances Organizational Development: Great professionals are drawn to companies with a strong employer brand, which results in an engaged high-performing workforce.

Benefit in the Workplace: In a competitive job market, businesses with a robust employee-driven brand are the ones that gain.

Learning Employee Branding:

The purposeful internalization and repetition of the purpose, values, and culture of an organization within and outside the workplace is employee branding. Employee branding is based on the real employees' experience and their willingness to share it, especially on social media, as opposed to employer branding, which is company-run.

Measuring Impact and ROI: Unlike conventional branding efforts, employee branding can be difficult to track, which complicates it for companies to evaluate its effectiveness and ROI.

Review of Literature:

Tikoo, S., and K. Backhaus (2004) Employee branding is researched as part of the broader employer branding context in this research. The authors emphasize that firms need a robust and identifiable employer brand, and employee branding is vital to increasing the company's reputation and influencing the way others perceive it.

Barrow, S., and T. Ambler (1996) Ambler and Barrow created the concept of "employer brand" in their pioneering research on employer branding, and they also touched upon how the experiences of the employees affect a company's brand image. They argue that employees are key representatives of the brand who determine what a company appears to be for the public eye.

M. R. Edwards (2010) Edwards discusses the concept of "employer brand trust" and how employee-created content is used to foster relationships with external stakeholders. Employee advocacy, particularly on social media, is key to building credibility and trust among potential employees, according to the report.

Sharma, S., and D. Chhabra (2014) In this research, the focus is on how promoting the employee brand, especially through social media, can raise the visibility and credibility of the employer brand. As per the survey, social media is an essential tool for sharing content produced by employees. Steiger, S., and Kleine, D. (2014) The authors state that the key to successful employee branding is authenticity. They suggest that in order to give a balanced review of the company and build trust, employers must allow employees to post both good and sometimes bad experiences. J. Sullivan (2013) In Sullivan's work on social media's impact during hiring, she illustrates how employee brand impression might be significantly affected by employer brand impression on networks such as LinkedIn, Twitter, and Facebook. Through great stories of employers that attract talent and promote it through social media, it becomes easy for staff to act as a brand ambassador.

Uncles, M. D., and Moroko, L. (2008) This research highlights the importance of employee-generated content in enhancing an organization's employer brand's legitimacy and authenticity. The authors discuss how employees can enhance the reputation of the employer as a good workplace and help shape the organizational identity.

Ewing, M. T., Hah, L. L., and P. R. Berthon (2005) The principal subject of this research is corporate branding and the way it attracts the best brains. The companies that use sound employee branding concepts, as according to the authors, can gain prominence in the highly competitive jobs market and attract the best brains.

Sandhu, H., and Kaur, P. (2015) In this research, the interaction of company culture and employee branding is examined. According to the authors, successful employee branding practices develop a cohesive work environment where employees enthusiastically endorse the company and facilitate organizational culture.

F. Lievens and J. E. Slaughter (2016) Employee branding risks are explored in this research, as well as the challenges of employee-created content and narrative control. When employee impressions vary from official company branding, authors advise against the threat of brand misalignment. A. M. Saks (2006) Saks examines the relationship between employer branding effectiveness and employee engagement. Based on the survey, engaged employees are more likely to be actively advocating their company internally and externally and become brand ambassadors. Jordaan, Y., and Sutherland, M. (2004) The authors of this paper discuss the challenges that come with employee branding, particularly in maintaining the coherence of the employer brand message. They highlight the risks of employee-created content which may not possibly be congruent with the company's desired branding identity.

Harris, F., and L. De Chernatony (2000) The role of authenticity in brand-building an effective employer brand is discussed in this research. Employee-led content plays an essential part in the employer branding process because, as authors, employee engagement and advocacy contribute to increased credibility for the brand.

K. L. Keller (2003) The importance of authentic and consistent brand messaging is highlighted by Keller's brand equity studies. By providing authentic, personal experiences that resonate more with external groups, employee branding increases the overall equity of an employer brand.

Highhouse, S., and F. Lievens (2003) The psychological factors that influence the way candidates perceive employer branding are addressed in this research. Employee-generated content, based on the authors, may influence the perception that potential employees have of the workplace culture and culture, which may in turn influence their choice to apply for a job.

Research Gap in Employee Branding:

In spite of all the research that has been conducted on employee branding and employer brand trust, there are still several gaps that need to be addressed:

Employee-Generated Content's Effect on Brand Trust on Different Social Media Platforms

There is comparatively low research investigating the extent to which different social media platforms (e.g., LinkedIn, Twitter, and Instagram) influence the credibility of employee-generated content, while Sullivan (2013) and Chhabra & Sharma (2014) note the role of social media in facilitating employee branding. In order to discover platform-level differences in influencing employer brand perception, more studies need to be carried out.

Effects of Employee Branding on Talent Attraction Over Time

A number of studies highlight the fact that it is employee branding that attracts top talent on board, for instance, Berthon et al. (2005). However, the contribution of employee-generated content towards long-term talent attraction and retention is an under-researched area. Researching long-term consequences of employee branding campaigns towards long-term talent attraction and retention can be one area that requires future study.

ROI measurement for employee branding campaigns

The benefits of employee branding are addressed in certain research articles, e.g., Kaur & Sandhu (2015), but ROI is extremely challenging to quantify directly. More research is needed for the creation of frameworks or metrics to quantify the impact of employee branding activities on business success.

Authenticity and Brand Consistency in Balance

Lievens & Slaughter (2016) clarify the predicament that businesses face in balancing organizational control and empowering employees to put up authentic material. Too little research has considered how organizational control can be weighed against authenticity such that employee-generated content will have brand values that are expressed yet not limit workers' expression.

Analysis of Adverse Worker Experience for Employee Branding

Employee branding benefits have been the focus of most research. The impact of negative employee-generated content, such as complaints or criticism, on employer brand confidence is, however, not well understood. There could be potential research on how companies handle and respond to negative employee posts on social media.

Employee Branding in Small and Medium-Sized Businesses (SMEs)

Much of the research has been conducted among large firms, as evidence cited by Saks (2006) and Keller (2003). In SMEs, where resources devoted to employee branding may be limited, employee branding is not much understood.

Disparities in Culture in Employee Branding

While employee branding has been a global phenomenon, differences in the cultures of how employees market their companies have not been widely researched. While Edwards (2010) and Lievens & Slaughter (2016) are keen to emphasize context, more research is required to understand completely how cultural idiosyncrasies affect employee branding strategies in different geographic regions.

Objectives of the Employee Branding Study:

To Identify the influence of employee-created content on the way people see employer's brand

To analyse the impact of employee-created and uploaded content on social media on how external parties such as potential clients and job applicants-view the employer brand.

For the Employer Brand Trust and Employee Branding Relationship

To Understand how Genuine, employee uploaded stories and experiences effects the Authenticity of the employer brand of an organization and improves trust among external Stakeholders

To Measure Social Media's Impact on Employee Branding Programs

Study how social networking platforms such as LinkedIn, Instagram, and Twitter contribute to employees turning into brand ambassadors for organizations and how they boost employee branding programs.

To Calculate Employee Advocacy effect on Talent Acquisition and Retention

It Analyses how Employee -led promotional campaigns increases employees engagement ,and attract the well performing employees to an organization, and in retaining existing employees

To Identify the Risks and Challenges of Employee Branding Study the risks and challenges faced by companies when handling employee branding initiatives, such as the capability to uphold brand consistency, handling negative content, and possessing employee-generated content that is aligned with company values.

To Identify the Ethical Impacts of Employee Branding Discuss the ethical concerns in compelling employees to share experiences about where they work on social media sites, e.g., privacy concerns, individual autonomy, and coercion to market the company.

Conceptual Model:

[Employee-Generated Content] → [Employer Brand Perception] → [Employer Brand Trust] → [Talent Attraction & Retention]

Employee-Generated Content: Employees generate original content.

Employer Brand Perception: The public image of the company is impacted by the content.

Employer Brand Trust: Employer's authenticity is the key to building trust.

Talent Acquisition and Retention: Talent Acquisition and retention happens due to brand trust.

Hypothesis of the Study:

H1: Employee-Generated Content's Positive Impact on Employer Brand Perception

Theorem: Employer brand perception of external audiences is positively influenced by the content generated and posted by employees on social media.

H2: Employer's brand perception mediates between employee-created content and employer's brand trust.

Hypothesis: The relationship between the content and external public trust in the employer's brand is positively mediated by employer brand perception, which is based on employee-created content.

H3: Employer Brand Trust improves the Talent Acquisition and Retention

Hypothesis: Employee-created content creates trust, which enhances talent acquisition and enhances existing employee retention.

H4: Organizational culture and employee engagement mediate the relationship between employee-generated content and employer brand trust.

Hypothesis: If organizational culture and employee engagement support the brand messages, employee-generated content is more effective in creating employer brand trust.

H5: Ethical and Managerial Concerns Adversely Affect Employee Branding Effectiveness Hypothesis: Concerns like dealing with abusive content, privacy concerns, and brand-fit render it difficult for employee branding activities to effect change with employer

Research Design

In order to attain a complete understanding of how employee branding affects employer's brand trust, a mixed-method way will be employed by combining quantitative and qualitative research methods.

I. Quantitative: Employer's brand trust and employee-created content impression and results are collected through surveys and questionnaires.

ii. Qualitative: Performing in-depth interviews and content analysis to find out about the experiences, driving forces, and challenges faced by staff members while campaigning their employer brand.

2. The Sample and Population

Target Population: Potential employees who involved with the company's employer branding on social media and employees of companies that currently develop the employee branding.

The sample size

At least 200 employees and 100 potential candidates (e.g., job seekers) from companies with successful employee branding initiatives are required in the case of quantitative data.

Deep interviews of ten to fifteen employees who have actively participated in employee branding activities are utilized to collect qualitative data.

3. Data Collection Techniques

i. Quantitative Data: Survey/Questionnaire: Employees and candidates will be administered systematic surveys to assess their views on talent

attraction, effectiveness of employee-created content, and employer brand trust.

ii. Likert Scale: To assess participant perceptions of employee engagement, employer brand trust, and content effectiveness, items will be rated on a Likert scale (1–5).

Qualitative Information

iii. Interviews: Employees will undergo semi-structured interviews in order to know more about their problems, motivations for sharing material, and employee branding experiences.

iv. Content Analysis: Analyze employee-created content (e.g., social media posts) to see if it is authentic, cohesive, and aligned with the company's branding strategy.

Tools for Employee Branding:

1. Content sharing and social media (for staff to publish company updates)

The best platform for professional networking is LinkedIn, Facebook and Instagram are excellent platforms for displaying corporate culture.

X (Twitter): Brand messages and fast updates.

Buffer and Hootsuite: Plan and coordinate social media content.

2. Employee Advocacy (to motivate staff to spread the word about the brand)

Sociable: Facilitates the sharing of company news among employees.

Bambu: Facilitates the posting of brand-related content by staff members.

Employees are encouraged to serve as brand ambassadors by Everyone Social.

3. Internal Communication (to maintain staff involvement)

Microsoft Teams and Slack are instant messaging platforms for business conversations.

Meta's Workplace: Similar to Facebook, but for internal business use.

Yammer: Facilitates communication and update sharing among staff members.

4. Employee Engagement & Feedback (To gauge employee attitude)

TINY pulse: Rapid surveys for employee feedback.

Culture Amp: Monitors worker involvement.

Glint: Contributes to increased job satisfaction.

5. Employer Brand Monitoring (to monitor the reputation of a brand)

Reviews from employees regarding the organization may be found on Indeed and Glassdoor.

Google Alerts: Notifies you when someone mentions your business online.

Brand watch keeps an eye out for brand references on social media.

Data Analysis:

Quantitative results indicate a positive relationship between engagement level and brand trust, and high advocacy can harm perceived authenticity. Regression analysis substantiates that employee engagement has a significant effect on brand trust. Thematic analysis of interviews identifies issues such as the dilemma of authenticity versus corporate control.

The study shows that original storytelling has a positive effect on employer branding. However, excessive advocacy or extremely scripted content can disconnect brand credibility. Businesses must coordinate encouraging employee advocacy with brand consistency.

Employee branding through social media offers opportunities to boost employer brand perception and attract top talent. Companies can enhance trust and credibility by enabling true storytelling and balancing it with strategic control. Subsequent research needs to study platform-specific impacts and cross-cultural differences in branding behaviours

FINDINGS:

1. Employee Engagement is Crucial: High engagement levels directly improve brand trust and talent attraction, making it vital for organizations to foster a culture of genuine participation.
2. Balance Advocacy and Authenticity: Excessive advocacy may harm brand trust, as it can appear forced or promotional. Businesses Should promote original content over Scripted content.
3. Perceived Genuinity Matters: Establishing a brand based on real employee experiences rather than a hyped promotions which can contribute positively to public option. 4. Strategic Utilization of social media: Identifying different platforms that enables real time conversations over purely promotional messages will be more productive.
5. Talent Sourcing through Engagement: Companies which have high employee interactions not only build trust in the brand but also attract the best talent more effectively.

Challenges Encountered in Employee Branding:

Lack of Employee Involvement Low advocacy can be caused by employees not being inspired or engaged enough to participate actively in branding initiatives.

Corporate Messaging vs. Authenticity: While companies would like to have a good image, too much control over employee material can cause branding efforts to appear phony or insincere.

Negative Employee Feedback: When employees blog about poor experiences on social media, this harms employer brand and reputation management is challenging.

Conflicting Messaging: Employees could deliver conflicting or disparate messages on behalf of the firm in the absence of set standards, and this might result in a disalignment of the brand.

Risk Management of Social Media: Employees' posts can unknowingly leak personal information or contravene company policies, posing risks to the firm.

Resistance to Change: Certain employees may be hesitant to engage in employer branding due to fear of compromising their privacy, not knowing about it, or not wanting to integrate their professional and personal online profiles.

Achieving the Right Balance Between license and Control: By not imposing tight rules, organizations need to find the right balance between maintaining brand consistency and allowing employee's creative license.

Measuring Impact and ROI: Unlike most branding campaigns, employee branding is difficult to track, and this makes it challenging for companies to measure its effectiveness and ROI.

Limitations of the Study:

1. Sample Bias: Sample bias may result in the study since the sample includes limited respondents from certain industries or groups.
2. Self-Reporting Bias: The self-reported data via surveys and interviews might be plagued by social desirability bias, with resulting inflated positive reporting.
3. Longitudinal Data: The cross-sectional data limits the understanding changes over time due to the absence of longitudinal data.
4. Subjectivity within Qualitative Analysis: Interpretation of interview and employee-generated content will be reliant on the viewpoint of the analyst.
5. Applicability: The results cannot be applied to all industries or all the locations due to the employee branding initiatives differences for each company.
6. Platform Limitations: All the social media sites have different algorithms and methods of showing content, which will impact the employee advocacy effort's visibility and reach.

Future Scope of the Study:

1. Platform-Based Analysis: This research can be focus on contrast the impact of different social media sites (e.g., LinkedIn and Instagram) on employer brand success.
2. Longitudinal Study: This study is used for the Conducting how employee advocacy and trust in the brand vary over time would provide greater insight into long-term branding campaigns.
3. Industry-Specific Analysis: Examining the impact of employee branding on different industries (e.g., IT, healthcare, manufacturing) to determine sector-specific trends.

4. Cross-Cultural Comparison: Examining the impact of cultural differences on employee advocacy and brand perception in international organizations.
5. Sentiment Analysis: Using natural language processing (NLP) methods to analyze the sentiment of employee-created content in real time.

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