

Understanding digital employee advocacy

A study into working professionals' perspective on advocating activities, motivations and challenges

Student Name: Francis Bak
Student Number: 482286

Supervisor: Vidhi Chaudhri

Master Media Studies – Media & Business
Erasmus School of History, Culture and Communication
Erasmus University Rotterdam

Master's Thesis
June 2020

UNDERSTANDING DIGITAL EMPLOYEE ADVOCACY

ABSTRACT

During the past years, employees have been assigned an influential role in constructing corporate reputation. This is due to the rise of social media, which enables all stakeholders to easily and rapidly create and spread stories, and the increasing trust of the general public in information coming from employees. Employees in this influential role are often referred to as advocates, advocating on behalf of the company they work for. Whereas before the rise of social media, employee advocacy was limited to face-to-face communication in which employees recommend the company's goods, services, and organization, today digital employee advocacy serves as a way to externally represent the company to a large online audience. However, research into digital employee advocacy, especially the motivations behind this behavior, is relatively scarce. Previous research into the topic mostly focused on the business perspective on the practice, making use of quantitative approaches and standardized questions to describe and explain employees' advocating behavior. In order to further develop the understanding of the workings of digital employee advocacy, the aim of this research was to study the employee perspective on digital employee advocacy. By conducting 20 in-depth interviews with working professionals who have experience with using their personal social media accounts to advocate on behalf of an employer, this research uncovered what online activities account as digital advocacy in the eyes of employees, the motivations behind their engagement in digital advocacy, and the challenges they face with using their personal social media accounts to advocate on behalf of an employer. The findings of this research show that digital employee advocacy is a heterogeneous construct, particularly based on employees' varying preference between the found online advocating activities (e.g. liking, reposting, creating) and used social media platforms to advocate on (e.g. LinkedIn, Facebook, Instagram). Moreover, it was found that digital employee advocacy intertwines the personal and organizational in terms of the perceived shared interest in the matter, and the merge of personal and professional identities and reputations. In order to manage this merge, employees prioritize identification with the organization they advocate on behalf of, and the content that they share with their social media accounts. Further, the findings of this research demonstrate a thin line between encouragement and surveillance when it comes to employers' interference in employees' online behavior. Besides serving as a foundation for future research on the topic of digital employee advocacy, the practical implications of this research can serve as guidelines for employers wanting to encourage and support digital employee advocacy.

KEYWORDS: Corporate reputation management, digital employee advocacy, employee advocacy, social media, work-related social media use

Table of contents

ABSTRACT

1. INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 Research topic	1
1.2 Academic and societal relevance	3
1.3 Structure	4
2. LITERATURE REVIEW	5
2.1 Corporate reputation	5
2.1.1. <i>The role of employees in constructing corporate reputation</i>	7
2.2 Digital employee advocacy	8
2.2.1. <i>Conceptualization</i>	8
2.2.2. <i>Organizational benefits of employee advocacy</i>	10
2.2.3. <i>Drivers of employee advocacy</i>	11
2.2.4. <i>Organizational challenges of digital employee advocacy</i>	12
3. METHODS	15
3.1 Research method	15
3.2 Sampling technique and research sample	16
3.3 Operationalization	19
3.4 Data collection	20
3.5 Data analysis	21
3.6 Validity and reliability	21
4. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS	22
4.1 Digital employee advocacy is a heterogeneous construct	22
4.2 Engaging in digital advocacy is perceived as extra-role behavior	24
4.3 Digital advocacy intertwines the personal and the organizational	26
4.3.1. <i>Pursuing personal and organizational interest</i>	26
4.3.2. <i>Identification is key to digital employee advocacy</i>	29
4.4 Encouragement versus surveillance	32
5. CONCLUSION	35
5.1 Practical implications	41
5.2 Limitations and suggestions for future research	42
REFERENCES	43
Appendix A: Call for participants	49
Appendix B: Interview guide	51
Appendix C: Coding schemes	59

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Research topic

In 2019, the Edelman Trust Barometer (2019) revealed the public's highest regard for corporate employees in shaping and evaluating corporate reputation. In 2014, employees were already indicated as the most credible source when it comes to a company's work environment, integrity, innovation, and business practices (Edelman Trust Barometer 2014), a result reinforced by the 2019 Barometer. The majority (78%) of the general public finds how a company treats its employees the best indicator of its level of trustworthiness (Edelman Trust Barometer 2019), and more than half (67%) of the general public agrees that "a good reputation may get me to try a product, but unless I come to trust the company behind the product, I will soon stop buying it" (Edelman Trust Barometer 2019, p. 33). Numbers like these assign an important and influential role to employees as the general public trusts them over CEO's, spokespersons, and marketing departments when it comes to their purchase decisions.

Based on such numbers, companies are advised to empower their employees by giving them a voice (Edelman Trust Barometer, 2019). Commonly referred to as word-of-mouth communication in which employees give favorable recommendations about their employer's goods, services, and organization in an external environment (e.g. friends and family) (Bettencourt & Brown, 2003; Burmann & Zeplin, 2005; Fullerton, 2011; Tsarenko, Leo, & Tse, 2018), employee advocacy reportedly has an impact on a company's performance as it builds brand awareness and improves company culture (Wright & Snook, 2017).

With the rise of social media, employee advocacy seems to become even more relevant. Before the rise of social media, employees' word-of-mouth storytelling about their employer was limited to face-to-face communication. Currently half of all employees surveyed by Weber Shandwick (2014) reported regularly using social media to post messages, pictures, or videos about their employer. Further, 36.5% of employees' Twitter posts are work-related (Van Zoonen, Verhoeven, & Vliegthart, 2016). Given the growing frequency with which employees use their social media to engage in advocacy on behalf of their employer, this research examines employees' motivations behind this online behavior and the possible challenges they might face in digitally advocating for their employer.

A business case illustrating this type of behavior can be found at the established energy drink brand Red Bull. By turning their employees into #canbassadors, the brand's marketing efforts are expanded from the company's social media platforms to being represented at employees' personal social media accounts. As Red Bull tries to present itself

as more than just a drink, employees incorporate the Red Bull lifestyle into their social media presence. With the use of hashtags like #beststudentjobintheworld, students around the world who work for the company digitally influence their social networks on a daily basis. From reposting existing company content to creating personal content including the brand's vision and products, a wide range of consumers are confronted with brand supportive content.

This use of social media to engage in advocating activities serves a new way of presenting and spreading employees' voices, a phenomenon that is referred to as digital employee advocacy. Employees posting from their personal social media accounts about their employer's activities and news, recommending employment at the company, and complimenting its initiatives such as sustainability, innovation, and new products and/or services (Kaul & Chaudhri, 2017; Li, Cifuentes, & Solis, 2014), has been studied over the past years, mostly focusing on the business perspective on the practice (Bettencourt & Brown, 2003; Burmann & Zeplin, 2005; Fullerton, 2011; Li et al., 2014; Tsarenko et al., 2018; Wright & Snook, 2017).

Despite the aforementioned desirable outcomes of employee advocacy, it comes with challenges as well. This growing corporate desire of having employees 'live the brand' (Gotsi & Wilson, 2001) and using their personal social media accounts on behalf of their employer, is blurring the lines between employees' working and private lives and identities (Rokka, Karlsson, & Tienari, 2014). On the one hand companies want to encourage their employees to advocate for them, but on the other hand like to be in control of what employees say about them to lower the risk of reputational damage (Rokka et al., 2014). Managing digital employee advocacy seems to remain a challenge and is all about balancing acts between encouraging versus restricting employees in their online participation, and emphasizing work versus private social media roles (Rokka et al., 2014). Establishing boundaries between working and private lives and identities while making use of digital employee advocacy is a challenge that should be evaluated from both the perspective of employers as well as that of employees.

Therefore, this research focuses on studying the employee perspective on digital employee advocacy with a qualitative approach. To further develop academic and societal understanding of the concept, this thesis uses a qualitative research design with the aim to build a common understanding of what behaviors and motives construct digital employee advocacy. Specifically, the thesis asks three research questions:

RQ1 states: *What activities are viewed as digital employee advocacy by working professionals?* As digital employee advocacy is an understudied topic, incorporating the perspective of working professionals into the further conceptualization and understanding of

the practice is crucial (Rokka et al., 2014). Current academic definitions and illustrations come either from analyzing employees' social media behaviors and qualifying them as digital advocacy and/or work-related social media use, or conducting large-scale quantitative surveys with pre-produced answers (Van Zoonen et al., 2016; Van Zoonen, Van der Meer, & Verhoeven, 2014a; Van Zoonen, Verhoeven, & Elving, 2014b). Therefore, this study explores working professionals' understanding of what behaviors illustrate the concept.

Further, RQ2 states: *What are working professionals' motivations to use their personal social media accounts to advocate for their employer?* Answering this question is relevant because previous research on the underlying mechanisms of employee advocacy made use of quantitative approaches using standardized questions and large samples in order to either describe effects of corporate qualities and actions (e.g. job satisfaction, organizational commitment) on employee advocacy (Weber Shandwick, 2014; Yeh, 2014), or motivations of employees to recommend employment at the company (Shinnar, Young, & Meana, 2004), which is only a small part of the concept. This study gives the opportunity to uncover what working professionals perceive as the drivers and motivations behind their digital engagement.

Finally, to successfully practice the notion of digital employee advocacy, the possible obstacles need to be identified. Besides the previously mentioned organizational challenges, it is important to uncover employees' challenges and boundaries when it comes to using their personal social media accounts to share content concerning their employer. Therefore, RQ3 states: *What are the challenges working professionals face in digitally advocating for their employer?*

1.2 Academic and societal relevance

Answering the proposed research questions is scientifically relevant because of the relative newness of the concept and lack of academic theory concerning the topic of digital employee advocacy. Moreover, existing literature on digital employee advocacy calls for future research to incorporate employees' views on the concept in order to extend knowledge on managing employees' and corporate reputations (Rokka et al., 2014). To fill this gap in academic literature, a number of qualitative interviews with working professionals have been conducted, enriching existing quantitative findings on the topic.

Furthermore, this research has societal relevance because the outcomes of this study can serve as guidelines for organizations wanting to stimulate and support their employees in using their personal social media accounts for reputation building behaviors (Helm, 2011).

1.3 Structure

In order to answer the proposed research questions, the following chapter of this report contains a review of existing literature concerning the research topic. Firstly, theory on corporate reputation and the role of employees in constructing corporate reputation is considered. Subsequently, digital employee advocacy is conceptualized and its benefits, drivers, and challenges are explored. Afterwards, the methods section describes and motivates the used research method. Thereafter, the results and analysis of the gathered data are presented. The last section of the report answers the aforementioned research questions, concluding with the limitations of the study and suggestions for future research.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This section contains a review of existing literature relating to digital employee advocacy. Firstly, relevant literature on the topic of corporate reputation and the role of employees in constructing corporate reputation is consulted. Thereafter, digital employee advocacy is further conceptualized and literature concerning its benefits, drivers, and challenges is reviewed.

2.1 Corporate reputation

In order to fully appreciate employees' role in constructing corporate reputation, corporate reputation needs to be defined first. Even though it is a multidimensional concept (Kaul & Chaudhri, 2017) that is influenced by many factors and players, Fombrun and Van Riel (1997) defined corporate reputation as:

A collective representation of a firm's past actions and results that describes the firm's ability to deliver valued outcomes to multiple stakeholders. It gauges a firm's relative standing both internally with employees and externally with stakeholders, in both its competitive and institutional environments. (p.10)

Accordingly, reputation is often referred to as an evaluation by different audiences or stakeholders, based on the behavior of a company that leads to negative or positive behavior of the audience or stakeholders (Carreras, Alloza, & Carreras, 2013). This representation or evaluation is argued to be an intangible corporate asset that helps a company to differentiate itself and gain competitive advantages, build goodwill and relationships with stakeholders, inspire stakeholders' support and trust, and can lead to pride within an organization (Kaul & Chaudhri, 2017).

Corporate reputation is argued to be an evaluation of stakeholders, but what or who are stakeholders? According to Freeman (1984), stakeholders can be defined as "any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organization's objectives" (p. 46). These groups and individuals can vary from people and organizations to institutions and even the natural environment (Mitchell, Agle, & Wood, 1997). Common examples of key stakeholders include consumers, suppliers, employees, media, government, and NGO's (Friedman & Miles, 2006). More specifically, this study focuses on the role of employees in shaping corporate reputation, as it is argued that "employees are the most significant non-shareholding corporate stakeholding group" (Lynch-Fannon, 2004, p. 155).

Stakeholders' experiences with a company construct corporate reputation, which is mediated by information sources like news media and other third-party sources (Gotsi & Wilson, 2001; Kaul & Chaudhri, 2017). These experiences can be direct experiences with the company (e.g. interaction with the company) and/or indirect experiences (e.g. opinions and

narratives of others) (Gotsi & Wilson, 2001; Kaul & Chaudhri, 2017). Companies greatly control the direct experiences of stakeholders with the company. Indirect experiences however, are mostly out of the control of companies as they consist of stories and opinions of others about the company (Aula & Heinonen, 2016; Kaul & Chaudhri, 2017). Nevertheless, indirect experiences play an important role in the construction of corporate reputation, which makes corporate reputation something that is not completely controlled by the company itself (Aula & Heinonen, 2016; Kaul & Chaudhri, 2017). These indirect experiences have become even more relevant due to the rise of social media. As argued by Aula and Heinonen (2016) “digitalization has changed the media landscape, and social networks are gaining more power to determine the reputations of companies” (preface).

Social media has changed the ways in which we connect and communicate with each other. Namely, social media has features that enable consumers and other stakeholders to easily, rapidly, and broadly access and spread all types of information and content through systems for feedback and sharing (Aula & Heinonen, 2016). Whereas before the rise of social media stakeholders could share their opinions and stories about companies only via word-of-mouth storytelling or traditional media channels, today they have the power to easily influence their widespread social networks (Dellarocas, 2003; Ji, Li, North, & Liu, 2007; Li, 2016). Therefore, social media is becoming a new social space in which reputations are negotiated and constructed, as well as a reputational risk arena (Aula & Heinonen, 2016; Ji et al., 2017; Li, 2016). Besides, the rise of social media challenges the traditional forming of corporate reputation via traditional media as it diminishes the dominance of organizations to communicate their own reputation to the public, and the power of established news media to be the only source of news for stakeholders (Aula & Heinonen, 2016). Social media enables stakeholders with multiple perspectives, sources, and opinions, and often presents personal experiences and emotionally charged content, which increases the likelihood of influencing the audience’s judgements (Etter, Ravasi, & Calleoni, 2019).

Based on the aforementioned developments, it is definite that companies are dealing with a growing loss of the control over their reputation as audience’s evaluations of organizations are greatly influenced by the access, creation, and spread of stakeholder stories about the company (Aula & Heinonen, 2016; Etter et al., 2019; Ji et al., 2017; Li, 2016). All in all, the traditional balance of powers is shifting more and more towards stakeholders, assigning a new role to companies in which they need to be in service of their stakeholders, and business success greatly depends on a company’s capacity to build and maintain meaningful relationships with its stakeholders in order to shape corporate reputation (Carreras et al., 2013).

2.1.1. The role of employees in constructing corporate reputation

As previously mentioned, companies' stakeholders consist of any person that can affect or is affected by the performance of the organization (Freeman, 1984). Although employees are a primary stakeholder group for any organization, they have not, until recently, been the focus of attention when it comes to stakeholder engagement (Kaul & Chaudhri, 2017). However, there has been an increase in the public's trust in corporate information coming from employees (Edelman Trust Barometer 2014; 2019) and the interest in the company behind the brand, which in the eyes of the public is characterized by the behavior and experiences of its employees (Gotsi & Wilson, 2011).

With this shifting focus on employees as the most trustworthy source of information, they are assigned an influential role when it comes to constructing corporate reputation. Walker (2011) argues that we should not question what role employees play as "they are the only ones who can build your corporate reputation" (para. 2). However, there are two sides to this increasing power of employees. On the one hand, having your employees commit to and behave according to the company's values and beliefs empowers them to be positive representatives of the brand (Rokka et al., 2014). On the other hand, personal and organizational reputations are becoming more entwined which can lead to reputational risks for companies when an employee's personal reputation does not align with the reputation of the organization (Rokka et al., 2014). Therefore, employees can either be viewed as a threat to corporate reputation, or as positive brand representatives that can boost corporate reputation (Miles & Mangold, 2014).

Employees in their positive influential role are often referred to as brand ambassadors, having the potential to directly or indirectly affect corporate reputation every time they share a story about the company to external audiences (Alsop, 2004; Aula & Heinonen, 2016; Dreher, 2014; Helm, 2011; Kaul & Chaudhri, 2017; Xiong, King, & Piehler, 2013). Accordingly, Aula and Heinonen (2016) state that as long as an individual earns money from working for the company, they are also its representative and therefore an ambassador for its reputation, "either good, bad, or indifferent" (p. 116). In this light, Cravens and Oliver (2006) point out a crucial question: "If the public perceives that employees have little confidence in their employer, why would they be encouraged to purchase products or services from the company?" (p. 297). Employees' knowledge of their employer's business and spirit makes them credible and authentic representatives of the organization (Agresta & Bough, 2011) and could be considered as the most important messenger of reputation (Aula & Heinonen, 2016).

Moreover, in this role as messengers of corporate reputation, employees can be viewed as advocates, advocating on behalf of their employer (Dreher, 2014; Walker, 2011). When viewing employees from this perspective, companies could benefit by empowering and training its employees as a source of competitive advantage (Miles & Mangold, 2014). Accordingly, Elsbach and Glynn (1996) stress that companies should actively engage their employees in transmitting and displaying the company's reputational signals in order to strengthen overall corporate reputation.

Although employees are appointed as ambassadors or advocates by the public and academics, the question remains how aware employees are of this influential role. Helm (2011) stresses the influence of perceived corporate reputation and pride on employees' awareness of their impact on corporate reputation. However, we know little about whether or not employees feel responsible to act as advocates on behalf of their employer. This study makes an important contribution in that direction.

2.2 Digital employee advocacy

2.2.1. Conceptualization

Advocacy in itself, regardless of who the advocate is and on behalf of what object he or she is advocating, can be described as a person's willingness to recommend an object (e.g. product or service) to others (Hill, Provost, & Volinsky, 2006). When a person positively recommends an organization's products, services, or brands, they are acting as advocates on behalf of that organization (Fullerton, 2003; Fullerton, 2011; White & Schneider, 2000). Combining literature on advocacy and applying this to employees as advocates, employee advocacy can be defined as the voluntary communication from employees in which they endorse and recommend their employer's goods, services, and organization in an external environment (e.g. friends, family and co-workers) (Bettencourt & Brown, 2003; Burmann & Zeplin, 2005; Fullerton, 2011; Tsarenko et al., 2018). More specifically, activities of employees to enhance corporate reputation could be: talking favorably about the organization to others, purchasing the organizations merchandise and/or its products or services to personify the brand, defending the firm against negative word-of-mouth, identifying negative word-of-mouth by others and finding ways to counter-act them, and voicing concern about harmful corporate behavior that might risk corporate reputation (Helm, 2011).

As previously mentioned, the rise of social media created a new form of word-of-mouth communication which now does not only take place face-to-face, but is easily spread with a larger audience online (Croteau & Hoynes, 2017; Miles & Mangold, 2014). Especially social media has features that enables stakeholders, including employees, to easily, rapidly and broadly spread all types of information and content with their wide social networks (Aula

& Heinonen, 2016; Dellarocas, 2003). It is even argued that “Today, employees’ participation in social media is more important than ever before as they embody an organization’s corporate character and shape its reputation by functioning as powerful representatives of their organization” (Dreher, 2014, p. 345). Based on this important role of employees’ social media use in constructing corporate reputation, this study focuses on the digital notion of employee advocacy.

Combining the online word-of-mouth communication with existing literature on employee advocacy, digital employee advocacy can be defined as the voluntary use of personal social media accounts by employees to advocate for their employer’s goods, services, activities, news, CSR initiatives, and employment at the company with the organizational goal to positively influence corporate reputation (Kaul & Chaudhri, 2017; Li et al., 2014; Tsarenko et al., 2018).

In digital context, employees’ work-related social media use can take the form of consuming, participating and creating content on personal social media platforms (e.g. Twitter, Facebook or LinkedIn) that concerns users’ work, employer, or the products and services of their employer (Van Zoonen et al., 2014a; Van Zoonen et al., 2014b). This can vary from sharing pre-existing online information (e.g. retweeting messages from other users or referring to external information) to creating own messages about their profession, employer, or work activities (Van Zoonen et al., 2016).

However, illustrations of digital employee advocacy in terms of particular online activities is missing. Moreover, the previously stated description of the concept and the given illustrations of work-related social media use, come either from analyzing employees’ social media behaviors and qualifying this as advocacy and/or work-related social media usage, or conducting large-scale quantitative surveys with pre-produced answers. With a qualitative approach, this research gives employees the opportunity to indicate what behaviors they perceive as digital advocacy.

Moreover, this research aims to enhance existing literature on the nature of employee advocacy. Academic literature presents two kinds of employee advocacy: in-role and extra-role behavior. When promoting the company towards stakeholders is the employee’s main duty (e.g. sales or in-store employee), this behavior is argued to count as in-role behavior and being mainly focused on increasing sales (Bettencourt & Brown, 2003; MacKenzie, Podsakoff, & Ahearne, 1998; Morhart, Herzog, & Tomczak, 2011; Tsarenko et al., 2018). When promoting the company towards other stakeholders is not in the employee’s job description, this behavior is argued to account as extra-role behavior and being mainly focused on promoting the company’s image (Bettencourt & Brown, 2003; MacKenzie et al.,

1998; Morhart et al., 2011; Tsarenko et al., 2018). Based on exhaustive reviewing of advocacy related literature, Tsarenko, Leo and Tse (2018) argue that employee advocacy should be understood as solely extra-role behavior that is supportive towards the organization, with the criterium that the advocating activities are external to their formal role. However, it remains unclear if employees' digital engagement in advocating activities should be considered as in-role or extra-role behavior. Therefore, this research aims to further explore the nature of digital employee advocacy by talking to working professionals in different formal roles, and uncovering their sense of responsibility towards these online activities.

2.2.2. Organizational benefits of employee advocacy

As discussed so far, having employees advocate on behalf the organization could lead to positive influence on the construction of corporate reputation. Reportedly, employee advocacy can help to build and strengthen the brand image of the organization (Löhndorf & Diamantopoulus, 2014; Morhart et al., 2009). Moreover, it is stressed that the external representation of employees is critical in today's competitive market as it drives organizational effectiveness and performance (Lages, 2012). An example of this increase in effectiveness and performance due to the positive external representation of employees, is the publication of Fortune Magazine's annual list of the "100 Best Companies to Work For" (Lages, 2012). This list is based on criteria that represent employees' opinions about their workplace, and influences job seeking professionals that search for jobs at quality companies worldwide (Lages, 2012). High ranked companies can recruit high quality professionals, which contribute to the company's performance (Lages, 2012). Therefore, understanding what motivates employees to externally represent their employer in a favorable manner, will benefit all organizations (Lages, 2012).

Besides intangible assets like corporate reputation and brand image, it is argued that employee advocacy has a significant effect on organizations' sales (Weber Shandwick, 2014; Wright & Snook, 2017). From this perspective, employee advocacy should be considered an "always on" marketing channel that leads to five times more web traffic and 25 percent more leads, and should be a vital part of organizations' strategy (Tsarenko et al., 2018; Wright & Snook, 2017).

From the organizational perspective, these benefits seem to be the main motivation to engage in employee advocacy. However, existing literature does not elaborate on the benefits for employees to engage in advocacy on behalf of the organization, which are expected to be different from the business case for employee advocacy. Moreover, Frank (2015) stresses the importance of making explicit what the employee will benefit from

engaging in the company’s new strategy. Employers should be able to answer the question “what is in it for me?” from the employee perspective and be able to illustrate how embracing the new strategy will bring them further (Frank, 2015). Therefore, this research aims to uncover employees’ motivations behind, and perceived benefits of engaging in digital advocating behaviors.

2.2.3. Drivers of employee advocacy

Although research into what motivates employees to engage in employee advocacy and how organizations can activate these motivations is relatively scarce (Löhndorf & Diamantopoulus, 2014), previous studies did manage to identify several drivers of behaviors that support the organization’s reputation building efforts, as presented in the table below.

Table 1

Drivers of employee advocacy

Source	Drivers	Outcome
Tsarenko, Leo and Tse, 2018	Social resources in the form support from co-workers and supervisors and supportive working environment .	Increased personal resource investment (i.e., commitment and effort) which are underlying mechanisms that facilitate employee advocacy behaviors
	Perceived recognition (e.g. reward, praise)	Increased effort, which is an underlying mechanism that facilitates employee advocacy. However, does not affect commitment and therefore argued to possibly reduce advocacy behaviors.
Löhndorf and Diamantopoulus, 2014; Hughes and Ahearne, 2010	Internal branding efforts to enhance employees’ perceived self-brand fit, brand knowledge, and belief in the brand.	Increased organizational identification (i.e., overlap between organization and personal identity). High organizational identification internally motivates
	Perceived organizational support (e.g. supervisor support, job security, development opportunities)	employees to engage in behaviors that support the

organizational brand-
building efforts (e.g.
employee advocacy).

While the aforementioned drivers remain valid, the digital context of this study necessitates a closer look at employees' reasons to use their personal social media accounts to engage in advocating activities. Consulting existing literature on work-related social media use, a remarkable contradiction can be found. Some academics argue that this type of social media use provides employees with a platform to engage in brand ambassadorship and is driven by organizational-related factors that support the organization's collective achievements instead of personal self-seeking motivations (e.g. personal branding) (Van Zoonen et al., 2014a). While others trying to explain employees' work-related social media use argue for the value of self-identity expressiveness and social identity expressiveness (e.g. using work-related messages on social media to express personal values) (Van Zoonen et al., 2014b). By further exploring the motivations of employees to use their personal social media accounts to talk about their employer, this research aims to clarify the previously mentioned contradicting explanations of work-related social media use.

2.2.4. Organizational challenges of digital employee advocacy

As previously discussed, having employees advocate on behalf of the organization can serve as an effective way for organizations to manage reputation. However, employee advocacy, digital employee advocacy in particular, comes with challenges as well. Existing literature highlights the possible risks and challenges organizations might face when having employees act as digital advocates. In general, two organizational challenges can be found: encouraging and managing digital employee advocacy (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002; Fleming, 2009; Fournier & Avery, 2011; Kaul & Chaudhri, 2017; Rokka et al., 2014; Vallaster & De Chernatony, 2006), and the merge of personal and professional lives and identities (Kaul & Chaudhri, 2017; Miles & Mangold, 2014; Rokka et al., 2014; Van Zoonen et al., 2016).

Firstly, the encouragement of employees' engagement in advocating activities can backfire their willingness to participate (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002; Fleming, 2009; Rokka et al., 2014). Research into forms of organizational control and its consequences, indicates that encouragement and pressure of employees to advocate on behalf of their employer may lead to counter actions (e.g. sarcasm and irony) and forms of resistance (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002; Fleming, 2009; Rokka et al., 2014). Moreover, it is argued that having employees communicate via the official company channels might be perceived as less authentic, which is why organizations choose to let employees use their personal social media to talk about

the organization (Fournier & Avery, 2011). Trying to minimize the possible reputational risks that come with this decision, organizations often set up social media policies to manage employees' online behaviors, invading employees' social media performance (Kaul & Chaudhri, 2017).

Secondly, existing literature argues that organizations need to be aware of the reputational risks that come with digital employee advocacy as well (Rokka et al., 2014). As illustrated by Miles and Mangold (2014) employees speaking out on social media "can be an untapped resource for enhancing the organization's public image or a bomb waiting to explode with devastating impact on the firm's reputation" (p. 401). Instead of positively advocating for the organization, employees can choose to use their social media to air their dissatisfaction with their employer (Miles & Mangold, 2014). Depending on how employees' work-related social media use is guided and managed, it can either be an opportunity or a threat for corporate reputation (Miles & Mangold, 2014). Moreover, this merge of private and professional use of social media leads to a merge of identities as well (Kaul & Chaudhri, 2017). Social media fails in which a misguided Tweet or Facebook post of an employee backfires the organization they work for, are no exception (Kaul & Chaudhri, 2017). Once employees have used their personal social media account for professional purposes, their personal online behavior can influence their profession as well (e.g. a racist statement of an employee can lead to reputational damage of the organization they work and advocate for) (Kaul & Chaudhri, 2017; Rokka et al., 2014).

Overcoming these organizational issues, companies are advised to balance acts of encouraging versus restricting employees in their online presence, posting marketing content versus authentic self-created content, and emphasizing employees private versus professional roles (Rokka et al., 2014). Thus far, research into (digital) employee advocacy has mainly focused on studying key organizational factors, overlooking the importance of examining the possible boundaries of the concept from the employee perspective (Labrecque, Markos, & Milne, 2011; Tsarenko et al., 2018; Rokka et al., 2014). Therefore, this research further studies the issues surrounding digital employee advocacy, focusing on the possible challenges employees face when engaging in advocating activities, and the perceived freedom or restriction of their online presence.

For employers to promote digital advocacy among its employees, and for academics to better understand digital employee advocacy, it is important to get a good understanding of its drivers, workings and boundaries (Tsarenko et al., 2018; Weber Shandwick, 2014). Therefore the aim of this research is to contribute to the understanding of these different aspects of the practice from the employee perspective, asking three research questions:

RQ1: What activities are viewed as digital employee advocacy by working professionals?

RQ2: : What are working professionals' motivations to use their personal social media accounts to advocate for their employer?

RQ3: What are the challenges working professionals face in digitally advocating for their employer?

3. METHODS

This section explains the research method and procedure of the study. Moreover, it provides information concerning the sampling process, research sample, operationalization, and data collection and analysis.

3.1 Research method

In order to answer the aforementioned research questions, a qualitative research method was conducted. Qualitative methods are often used when researchers want to get a deeper and fuller understanding of a social process (Babbie, 2014). Moreover, qualitative social research enables the researcher to recognize nuances of attitudes and behavior that might not be found in quantitative research, and by using language it aims to understand concepts based on people's experiences (Babbie, 2014; Brennen, 2017). As this research is focused on understanding the concept of digital employee advocacy from the employee perspective, a qualitative research approach was chosen.

In order to understand employees' experiences with, perceptions of, and opinions on digital employee advocacy, an interactive conversation was needed (Kvale, 2007). Therefore, this research made use of in-depth qualitative interviews, as this method is argued to be well suited to explore people's attitudes, values, beliefs, and motives (Barriball & While, 1994; Richardson, Dohrenwend, & Klein, 1965). Moreover, information gained with qualitative interviews helps broaden our knowledge base and helps to understand alternative points of view (Brennen, 2017), and serves as a way to detect the motives behind specific behaviors and actions (Patton, 2005). Through in-depth interviewing, participants' experiences with and motivations behind digital employee advocacy were explored.

A semi-structured interview is a highly valued form of in-depth interviewing as this type of interviewing seeks to interpret the meaning of particular phenomenon based on interviewees' descriptions (Kvale, 2007). Conducting semi-structured interviews, the researcher pre-establishes themes to be covered, as well as suggested questions, but the conversation is open to changes of themes and forms of questions following up the answers and stories of the participant (Kvale, 2007). Moreover, semi-structured in-depth interviews give the opportunity to explore participants' perceptions and opinions regarding complex issues by probing for more information and/or a better understanding (Barriball & While, 1994). As this research aims to study a varying sample consisting of working professionals with different backgrounds and knowledge, standardized questions (e.g. survey) are not desired (Barriball & While, 1994).

As previously mentioned, semi-structured in-depth interviews make use of pre-established themes and questions to obtain reliable results, yet there is much flexibility in the

order of the conversation and adding questions and probes based on the conversation (Kvale, 2007). While conducting the interviews, the researcher managed to discuss all topics and questions with the interviewees, however, the order of the topics and questions varied, and several follow-up and additional questions rose from the conversation (Brennen, 2017). Together with the interviewees, the researcher aimed to make meaning of digital employee advocacy from their perspective.

At the beginning of each interview, the participant and interviewer verbally discussed the consent of the interview by clarifying the research purpose and topic, as well as informing them about their rights and voluntary participation (Kvale, 2007). Furthermore, participants' permission to audiotape the conversation was asked and the use of personal information (e.g. real name, company name) was discussed. Some participants expressed wanting to stay completely anonymous or did not allow the use of the company name.

3.2 Sampling technique and research sample

In order to uncover the employee perspective on digital employee advocacy, the population of this research was defined as working professionals who engage, or have engaged, in digital employee advocacy. Talking to these people gave the opportunity to illustrate what personal behaviors they perceive as digital employee advocacy, what motivates them to perform those behaviors, and what possible challenges they face, or have faced.

Recruiting participants was done via purposive and snowball sampling. A combination of these sampling techniques allowed the researcher to achieve the desired variety (e.g. male/female, professional role, industry, age etc.) in the sample, as well as recruiting interviewees outside the researcher's own social network (Babbie, 2014). By going from one case to the next, the researcher asked each initial participant to suggest additional people that might want to participate in a future interview (Flick, 2007). The use of a non-random sampling method limits the production of empirical generalizations (Patton, 2015). However, using purposive sampling contributes to a better understanding of the concept and leads to new views on the research topic, which is in line with the benefits of using qualitative methods (Babbie, 2014; Brennen, 2017).

Recruiting initial interviewees was done via posting a request on LinkedIn and Facebook, asking for volunteers to participate in the study. Social media was used to increase the visibility of the study and allowed the researcher to select varying participants. The call for participants (see appendix A) asked for working professionals in a permanent position who have experience with engaging in digital advocacy on behalf of their employer (e.g. recommending the employer to others on social media, or sharing company posts in

your personal network etc.). This way, initial participants who could identify with this broad description were recruited.

In total, 20 interviews were conducted between the 9th and 24th of April via phone or video call, lasting between 45 and 75 minutes. The sample included 10 men and 10 women, working in different positions (e.g. communications, flight attendant, soccer agent, consultant, sales) for organizations in different industries (e.g. healthcare, IT, government institution, tourism). Moreover, participants' ages range from 24 years till 49 years, coming from different educational backgrounds. Besides, participants' tenure range varied between 5 months and 24 years. 19 out of 20 interviews were conducted with Dutch working professionals and one with a German working professional. A list of all participants and their details can be found below.

Table 2*Interviewee profile*

Name	Age	Role	Company/industry	Country	Educational level	Time with the company
Alex	32	Accountant (former) Photographer (current)	UC Group (former) Freelancer (current) / Consultant agency	NL	University of applied science	4 years (former)
Julia	24	Project manager (freelancer)	Weelde / Hospitality	NL	University of applied science	8 months
Jan-Willem	45	Financial consultant	NDA / Consultant agency	NL	University	24 years
Anna	44	Touring guide	City Sightseeing / tourism	NL	Conservatorium	1 year
Tim	24	Trainee	NDA / Real estate agency	NL	University of applied science	8 months
Thijs	31	Online marketing manager	NDA / Sports management agency	NL	University	4.5 years
Caroline	30	Marketeer	NDA / Game developer (former) – Travel agency (current)	NL	University of applied science	8 years (former) 2 months (current)
Joey	26	Soccer agent	NDA / Sports management agency	NL	University	4 years
Eva	23	Flight attendant	NDA / Airline	NL	Secondary vocational education (MBO)	1 year
Romy	27	Team coach	NDA / Health care	NL	University of applied science	3 years
Bas	44	Director sales and operations	Veenman / IT consultancy	NL	University of applied science	12.5 years
Willem	49	Area coordinator	Rotterdam Sport Support / Sports Foundation	NL	University	2 years

Jeroen	23	Marketeer	Helminck / IT consultancy	NL	University of applied science	2 years
Lisa	31	Communications advisor	Governmental organization	NL	University of applied science	1 year
Kristel	24	Pedagogical staff member	Jongleren Woensdrecht / Daycare	NL	Secondary vocational education (MBO)	4 years
Peter	31	Management consultant	NDA / Consultant agency	GE	University	6 years
Dylan	27	Sales and account manager	NDA / Credit management agency	NL	University	2.5 years
Jet	25	Trainee	NDA / Consultant agency	NL	University	8 months
Jessica	33	Flight attendant	TUI / Travel agency	NL	Secondary vocational education (MBO)	2 years
Melissa	31	Communications advisor	NDA / Healthcare institution	NL	University	5 months

* Pseudonym names were created for each participant

* NDA = non-disclosure agreement

3.3 Operationalization

Based on the research questions and literature review of this study, the interviews were built around three main topics: advocating activities, motivations to engage in such activities, and challenges faced in advocating for the employer.

At the beginning of each interview, the interviewer took the time to establish rapport to ensure the effectiveness of the conversation (Bell, Fahmy, & Gordon, 2016). The interview started with introductory questions to gain some background information on the participant. Moreover, in this stage of the conversation the interviewer and participant had the opportunity to get comfortable with each other. Throughout the interview, the interviewer interestedly listened to the participant's stories and answers, whether or not they were relevant to the research topic, to build trust and an honest conversation (Bell et al., 2016). At the end of every interview, participants were asked if they had any questions or comments regarding the conversation and/or the study, and were provided with the researcher's contact details in case of later questions and/or comments. After conducting all interviews, the

participants received an e-mail to thank them for their time and effort, and shortly repeating the informed consent.

The first topic of the interview guide (see appendix B) aimed to uncover what online activities working professionals perceive as advocating behavior, and to discuss the participants' experience with advocating on behalf of their employer. Moreover, this section of the interview guide elaborated on participants' sense of responsibility and perceived freedom to advocate, as well as employers' efforts to encourage engagement.

The second topic focused on exploring participants' perceived motivations to engage in the described activities. Besides questions that directly asked for participants' motivations for their engagement, probe questions on how they got the idea to engage and/or what happened prior to their engagement, were included to stimulate participants to share their motives. Moreover, this part of the interview guide stated the drivers that were found with the literature review of this study (i.e. reward/recognition, organizational identification, satisfaction with job/employer), aiming to explore participants' perception and value of these factors. Concluding this topic, questions about the existence of internal guidelines, and perceived benefits of their engagement were included.

The third, and last section of the interview guide related to the possible challenges participants face with using their personal social media accounts to advocate for their employer. Moreover, questions relating to the issue of blurring lines between private and professional lives and identities as described in the literature review, were included. Lastly, participants' experience with sharing negative online word-of-mouth (eWOM) about their employer was explored.

3.4 Data collection

As previously mentioned, 20 interviews with working professionals were conducted. Due to the circumstances (COVID-19), the interviews could not take place face-to-face. In favor of building rapport and experiencing live interaction with the participants (e.g. facial expressions, body language) (Kvale, 2007), the researcher initiated interviewing via video call. Eventually 18 interviews took place via video call, whereas two participants preferred to do the interview via phone call. All interviews, except one, were carried out in Dutch, so that the participants felt comfortable talking about their experiences and sharing their opinions with the interviewer. One interview was carried out in English with a German participant who expressed being comfortable with talking English.

All interviews were audiotaped with the permission of the participants, in order to later transcribe the conversations. The first six interviews were directly transcribed and translated into English, whereas the later interviews were transcribed in the spoken language due to the

time consumption of the transcribing and translating process. The researcher did not make use of any transcribing software, however a total of five interviews were transcribed by two other persons, all in verbatim (i.e. word-by-word transcribing).

3.5 Data analysis

Analyzing the data of this study, a thematic analysis of the transcripts was conducted in order to detect possible patterns and meanings (Braun & Clarke, 2006). During the process of analyzing, the transcripts were sorted, named, categorized and connected, all entailing the interpretation of digital employee advocacy (Boeijs, 2014). The process was guided by the following six steps of thematic analysis by Braun and Clarke (2006): 1) transcribing the interviews, re-reading the data and writing down initial ideas, 2) generating initial codes for interesting features of the data, 3) comparing codes and searching for initial themes, 4) reviewing themes and generating a thematic coding scheme of the analysis, 5) defining and generating definitions and names for each theme, and 6) producing the report based on the found themes and relating the analysis back to the research questions and literature. During this process, coding schemes were created (see appendix C). Firstly, all relevant data was coded with initial codes (i.e. open codes). Afterwards, initial codes were compared and sorted into initial themes (i.e. axial codes). Based on the open and axial codes, overarching themes, covering the content of the data in relation to the research questions, were created (i.e. selective codes). The created coding schemes served as a foundation for the results and analysis section of the report (Böhm, 2004).

3.6 Validity and reliability

In order to ensure the validity and reliability of the research, several verifying factors were taken into account (Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson, & Spiers, 2002). By clearly documenting the research process (sample information, transcripts, analysis process, coding schemes etc.), the methodical coherence ensured the congruence between the research questions and the method (Morse et al., 2002). Moreover, the researcher ensured that the sample of the research was appropriate by selecting participants that best represent the research topic. Acknowledging the iterative nature of qualitative research methods, the researcher moved back and forth between the research design and the implementation of new findings, ensuring congruence between literature and interview questions, as well as the analysis and interpretation of the gathered data (Morse et al., 2002)

4. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

This chapter presents the analysis of 20 interviews with working professionals, also known as employees, aiming to explore the employee perspective on digital employee advocacy. Particularly, the aim was to uncover what online behaviors are viewed as advocacy in the eyes of working professionals, the motivations behind their engagement in these activities, as well as the possible challenges they face in digitally advocating on behalf of their employer. Based on the analysis, two overarching themes were found relating to advocating behaviors and the nature of this behavior. Besides, two themes that serve as a motivation for working professionals to engage in digital advocacy, yet also uncover obstacles and boundaries to the concept of digital employee advocacy, derived from the data analysis.

4.1 Digital employee advocacy is a heterogeneous construct

The analysis of the interviews uncovered varying online activities that in the eyes of working professionals account as digital advocacy. Ranging from passively liking company posts, to actively creating content concerning their work and/or employer. In particular, working professionals vary in their preference for the aforementioned range of activities. Whereas some interviewees expressed their preference for sharing pre-produced content to retain quality and security, others showed a preference for self-creation of content to retain authenticity.

For only three of the participants, their online advocacy mainly consists of “just pressing like” (Anna, 44, touring guide) and/or commenting on company posts. The other 17 participants indicated using their personal social media accounts to share company-related content by either reposting company posts and/or personally creating content concerning their work and/or employer.

Almost all participants (19 out of 20) expressed their experience with reposting company posts with their personal social media accounts. Moreover, for the largest group of the interviewed working professionals (9 out of 20), their engagement in digital advocacy is characterized by reposting content posted by the company. The example of reposting job vacancies was repeatedly given to illustrate their engagement. Others spoke about reposting company posts about CSR activities (i.e. voluntary initiatives that support a greater good) (e.g. corona-helpdesk) or informative publications coming from the company. Romy (27, team coach) for example, talked about reposting content when “colleagues or supervisors share interesting articles” to illustrate her understanding of advocating activities.

More interestingly, the analysis uncovered a form of engagement that combines sharing pre-produced content and self-created content. It was found that working professionals often add a personal text above the company posts that they repost, with the

aim to make the message more personal. Jeroen (23, marketer), for example, illustrated his behavior as followed:

I literally share the posts, but I always write a supportive message with it, how I personally experience things. So Helmink writes a post about a job vacancy like: this is what you earn, this is the role, help us out. And what I personally do is writing: are you going to be my new colleague? Because cool projects, fun drinks. Making it more personal.

For others (8 out of 20), their engagement in digital advocacy is characterized by using their personal social media accounts to share self-created content related to their work and/or employer. In those self-created posts they either mention (i.e. tagging) their employer and/or use company hashtags. Illustrating their engagement, interviewees gave examples of writing about their success, personal experiences and/or projects that they personally worked on. For instance, Caroline (30, marketer) explained that when she has been working on a “nice project” she “posts an update about it on LinkedIn, coming from myself but that we have worked on that at X or X”. Moreover, sharing self-created visual content, like “taking pictures in uniform” (Eva, 23, flight attendant) and “making nice visuals of what you experience during the day” (Lisa, 31 communications advisor), was repeatedly mentioned.

Besides uncovering the activities that account as digital advocacy in the eyes of working professionals, it was found that employees vary in their preferred way of engaging. Whereas several interviewees expressed their preference to create their own content to retain authenticity, others like to leave the content creation up to the communications department in order to retain the quality of the content. As explained by Tim (24, trainee), he prefers to repost company posts because “it is coming from the communications department and they really know how to post such a message in a powerful way”. Moreover, this preference for reposting company posts can be seen as a way to ensure that the content is approved by the company, as Jan-Willem (45, finance consultant) argued that “it has been looked at and someone has given their blessing over it. So what is in it is right. And our visions of X is also included, the visions of our organization”. On the contrary, several participants expressed their preference for creating their own content instead of sharing pre-produced content, with the aim to keep it authentic and “straight from the heart” (Willem, 49, area coordinator). Caroline (30, marketer) expressed her need for authenticity as finding it “super lame when someone only uses their Instagram or LinkedIn to simply share. I find that you totally miss the point then, not credible”. Yet, this need for authenticity can still be found with working professionals who prefer to repost content instead of creating, arguing that

adding a personal text above a repost makes the message “come across a bit more enthusiastic and genuine” (Lisa, 31, communications advisor).

Besides a variety in preference for particular online activities, the findings of this research presented a variety in social media platforms that working professionals use to digitally advocate on behalf of their employer. Instagram, Facebook and LinkedIn were indicated as platforms used for digital advocacy. More importantly, it was found that employees advocate on the platform with the most relevant network for the particular content. For some this means using their personal Instagram account to reach a young audience or to update family and friends on their working activities, but for most interviewees (13 out of 20) advocacy mainly takes place on their LinkedIn account. As illustrated by Caroline (30, marketeer) who prefers using LinkedIn over Instagram to talk about her employer:

Well because that is quite related to work and I also think that the target audience, which are not that many, but people that contact or follow me via LinkedIn find that also more relevant than the people that I have on Instagram. And if it is really funny and nice then I do, but if it is something really work-related, then I would never post that on my own Instagram.

Moreover, it was found that LinkedIn is evaluated as a “professional medium” (Romy, 27, team coach), specifically aimed for professional use, whereas Facebook and Instagram are often either intertwined or for private use only.

In other words, digital employee advocacy should be considered a heterogeneous construct particularly based on the found variety in working professionals’ preferred way of engaging, and using of different social media platforms. Based on this found variety, it is important to note that employees should not be expected to engage in the same advocating activities and use the same social media platforms to advocate on.

4.2 Engaging in digital advocacy is perceived as extra-role behavior

The analysis of the gathered data showed that employees, regardless of their professional role, do not perceive the advocating activities that they have ever engaged in, as a part of their formal tasks. Nonetheless, six participants work or have worked in a sales, marketing, and/or communications position. For example, Lisa (31) works as a communications advisor, but does not see engaging in digital employee advocacy as a part of her formal tasks, arguing that “what you do in private is up to yourself”. So even though these working professionals’ job is to externally present the company, engaging in advocating activities with their personal social media accounts is not considered a part of their formal tasks. Arguably,

working professionals consider digital employee advocacy as extra-role behavior, regardless of their role within the company.

Enhancing this statement, the majority of the interviewees argue that digitally advocating on behalf of the company should not be seen as a responsibility of employees. Moreover, several participants expressed that they would not support employees being required to engage in digital advocacy as they “would see that as a constraint of your freedom or something” (Alex, 31, freelancing photographer and accountant). It was repeatedly mentioned that the responsibility of building the brand image lies with the company itself, and not with its employees. This was, amongst others, highlighted by Jessica (33, flight attendant, former in-store retail employee):

I think that main responsibility lies with the owner or with the store chain or something in that sense. Look, you can make something really big by effectively using your social media accounts because you simply have a really big reach with that, I do find that. But I do not find that you can impose that on your employees like “you have to share particular content for us”. I do not think that’s how it works.

Complementing this perspective, Tim (23, trainee) feels that the core of brand building should be with the company itself, independent of its employees’ help, but “if employees thereafter also share that, that only benefits the company of course”.

Despite a mutual agreement among the participants that digital advocacy is not a part of their formal tasks and responsibilities, a remarkable contradiction can be found with some of the interviewees when it comes to the responsibility of employees in general. Six interviewees expressed that the responsibility to digitally advocate on behalf of the company partly depends on someone’s professional role, the industry that they work in, or their personal online activeness. As previously mentioned, Lisa (31, communications advisor) believes that digitally advocating on behalf of the company is not a part of her formal tasks, however, when she was later asked if digital advocacy should be considered as a responsibility of employees in general, she argued for the dependence on their “background and role”. In her opinion, sales and communications are two elements in which “an employer may expect that you have insight into, for example, how you can reach your network through a channel like LinkedIn”.

Contradictions like these justify the ongoing debate about qualifying employee advocacy as in-role or extra-role behavior that can be found in academic literature. However, interviewees’ unanimous agreement to not recognize online advocating activities as a part of their formal tasks and personal responsibility, given that employees working in sales,

communications, and marketing are included, leads to the conclusion that digital employee advocacy is perceived as extra-role behavior by working professionals.

Besides uncovering the perceived nature of digital employee advocacy, the interviews showed that defending or protecting the company from negative eWOM is not perceived as a part of digital employee advocacy. Although existing theory on employee advocacy describes defending or protecting the company from negative word-of-mouth as illustrative behavior of employee advocacy (Helm, 2011), this does not account for digital employee advocacy in the eyes of working professionals. Interviewees repeatedly expressed that, in their opinion, responding to negative eWOM with their personal social media account will not solve the issue and might even worsen the situation. As Eva (23, flight attendant) puts it:

They have people that are trained for that and they can respond in name of the company. And otherwise you get into arguments with people you do not know, you also can't help them because you can't offer them anything. So its better if the company helps with that.

However, employees do feel the responsibility to internally report negative eWOM to the right person in the company (e.g. communications department) when they come across it. Thus, incorporating the perspective of working professionals in further conceptualizing digital employee advocacy, the use of personal social media accounts to protect or defend the company from negative eWOM should not be included in the conceptualization.

4.3 Digital advocacy intertwines the personal and the organizational

When analyzing participants' motivations behind and challenges with engaging in digital advocacy, it was found that digital employee advocacy intertwines the personal and the organizational. Which on the one hand serves as a motivation as working professionals indicated mutual interest in their engagement, but on the other hand challenges their engagement as it merges their private and professional identities and reputations. Managing this merge, it was found that employees' identification with the particular content that they share and the organization they advocate on behalf of, has a great influence on their online behavior, including their engagement in advocating activities.

4.3.1. Pursuing personal and organizational interest

The interviews showed that engaging in digital advocacy is motivated by both personal interest, as well as organizational interests in the practice. Several participants argued that their use of personal social media accounts to share work- and/or employer-related content is motivated by their desire to show their followers, friends, and/or family what they are doing in terms of work. Interviewees expressed wanting to "show how much fun my job actually is" (Jessica, 33, flight attendant) and what their daily work looks like. Lisa (31, communications

advisor) explained she wants to show others “how cool my job is and what I am allowed to do and what I achieve”. Linked to this, it was found that working professionals use their personal social media accounts to engage in advocacy because they are proud of their personal success and/or involvement, as illustrated by Thijs (31, online marketing manager) talking about why he shared a company post:

I have once made a documentary about X and sold that to X with our team, and that was something I was proud of so then I share that type of post because that concerns my personal work so to say.

Slowly moving from engagement as a way of self-expression, participants expressed pursuing personal interest linked to their professional role. Several interviewees mentioned the urge to inform their network about important developments and/or events concerning their expertise. Some sense of “taking and giving” (Jan-Willem, 45, financial consultant), informing others about “issues they would want to be informed about themselves” (Jessica, 33, flight attendant).

Moreover, the interviews uncovered a more strategic motive behind employees’ engagement in digital advocacy. Using their personal social media accounts to show their network what they are capable of, presenting themselves as skilled employees, several interviewees explained their engagement as “building some kind of CV” (Julia, 24, project manager). Furthermore, two participants expressed using their personal social media accounts to reach their targets (e.g. marketing target or recruiting new employees). Based on these findings, digital employee advocacy should not only be considered as a strategic tool for organizations to boost their reputation, but also as a strategy for working professionals to build their own professional reputation.

Besides being driven by personal interest to engage in advocating activities, the analysis of this research indicated motivations focused on pursuing organizational interest. Several interviewees (6 out of 20) argued to be driven by their knowledge of the valuable role of employees’ online expressions for the company’s reputation. As Melissa (31, communications advisor) explains, she has been “in PR for a very long time so I just know it is good to focus on branding, and that others like that as well. So I have always done that everywhere, without actually being asked”. An important remark here is that the majority of those participants are occupied with marketing, sales, or communications for their employer. More detailed, Jeroen (23, marketer) shared his knowledge on the effect of employee engagement:

As a marketer I see that if a company posts content itself, you of course get certain interactions, certain reach. And I see that if employees actively engage in that, so

comment, share content, have something to say about it, that logically the range increases because you reach more people, but especially the interaction level increases.

Enhancing this previously mentioned intertwining role of digital employee advocacy, recruiting new people serves as an illustrative example of pursuing mutual interest. Several participants touched upon using their personal social media accounts to recruit employees for the company, which on the one hand is beneficial for the company, but is also seen as a way to have influence on who will become their new colleague because:

I also want to draw attention to others like myself, people that I know, people that I like ... It should build a company around the people you kind of like, where you have a bit more influence yourself other than having it growing anonymously (Peter, 31, management consultant).

Furthermore, it was found that perceived organizational support serves as a criterion for working professionals to engage in digital advocacy. All participants expressed that their willingness to engage derives from their satisfaction with their job, employer, and working environment, believing that “if colleagues are not happy or not satisfied with the company, they would not want to do that. I am happy and satisfied, so that is why I did it” (Anna, 44, touring guide). Enhancing this believe, a powerful illustration of the importance of perceived organizational support was given by Jet (25, trainee):

Currently I am not really satisfied with my assignment and how things are going within the company. So I feel like, because you do not have everything in order like I would want it to be, I do not feel like doing this for you.

All in all, this research has shown that personal and organizational interest become intertwined when using personal social media accounts to advocate on behalf of the employer. Strengthening this shared interest in the practice, all interviewees identified perceived personal benefits, as well as perceived organizational benefits of their engagement. Self-promotion and staying in contact with their friends, family, and/or network, were repeatedly indicated as personal benefits deriving from their engagement. Indicating the organizational benefits of their engagement, most participants talked about increasing the visibility of the organization, seeing their engagement as an “oil spill” (Willem, 49, area coordinator), and creating a positive image (e.g. organization as a good employer). Despite recognizing the mutual benefits of their engagement, half of the participants argued to be mainly driven by the perceived personal benefits of digital advocacy, finding it important that “I personally gain something from it, more important than the company” (Joey, 23, soccer agent). On the contrary, the other half of the interviewees argued to mainly pursue

organizational benefits when they engage in digital advocacy. Willem (49, area coordinator) for example, argued that his engagement is driven by the aim to “get people to know Rotterdam Sport Support and what we do because often we are too modest”.

Based on the aforementioned findings, digital employee advocacy should be considered as a notion where personal and organizational interest meet each other, instead of wanting to qualify employees' engagement in digital advocacy to be driven by either personal-related *or* organizational-related factors.

4.3.2. Identification is key to digital employee advocacy

Besides intertwining interests, digital employee advocacy intertwines people's personal and professional identities and reputations. Mediating these intertwined identities and reputations, working professionals' identification with the organization they advocate on behalf of, as well identification with the particular content that they share, is key. Thus, it was found that employees are only willing to digitally advocate on behalf of an organization they can identify with, only wanting to share content that they consider to be relevant to their profession, network, and identity. Which on the one hand can be seen as a motivation behind digital employee advocacy when this identification is high, but on the other hand leads to employees being selective in their online engagement.

The interviews showed that for the majority of the participants (11 out of 20), pride is a primary motivation for their engagement, which indicates the importance of organizational identification. A significant number of participants expressed that being proud of the company they work for and “the things we accomplish” (Kristel, 24, pedagogical staff member) motivates them to engage in digital advocacy. This way, their engagement serves as a way to portray themselves as a part of the company and to show their support for the company and its work. As perceived by Bas (44, director sales and operations), digital advocacy naturally occurs when “you have employees who are proud of the company, who can reflect themselves like ‘hey this is me, I can identify with this company, with its goals, the challenges that we have’. Especially the ‘we-feeling’ is very important”.

Besides indicating organizational identification as a key motivator, the analysis uncovered that organizational identification serves as an important criterion for working professionals' engagement. Almost all interviewees (18 out of 20) consider the match between the organization's identity (i.e. values and beliefs) and their personal identity as an important criterion for their engagement.

Moreover, it was found that when this criterion is not met, meaning that organizational identification is missing, it can form an obstacle, making employees unwilling to advocate. For three participants this currently is the case. Caroline (30, marketeer) for example, talked

about her extensive experience with advocating on behalf of her former employer compared to her current employer:

Back then I really shared a lot, articles and tagging people and so on ... But I do not feel quite connect to X yet because I just started working there. That I do not feel a lot for it yet. And currently during the crisis there are also a lot of people that use the hashtag X and all those kind of things. But at this moment I do not feel compelled to that or connected to that.

Results suggest that employees' identification with the content they share via their personal social media accounts guides their online behavior, including their engagement in advocacy. In particular, it was found that in every step of the process, working professionals consider whether or not they perceive particular content as relevant to either their profession or their network as "there are of course many things that we publish, but if it stands too far from my clients or too far from my so to say profession, then I do not share it" (Jan-Willem, 45, financial consultant). Moreover, it was repeatedly argued that the content has to relate to their identity as "I only post something that fits me and who I am. Those are my personal accounts so I only share something that fits me" (Melissa, 31, communications advisor), and has to support their personal beliefs as "I would never post something that I do not support" (Kristel, 24, pedagogical staff member).

It was found that the importance of this identification has to do with participants' awareness and management of their reputation. When posting too much work-related content with their personal social media accounts they fear to 'overkill' their followers, network, friends, and/or family, and therefore guide their activities based on relevance and identification. Julia (24, project manager) described getting comments from her friends on the amount of work-related content she shares with them via social media. Dealing with this issue, she tries to be selective in what she shares and what not. Moreover, several interviewees expressed their fear of becoming 'that person', as illustrated by Jet (25, trainee):

Otherwise I get the idea that I constantly overwhelm people with messages about my employer while I never have the idea with other people like "you are sharing so much". And if people would do that, I often delete them, I find that annoying. I follow you as a person and not as a company, otherwise I would follow the company.

Enhancing this awareness of the impact of their online behavior on their own reputation, it was found that working professionals are very conscious of their online behavior in relation to their professional reputation. Several interviewees argue that once you combine private and professional use of your personal social media accounts, which often is the case

with digital advocacy, you should be conscious of what you expose to whom. As illustrated by Joey (23, soccer agent):

You should not simply share everything and I definitely think that you have the responsibility, everyone actually, that once you start posting privately and professionally, you have the responsibility to be conscious of what you are posting privately. So if you are in the club, drunk, and you take a picture like “we are at the club getting drunk”, you have to seriously consider whether that fits with the type of work you do.

The analysis did not only illustrate interviewees’ awareness of the impact of their online behavior on their own reputation, it was also found that working professionals are aware of the impact of their online behavior on the organization’s reputation as well. As previously mentioned, all interviewees were able to name several organizational benefits of their engagement like influencing the external image of the organization.

This awareness of the impact of online behavior on both reputations (personal and organizational) emphasizes the intertwining role of digital advocacy. When it comes to reputational damage, participants perceive talking badly about an employer online as detrimental to their personal reputation as it is to the company’s reputation. Repeatedly, participants expressed not seeing social media as a way to solve issues or dissatisfaction with their employer. They believe that this way of ‘airing’ dissatisfaction will badly reflect on their own reputation. All interviewees claimed to have never talked badly about an employer on social media. Jeroen (23, marketer) however, once considered using his social media to express his dissatisfaction with the way he was fired. But after re-thinking, he decided to not use his social media for this purpose as he also wanted to post a call for a new job with the same social media account. He explained his decision by arguing that “if I am complaining about a company and thereafter say “who wants to hire this nice marketer”, that is not 1 plus 1 is 2 in my head”.

Based on the interviews, it is valid to state that digital employee advocacy indeed enmeshes private and professional reputations, previously referred to as ‘blurring lines’ (Rokka et al., 2014), which is experienced by both organizations as well as working professionals. Besides handling this challenge by prioritizing their identification with the organization they advocate on behalf of, and the content that they share, several interviewees expressed taking extra measures by separating their private and professional (online) relationships. Whereas some participants talked about almost non-existent boundaries between their private and professional (online) relationships as colleagues and clients became friends, others prefer to keep those (online) relationships separate by not

'friending' with colleagues and clients on their social media accounts, except for LinkedIn. As motivated by Tim (24, trainee), 'friending' with colleagues on social media "gets too personal and I want to build a friendly professional collegian relationship with someone".

Thus, even though working professionals show a willingness to use their personal social media accounts to, when perceived as relevant and convenient, share company-related content, a complete merge of their private and professional online identities and relationships should not be expected, emphasizing the importance of letting employees engage in digital advocacy on their own terms.

4.4 Encouragement versus surveillance

Interviewees reflected on the role of the employer in encouraging engagement in advocating activities. The majority of the participants (13 out of 20) expressed being encouraged by their employer to use their social media accounts to share company-related content. For most of the interviewees this meant receiving direct requests from their employer to share certain content, either via e-mails, group chats, or during meetings. The most common given example was receiving requests from their employer to share job vacancies with their network. Moreover, several participants talked about being provided with pre-produced content (e.g. articles, video's, pictures) to post with their personal accounts, which for two participants is done via a content-sharing app (Smarp and Hootsuite). Others expressed feeling encouraged by being asked for input and feedback on the company's social media strategy via brainstorm sessions, or submitting their self-created content for company use. An illustrative example of submitting self-created content was given by Kristel (24, pedagogical staff member) explaining that she and her colleagues are the once creating the content that is shared with the company's Facebook page, which makes her feel encouraged to engage.

However, going in-depth, it appeared that the act of encouragement is not as innocent, and may be perceived as a form of surveillance or social pressure. When asking interviewees if they have ever felt pressured or uncomfortable, it shows that they have a hard time using the word pressure, but several interviewees indicated feeling like their engagement is "really expected" (Julia, 24, project manager), "like an unwritten rule" (Caroline, 30, marketeer), and "some kind of social pressure" (Dylan, 27, sales and account manager). Moreover, in some cases this clear expectation makes employees feel obligated to engage and therefore sometimes uncomfortable, as explained by Alex (32, freelancing photographer and accountant) who worked as an accountant at the time of the following experience: "I have felt uncomfortable because I did not engage while sensing that it was

expected from me. Or I felt uncomfortable because I indeed posted something of which I later thought “Why did I actually post that?”.

Feeling encouraged can turn into feeling pressured when employers repeatedly request employees to advocate. Especially tracking employees’ engagement and sending follow-up request leads to a decrease in their willingness to digitally advocate. As illustrated by Julia (24, project manager):

There are sometimes comments like “hey guys, I see that not everyone has shared it yet” or if the event is not going well they sent a message like “share it again” or “let’s try something again”. Then I do sometimes think that that is not really my job and I can feel bothered sometimes if it is brought up again. See, I do not mind the asking in the first place, but repeating.

Thus, balancing on a thin line between encouragement and surveillance, participants suggested that employers can encourage their employees to engage by initiating engagement, providing them with pre-produced content, and setting the right example, but leaving the choice to engage or not up to employees, “giving employees total freedom in that” (Alex, 32, freelancing photographer and accountant).

Another important aspect of this balancing act, is how working professionals perceive measures that guide or restrict their online behavior. The majority of the interviewees acknowledged the existence of general social media guidelines (e.g. corporate identity guidelines, representation protocols). However, these guidelines are often referred to as “common sense” (Eva, 23, flight attendant). Moreover, most participants expressed feeling like their creativity is appreciated. Dylan (27, sales and account manager) expressed that being creative with creating social media content is “even promoted. Of course posts have to be acceptable, so you have to get approval first and then you are allowed to post those type of things”. Thus, even if organizations utilize guidelines or make employees get an approval before sharing work-related content, such measures are not perceived as a constraint of their freedom. Moreover, all interviewees expressed that they feel like their employer trusts them to represent the organization in the right way.

Managing this balancing act, the analysis uncovered a way for employers to encourage employees’ engagement without it being perceived as a form of social pressure or surveillance. It was found that being recognized, either verbally or materialistically, by their employer does not play an important role in working professionals’ motivation to engage in digital advocacy. Even if verbal recognition takes place, it is more seen as “a consequence of me acting, but not really a driver” (Peter, 31, management consultant) and not “the reason why I do it, not the main reason, but I do like it” (Jeroen, 23, marketer). However, the

interviews showed that some employees do seek some form of approval of their behavior. This need for approval was found in expressions of internally checking their content with the communications department or colleagues before posting. Fulfilling this need for approval and encouraging employees the right way, employers should focus on recognizing employees' favorable behaviors via online interactions. Several participants spoke about interacting online with their employer and perceiving this interaction as a sign of appreciation, encouragement, and validation of their advocating behavior. Illustrative examples of this interaction are employers reposting employees' self-created content, liking and/or commenting on employees' posts, and using employees' self-created content for the company's social media accounts. Eva (23, flight attendant) for example, often uses her Instagram to post pictures relating to her work (e.g. picture in uniform) and explains the online interaction with her employer as followed:

It is nice to see that they kind of approve it I guess. That is the thing with commenting, they have seen it and thought: that is a nice picture. Sometimes, when it is Animal Day and I would post a picture with Bob, my dog, in uniform on Instagram for example, they always post some pictures of flight attendants with an animal ... If you post something like that there is a big chance that they repost that on the social media of X, and that is quite big. All of your colleagues see that, that is really nice.

All in all, the findings of this research uncovered that initiating engagement in digital advocacy and providing employees with the right tools and input, is considered effective and appropriate, while clear expectations and follow-up request develop a feeling of social pressure and surveillance, which leads to resistance. Moreover, the interviews showed that general social media guidelines are not necessarily considered as a restriction of freedom, as long as there is room for creativity. Above all, this study uncovered that instead of wanting to control employees' online behaviors, employers should focus on recognizing employees' favorable behaviors via online interactions.

5. CONCLUSION

The purpose of this research was to study the employee perspective on digital employee advocacy. Previous research that studied the concept, mainly focused on the business perspective on the practice. Therefore, this research serves as an exploration of how the concept is perceived by working professionals (i.e. employees) in order to further develop knowledge and contribute to existing literature. Moreover, the findings of this research can serve as guidelines for companies wanting to understand and support digital employee advocacy. In particular, 20 semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with working professionals who have experience with using their personal social media account(s) to advocate on behalf of an employer. The following section reflects on the theoretical and practical implications of the findings, limitations of the study, and directions for future research.

Academic literature on the topic broadly described digital employee advocacy as employees' use of their personal social media accounts to advocate for their employer's goods, services, activities, news, CSR initiatives, and employment at the company (Kaul & Chaudhri, 2017; Li et al., 2014; Tsarenko et al., 2018). Moreover, theories on work-related social media use further explain employees consuming, participating, and creating content on social media platforms relating to their work, employer, or the products and services of the employer (Van Zoonen et al., 2014a; Van Zoonen et al., 2014b), varying from reposting existing company content to creating their own (Van Zoonen et al., 2016). However, these descriptions derive from quantitative studies based on pre-produced answers or analyzing social media behaviors. Wanting to give working professionals the opportunity to indicate what behavior they understand as digital advocacy, this study used a qualitative approach with the aim to incorporate the employee perspective into the conceptualization and illustration of the practice. Thus, this study asked: *What activities are viewed as digital employee advocacy by working professionals?*

Based on the findings of this research, it has become clear that digital employee advocacy is mainly understood as using personal social media accounts to repost company posts and share self-created content relating to work and/or the company. Examples of reposting job vacancies, CSR initiatives, and informative publications, and creating posts about personal successes and working activities, were indicated by employees as illustrations of their engagement. Thus, this research shows a mutual understanding between employees and academics when it comes to describing the concept in general. Moreover, the findings enhance the found illustrations of work-related social media use, which therefore could also serve as illustrations of digital employee advocacy. However, this study uncovered a form of online engagement that has not been described in existing theory so far. Several

participants illustrated their advocating behavior as reposting company posts and adding a personal text above, a combination of sharing pre-produced and self-created content. Furthermore, prior research did not uncover the remarkable difference in working professionals' preferred form of engagement that was found with this research. Whereas some employees prefer to use their personal social media accounts to repost company content to retain quality and security, others prefer to spread their self-created content to retain authenticity. However, this need for authenticity can also be found in the previously described form of engagement in which employees add a personal text above reposted company content, as this is done to make the message more personal.

Although existing literature identifies digital employee advocacy as the use of personal social media accounts to advocate on behalf of the company (Kaul & Chaudhri, 2017; Li et al., 2014; Tsarenko et al., 2018), the use of specific social media platforms to do so has not been noted. Specifying this online behavior, this research found that digital employee advocacy in its current state mainly takes place on LinkedIn, as this platform is considered most appropriate for such activities due to its professional nature. Yet, advocating activities can also be found on Facebook and Instagram when working professionals aim to inform their friends, family, and/or followers, or to reach a young audience. Above all, it was found that working professionals prefer to advocate on the platform on which they have the most relevant network for the particular content.

Based on this found variety between employees when it comes to their preferred way of engaging in digital advocacy and used social media platforms to advocate on, this study argues that digital employee advocacy should be understood as a heterogenous construct. Though employees' understanding of digital employee advocacy corresponds with academics' explanation of the concept, the illustration of the practice in terms of preferred activities and platforms varies.

Furthermore, an ongoing debate on the nature of employee advocacy was found in existing literature (Bettencourt & Brown, 2003; MacKenzie et al., 1998; Morhart et al., 2011; Tsarenko et al., 2018). Whereas some academics argue that advocating on behalf of the company should be considered as in-role *and* extra-role behavior, others argue for it to be considered as extra-role behavior solely (Bettencourt & Brown, 2003; MacKenzie et al., 1998; Morhart et al., 2011; Tsarenko et al., 2018). Aiming to contribute to this debate, this study analyzed the perceptions of working professionals, in varying professional roles, on the matter. Interestingly, the findings show that employees, regardless of their professional role, do not perceive the advocating activities that they have engaged in, as a part of their formal tasks. This despite the fact that six of the participants work or have worked in a sales,

marketing, and/or communications position. Reinforcing this perception, the majority of the interviewees finds that digital employee advocacy should not be seen as a responsibility of employees, as they argue that the responsibility of brand building lies with the company itself, and not with its employees.

Additionally, it was found that using personal social media accounts to defend or protect the company from negative eWOM is not considered as a responsibility of employees by working professionals. Relating this back to Helm's (2011) illustration of employee advocacy as defending the company from negative word-of-mouth, the digital context of this research suggests to not include this behavior in the conceptualization of digital employee advocacy. However, participants did express feeling responsible to internally report negative eWOM.

Summarized, based on the findings of this research it can be argued that digital employee advocacy is a heterogeneous construct, particularly based on employees' varying preference for the aforementioned range of activities, and different social media platforms on which digital employee advocacy can be found. Moreover, working professionals perceive their engagement as extra-role behavior. Thus, it should not be expected that employees are willing to engage in digital advocacy in the first place, let alone to engage in digital advocacy in the same way.

The second research question of this study was posed because previous research into the underlying mechanisms of employee advocacy and work-related social media use, mostly used large-scale quantitative methods to either indicate relationships between organizational factors and advocating behaviors, or explain online behavior based on pre-produced answers. Therefore, the current study uncovers how working professionals who engage in such activities, perceive their own behavior in terms of the motivations behind their engagement. Thus, this research question asked: *What are working professionals' motivations to use their personal social media accounts to advocate for their employer?*

Furthermore, this research aimed to explore the challenges working professionals face in digitally advocating on behalf of their employer. This aim arose from the gap in literature on the topic of challenges and risks concerning digital employee advocacy. Academic literature mainly elaborates on the challenges and risks faced by organizations, focusing on how to manage corporate reputation with employees' online presence (Fournier & Avery, 2011; Kaul & Chaudhri, 2017; Miles & Mangold, 2014; Rokka et al., 2014; Vallaster & de Chernatony, 2006). However, insights into possible obstacles and boundaries experienced by working professionals engaging in digital advocacy, is scarce (Labrecque et al., 2011; Rokka et al., 2014; Tsarenko et al., 2018). Therefore, a third research question

asked: *What are the challenges working professionals face in digitally advocating for their employer?*

Analyzing the interviews, two overarching issues were found that serve as both motivations and challenges. Firstly, it was found that digital advocacy intertwines the personal and the organizational. Consulting previous research into the motives behind work-related social media use, a contradiction can be found between academics arguing that the behavior is driven by the value of self-expression (Van Zoonen et al., 2014b), and academics arguing that work-related social media use is mostly driven by organizational-related factors (Van Zoonen et al., 2014a). However, instead of arguing for a contradiction, the findings of this research uncovered an intertwinement between working professionals' personal and organizational interest to engage in online advocating activities.

Participants were able to indicate both personal benefits (e.g. self-promotion, keeping friends and family updated) as well as organizational benefits (e.g. increasing visibility and positively influencing the external image of the company) of their engagement in digital advocacy, highlighting the perceived mutual interest in the practice. Moreover, the analysis found motivations behind advocating behavior that pursue personal interest (e.g. showing others what I do in terms of work, informing my network, building a portfolio) as well as motivations that pursue organizational interest (e.g. knowledge of value of employee advocacy for the company's reputation). Furthermore, motivations that relate to both personal and organizational interest (e.g. attracting new 'nice' employees) were found.

Relating back to the found drivers of employee advocacy in existing theory (Hughes & Ahearne, 2010; Löhndorf & Diamantopoulus, 2014; Tsarenko et al., 2018), working professionals did not indicate perceived organizational support (e.g. supportive working environment, job satisfaction) so much as motivation for their engagement, but more as a criterion. It was found that dissatisfied employees are not willing to engage in digital advocacy on behalf of the company, highlighting the important role of perceived organizational support.

Above all, it was found that identification plays an important role in employees' online behavior. Previously presented as a driver of employee advocacy (Hughes & Ahearne, 2010; Löhndorf & Diamantopoulus, 2014), the analysis uncovered that organizational identification indeed influences digital employee advocacy. Being proud of the company and its accomplishments serves as a primary motivation for employees to engage in digital advocacy. Besides it being a motivation, organizational identification (i.e. the values and beliefs of the organization match with personal identity) is a necessary condition for working professionals to engage in digital advocacy. Participants expressed that they would refuse to

advocate on behalf of an organization they cannot identify with. Thus, serving as an opportunity when organizational identification is high and as a challenge when organizational identification is low.

Besides identification with the organization, it was found that working professionals guide their online behavior, including their engagement in digital advocacy, by their identification with the particular content that they share. The analysis uncovered employees' existing fear of 'overkilling' family, friends, and/or followers with company-related content, which leads to selectivity in what they post and what not. Throughout the process, working professionals consider whether or not they perceive particular content as relevant to either their profession, their network, and their personality. Building on existing theory about the underlying mechanisms of employee advocacy, these newly gathered insights add the importance of 'content identification' for the workings of digital employee advocacy.

Additionally, the findings of this research reinforce the found issue of 'blurring lines' between individuals' private and professional reputations (Kaul & Chaudhri, 2017; Rokka et al., 2014). Employees' use of personal social media accounts to advocate on behalf of their employer leads to a merge of reputations, which is experienced by both organizations and working professionals. However, the findings downplay the argued organizational risk of employees' online behavior (Kaul & Chaudhri, 2017; Miles & Mangold, 2014; Rokka et al., 2014) as participants showed awareness of the impact of their online expressions on both the company's, as well as their own reputation. It was found that this awareness makes employees selective in what they post on behalf of their employer to not damage their personal reputation (organizational and content identification), as well as selective in what they post privately to not damage their professional reputation (awareness). Especially the organizational risk of having employees use their social media to spread negative information about the company (Miles & Mangold, 2014) is undermined by the findings of this research, as working professionals themselves do not support this type of behavior. It is not so much about not wanting to damage the corporate reputation, but more specifically protecting their own reputation. Spreading negative eWOM about their employer is perceived as inconvenient for their own reputation and ineffective for solving issues.

Besides acknowledging this merge of private and professional identities and reputations, it was found that not all employees are willing to completely intertwine those two. Especially in terms of online relationships, some still prefer to separate their private relationships from their professional ones by not connecting with colleagues and/or clients on social media, or not wanting to advocate on platforms which they perceive as solely private (e.g. Instagram). Thus, even though working professionals show a willingness to use their

personal social media accounts to, when perceived as relevant and convenient, spread company related content, a complete merge of their private and professional online identities and relationships should not be expected.

Secondly, it was found that digital employee advocacy is a matter of balancing between encouragement and surveillance of employees' engagement, reinforcing the argued 'balancing act' between encouraging versus restricting employees in their online participation, and emphasizing work versus private social media roles (Rokka et al., 2014). Asking working professionals how they would like to be encouraged to engage in digital advocacy leads to several do's and don'ts. Encouragement in the form of initiating employees' engagement, providing employees with pre-produced creative content, and giving the good example (as company and/or supervisor), are perceived as appropriate ways to stimulate engagement. However, monitoring their online activities and repeatedly requesting their engagement, leads to feelings of pressure and obligation, decreasing their willingness to advocate. Findings which are partly in line with existing theories that argue that encouraging employees to engage in advocacy could lead to forms of resistance (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002; Fleming, 2009; Rokka et al., 2014). However, this study does not discourage employers to encourage employees' engagement in digital advocacy but emphasizes the importance of balancing such acts.

Moreover, it was found that the existence of social media guidelines (e.g. corporate identity guidelines, representation protocols) is quite common. Interestingly, these guidelines are mostly understood as 'common sense' and do not influence working professionals' perceived freedom to talk about their employer online. Despite these guidelines, and in some cases even having to get approval before sharing company-related content, interviewees expressed feeling like their employer trusts them in their ability to digitally represent the company, and appreciates their creativity. Extending the perception of digital employee advocacy as a 'balancing act', this research shows the possibility of the co-existence of guidelines to guide employees' online behaviors and employees' perceived freedom and trust.

Furthermore, it was established that perceived recognition (e.g. reward, praise) as described in academic literature (Tsarenko et al., 2018), does not play a significant motivating role for employees to engage in digital advocacy. It was found that working professionals do not aim to get rewarded or recognized by their employer for their engagement. However, there seems to be a need for approval of their behavior which can be found in internally checking their content (e.g. communications department, colleagues) before posting. More importantly, employees perceive online interaction with their employer

(e.g. receiving likes and comments, employer reposting/using employees' self-created content) as a sign of appreciation, encouragement and validation of their advocating behavior.

Summarized, it was found that the interference of employers can either serve as a motivation to engage when experienced as encouragement, or as surveillance when experienced as pressure. Supporting digital employee advocacy, the focus should be on recognizing employees' engagement in online advocating activities via online interactions, instead of controlling employees' online behavior via pressure and surveillance.

5.1 Practical implications

As previously mentioned, the findings of this research can serve as guidelines for organizations wanting to understand, stimulate and support digital employee advocacy. Understanding digital employee advocacy is about understanding it cannot be expected that employees are willing to engage in the same way or use the same social media platforms to advocate. Employers should respect employees' preferences and allow them to only engage in activities they feel comfortable with and confident about, using social media platforms that they consider relevant for these activities. Moreover, employers should not take employees' engagement for granted, as the concept is perceived as extra-role behavior.

For organizations wanting to stimulate and support digital employee advocacy, answering the "what is in it for me?" question from the employee perspective (Frank, 2015) is crucial. Based on existing and newly gathered insights, the answer to this question should emphasize the mutual interest in the matter. Moreover, as for some employees their engagement is mainly driven by the perceived personal benefits and for others by the perceived organizational benefits, digital employee advocacy should not be seen as an 'one-size-fits-all' strategy but calls for a more individual approach.

Furthermore, employers should focus on employees' identification with the organization, as well as with the particular content the organization wants its employees to share. Regardless of their pride and satisfaction, working professionals prefer to share content that they can relate to, on professional and personal level, enhancing the aforementioned argument that digital employee advocacy should not be viewed as a 'one size fits all' strategy. Instead of expecting employees to share any type of company-related content, employers should focus on creating (or stimulating the self-creation of) content that employees can identify with. Instead of requesting all employees to spread the same content, it is advised to target requests to employees for whom the particular content could be relevant.

In terms of lowering the risk of organizational reputational damage due to employees' online expressions, employers should focus on making their employees conscious of how their online behavior reflects on their personal reputation. Moreover, even though working professionals do acknowledge the blurring lines between their private and professional identities and reputations, employers should not expect that employees are willing to fully merge these two. Therefore, it is advised that employers allow their employees to engage in digital advocacy on their own terms, once again discouraging a 'one-size-fits-all' approach.

Concluding, employers wanting to actively stimulate their employees to use their personal social media accounts to advocate on behalf of the company should not focus on wanting to control employees' online behaviors, but instead should focus on recognizing employees' favorable behaviors via online interaction. When coming across digital employee advocacy, employers should encourage and recognize this behavior by liking and commenting on employees' posts, reposting self-created company-related content, and using employees' self-created content for company posting.

5.2 Limitations and suggestions for future research

It is important to note that this study does not come without limitations. An important limitation is the explorative character of this research due to lack of prior research into the employee perspective on digital employee advocacy. Thus, since qualitative insights into how working professionals perceive digital employee advocacy in terms of activities, motivations, and challenges are relatively scarce, the findings of this study serve as a foundation for future research on the topic. Moreover, based on the Dutch orientation of the sample of the research, it is suggested for future research to further duplicate this study to be able to confirm certain findings and to be able to generalize them to other countries.

Furthermore, this research focused on studying the perspective of employees who have experience with engaging in digital advocacy. For future research it would be interesting to focus on incorporating the perspective of employees who do not engage in digital advocacy, with the aim to uncover the reasons why they do not engage and what possible factors could change their behavior.

REFERENCES

- Agresta, S., & Bough, B. B. (2011). *Perspectives on social media marketing*. Boston: Course Technology PTR.
- Alsop, R. (2004). *The 18 immutable laws of corporate reputation : Creating, protecting & repairing your most valuable asset*. London: Kogan Page.
- Alvesson, M., & Willmott, H. (2002). Identity regulation as organizational control: Producing the appropriate individual. *The Journal of Management Studies*, 39, 619-644. <https://doi-org.eur.idm.oclc.org/10.1111/1467-6486.00305>
- Aula, P., & Heinonen, J. (2016). *The reputable firm: How digitalization of communication is revolutionizing reputation management*. <https://doi-org.eur.idm.oclc.org/10.1007/978-3-319-22008-6>
- Babbie, E. (2014). *The basics of social research*. Andover: Wadsworth Cengage Learning.
- Barriball, K. L., & While, A. (1994). Collecting data using a semi-structured interview: a discussion paper. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 19(2), 328-335. <https://doi-org.eur.idm.oclc.org/10.1111/j.1365-2648.1994.tb01088.x>
- Bell, K., Fahmy, E., & Gordon, D. (2016). Quantitative conversations: the importance of developing rapport in standardised interviewing. *Quality and Quantity*, 50(1), 193-212. <https://doi-org.eur.idm.oclc.org/10.1007/s11135-014-0144-2>
- Bettencourt, L. A., & Brown, S. W. (2003). Role Stressors and Customer-Oriented Boundary-Spanning Behaviors in Service Organizations. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 31(4), 394-408. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0092070303255636>
- Boeije, H. (2014). *Analysis in qualitative research*. London: SAGE.
- Böhm, A. (2004). Theoretical coding: Text Analysis. In U. Flick, E. Von Kardorff, & I. Steinke (Ed.), *A companion to qualitative research*. Newbury Park, CL: Sage Publications.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77-101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- Brennen, B. (2017). *Qualitative research methods for media studies*. Milton: Taylor & Francis. Retrieved from <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.eur.idm.oclc.org/lib/eur/reader.action?docID=4891115>
- Burmann, C., & Zeplin, S. (2005). Building brand commitment: A behavioural approach to internal brand management. *Journal of Brand Management*, 12(4), 279-300. <https://doi-org.eur.idm.oclc.org/10.1057/palgrave.bm.2540223>

- Carreras, E., Alloza, A., & Carreras, A. (2013). *Corporate reputation*. London: LID Publishing Ltd. Retrieved from <https://learning-oreilly-com.eur.idm.oclc.org/library/view/corporate-reputation/9788483567982/>
- Cravens, K., & Oliver, E. (2006). Employees: The key link to corporate reputation management. *Business Horizons*, 49(4), 293-302.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bushor.2005.10.006>
- Croteau, D., & Hoynes, W. (2017). *Media/society: Industries, images, and audiences*. Los Angeles: SAGE.
- Dellarocas, C. (2003). The digitization of word of mouth: Promise and challenges of online feedback mechanisms. *Management Science*, 49(10), 1407-1424. Retrieved from <https://search-proquest-com.eur.idm.oclc.org/docview/213250600?accountid=13598>
- Dreher, S. (2014). Social media and the world of work: A strategic approach to employees' participation in social media. *Corporate Communications*, 19(4), 344-356.
<https://doi.org/10.1108/CCIJ-10-2013-0087>
- Edelman's Trust Barometer 2014 (2014, January 16). Retrieved from <https://www.edelman.com/research/2014-edelman-trust-barometer>
- Edelman's Trust Barometer 2019 (2019, January 20). Retrieved from https://www.edelman.com/sites/g/files/aatuss191/files/2019-02/2019_Edelman_Trust_Barometer_Global_Report.pdf
- Elsbach, K. D., & Glynn, M. A. (1996). Believing your own 'PR': Embedding Identification in Strategic Reputation. *Advances in Strategic Management*, 13, 65-90
- Etter, M., Ravasi, D., & Colleoni, E. (2019). Social media and the formation of organizational reputation. *Academy of Management Review*, 44(1), 28-52.
<https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.2014.0280>
- Fleming, P. (2009). *Authenticity and the cultural politics of work : New forms of informal control*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Flick, U. (2007). *Designing Qualitative Research*. London: SAGE Publications, Ltd. <https://dx-doi-org.eur.idm.oclc.org/10.4135/9781849208826>
- Fombrun, C. J., & Van Riel, C. B. M. (1997). The reputational landscape. *Corporate Reputation Review*, 1(2), 5-13.
<https://dx.doi.org.eur.idm.oclc.org/10.1057/palgrave.crr.1540024>

- Fournier, S., & Avery, J. (2011). The uninvited brand. *Business Horizons*, 54(3), 193-207. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bushor.2011.01.001>
- Frank, J. (2015). From engagement to empowerment – employee advocacy in the social economy. *Strategic HR Review*, 14(4). <https://doi.org/10.1108/SHR-06-2015-0047>
- Freeman, R. E. (1984). *Strategic management: A stakeholder approach*. Boston: Pitman.
- Friedman, A.L., & Miles, S. (2006). *Stakeholders: theory and practice*. Retrieved from <https://web.b.ebscohost.com/ehost/detail?sid=c3ae33fb-40a5-4ba7-945d-54d77dd85541%40pdc-v-sessmgr03&vid=0&format=EB&rid=1#db=nlebk&AN=201128>
- Fullerton, G. (2003). When does commitment lead to loyalty? *Journal of Service Research*, 5(4), 333-344. <https://doi-org.eur.idm.oclc.org/10.1177/1094670503005004005>
- Fullerton, G. (2011). Creating advocates: The roles of satisfaction, trust and commitment. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 18(1), 92-100. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretconser.2010.10.003>
- Gotsi, M., & Wilson, A. (2001). Corporate reputation management: "living the brand". *Management Decision*, 39(2), 99-104. <https://doi-org.eur.idm.oclc.org/10.1108/EUM0000000005415>
- Helm, S. (2011). Employees' awareness of their impact on corporate reputation. *Journal of Business Research*, 64(7), 657-663. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2010.09.001>
- Hill, S., Provost, F., & Volinsky, C. (2006). Network-based marketing: Identifying likely adopters via consumer networks. *Statistical Science*, 21(2), 256-276. Retrieved from <https://www-jstor-org.eur.idm.oclc.org/stable/27645754>
- Hughes, D., & Ahearne, M. (2010). Energizing the reseller's sales force: The power of brand identification. *Journal of Marketing*, 74(4), 81-96. <https://doi-org.eur.idm.oclc.org/10.1509/jmkg.74.4.81>
- Ji, Y. G., Li, C., North, M., & Liu, J. (2017). Staking reputation on stakeholders: How does stakeholders' Facebook engagement help or ruin a company's reputation? *Public Relations Review*, 43(1), 201-210. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2016.12.004>
- Kaul, A., & Chaudhri, V. (2017). *Corporate communication through social media: strategies for managing reputation*. New Delhi: SAGE Publications India Pvt.
- Kvale, S. (2007). *Qualitative Research kit: Doing interviews*. London: Sage publications Ltd. <https://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781849208963>

- Labrecque, L. I., Markos, E., & Milne, G. R. (2011). Online personal branding: Processes, challenges, and implications. *Journal of Interactive Marketing, 25*(1), 37-50.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.intmar.2010.09.002>
- Lages, C. R. (2012). Employees' external representation of their workplace: Key antecedents. *Journal of Business Research, 65*(9), 1264-1272.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2011.10.044>
- Li, Z. (2016). Psychological empowerment on social media: Who are the empowered users? *Public Relations Review, 42*(1), 49-59. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2015.09.001>
- Li, C., Cifuentes, J., & Solis, B. (2014). *Strengthening Employee Relations in the Digital Era: How Digital Employee Engagement and Advocacy Transforms Organizations*. Retrieved from Villa Fane Website: http://www.villafane.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Cap-7_2014_Strengthening-Employee-Relationships_Altimeter.pdf
- Löhndorf, B., & Diamantopoulos, A. (2014). Internal branding: Social identity and social exchange perspectives on turning employees into brand champions. *Journal of Service Research, 17*(3), 310-325. <https://doi-org.eur.idm.oclc.org/10.1177/1094670514522098>
- Lynch-Fannon, I. (2004). Employees as corporate stakeholders: Theory and reality in a transatlantic context. *Journal of Corporate Law Studies, 4*(1), 155-186.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/14735970.2004.11419917>
- MacKenzie, S. B., Podsakoff, P. M., & Ahearne, M. (1998). Some possible antecedents and consequences of in-role and extra-role salesperson performance. *Journal of Marketing, 62*(3), 87-98. Retrieved from <https://search-proquest-com.eur.idm.oclc.org/docview/227801175?accountid=13598>
- Miles, S. J., & Mangold, W. G. (2014). Employee voice: Untapped resource or social media time bomb? *Business Horizons, 57*(3), 401-411.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bushor.2013.12.011>
- Mitchell, R. K., Agle, B. R., & Wood, D. J. (1997). Toward a theory of stakeholder identification and salience: Defining the principle of who and what really counts. *The Academy of Management Review, 22*(4), 853-886. Retrieved from <https://search-proquest-com.eur.idm.oclc.org/docview/210945979?accountid=13598>
- Morhart, F. M., Herzog, W., & Tomczak, T. (2011). Turning employees into brand champions: Leadership style makes a difference. *GfK-Marketing Intelligence Review, 3*(2).
<https://doi.org/10.2478/gfkmir-2014-0088>

- Morse, J. M., Barrett, M., Mayan, M., Olson, K., & Spiers, J. (2002). Verification strategies for establishing reliability and validity in qualitative research. *International journal of qualitative methods*, 1(2), 13-22. <https://doi.org/10.1177/160940690200100202>
- Patton, M. Q. (2005). Qualitative Research. *Encyclopedia of Statistics in Behavioral Science*. <https://doi.org/10.1002/0470013192.bsa514>
- Richardson, S.A., Dohrenwend, B.S., & Klein, D. (1965). *Interviewing: Its forms and functions*. New York: Basic Books.
- Rokka, J., Karlsson, K., & Tienari, J. (2014). Balancing acts: Managing employees and reputation in social media. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 30(7-8), 802-827. <https://doi-org.eur.idm.oclc.org/10.1080/0267257X.2013.813577>
- Shinnar, R. S., Young, C. A., & Meana, M. (2004). The motivations for and outcomes of employee referrals. *Journal of Business and Psychology*, 19(2), 271-283. doi:10.1007/s10869-004-0552-8. <https://doi-org.eur.idm.oclc.org/10.1007/s10869-004-0552-8>
- Tsarenko, Y., Leo, C., & Tse, H. (2018). When and why do social resources influence employee advocacy? the role of personal investment and perceived recognition. *Journal of Business Research*, 82, 260-268. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2017.09.001>
- Vallaster, C., & De Chernatony, L. (2006). Internal brand building and structuration : he role of leadership. *European Journal of Marketing*, 40(7), 761-784. <https://doi.org/10.1108/03090560610669982>
- Van Zoonen, W., Van der Meer, T. G. L. A., & Verhoeven, J. W. M. (2014a). Employees work-related social-media use: his master's voice. *Public Relations Review*, 40(5), 850-852. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2014.07.001>
- Van Zoonen, W., Verhoeven, J. W. M., & Elving, W. J. L. (2014b). Understanding work-related social media use: an extension of theory of planned behavior. *International Journal of Management, Economics & Social Sciences*, 3(4), 164-183. Retrieved from <https://www.econstor.eu/handle/10419/106161>
- Van Zoonen, W., Verhoeven, J. W. M., & Vliegenthart, R. (2016). How employees use twitter to talk about work: a typology of work-related tweets. *Computers in Human Behavior: Part A*, 55, 329–339. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2015.09.021>
- Walker, H. (2011). *Inspiring Employees to Act as Brand Advocates: Insights from Herman Miller*. Paper presented at the 2011 Great Place to Work Conference, San Francisco,

- CA. Abstract retrieved from
http://gptwmx2.nonprofitsoapbox.com/storage/documents/Publications_Documents/Herman_Miller_-_Inspiring_Employees_to_Act_as_Brand_Advocates.pdf
- Weber Shandwick. (2014). *Employees Rising: Seizing the Opportunity in Employee Activism*. Retrieved from: <https://www.webershandwick.com/uploads/news/files/employees-rising-seizing-the-opportunity-in-employee-activism.pdf>
- White, S. S., & Schneider, B. (2000). Climbing the commitment ladder: The role of expectations disconfirmation on customers' behavioral intentions. *Journal of Service Research: JSR*, 2(3), 240-253. <https://doi.org/eur.idm.oclc.org/10.1177/109467050023002>
- Wright, T., & Snook, C. J. (2017). *Digital sense: The common sense approach to effectively blending social business strategy, marketing technology, and customer experience*. Retrieved from <https://learning-oreilly-com.eur.idm.oclc.org/library/view/digital-sense/9781119291701/f03.xhtml>
- Xiong, L., King, C., & Piehler, R. (2013). "That's not my job": Exploring the employee perspective in the development of brand ambassadors. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 35, 348-359. doi:10.1016/j.ijhm.2013.07.009. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijhm.2013.07.009>
- Yeh, Y. (2014). Exploring the impacts of employee advocacy on job satisfaction and organizational commitment: Case of Taiwanese airlines. *Journal of Air Transport Management*, 36, 94-100. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jairtraman.2014.01.002>

Appendix A: Call for participants

[Dutch below]

Dear network,

I am currently writing my master thesis at Erasmus University Rotterdam focusing on employees' experience with, and motivations for participating in digital activities to support their employer. Although there is a lot of academic and business interest in engaging employees in such activities to enhance companies' reputation and performance, little is known about how employees think/feel about this. Therefore, I am looking for working professionals who have, in their current or previous jobs, engaged in digital advocacy on behalf of their employer. By advocacy, I mean recommended the employer to others on social media, or shared company posts in your personal network, etc. You do not have to be in a specific position/professional role to participate in this study. I am hoping to find people who are willing to join me for a 40-50 minutes Skype/phone interview, somewhere between now and April 20. Your participation would be really helpful for my research into the employee perspective on digital advocacy!

If you have any questions, or are interested in participating (or know someone that might be), please contact me at 482286fb@student.eur.nl or +31613233752.

Lief netwerk,

Mijn naam is Francis Bak en momenteel ben ik bezig met het schrijven van mijn scriptie voor de master Media & Business aan de EUR, omtrent de ervaringen en motivaties van werknemers om deel te nemen aan online activiteiten ter promotie van hun werkgever, ook wel employee advocacy genoemd. Hoewel er veel wetenschappelijke en commerciële interesse is in het betrekken van werknemers in zulke activiteiten om de reputatie en het presteren van het bedrijf te verbeteren, is er weinig bekend over hoe werknemers hierover denken/zich hierbij voelen. Daarom ben ik opzoek naar werkenden in een vaste functie (geen stage) die ervaring hebben met het online aanbevelen van hun huidige of vorige werkgever(s). Hiermee bedoel ik activiteiten als het aanbevelen van de werkgever via social media, het delen van berichten van de werkgever met je persoonlijke netwerk etc. Om deel te nemen aan het onderzoek hoef je niet een bepaalde functie/rol te hebben binnen het bedrijf. Ik hoop via deze manier mensen te vinden die bereid zijn tussen nu en 20 april telefonisch of via Skype deel te nemen aan een interview dat ongeveer 40-50 minuten zal duren. Jouw deelname zou mij enorm helpen met mijn onderzoek naar het werknemers perspectief op employee advocacy!

Als je interesse hebt om deel te nemen (of iemand kent die dat misschien heeft) of voor andere vragen, neem dan alsjeblieft contact met mij op via 482286fb@student.eur.nl of +31613233752

Appendix B: Interview guide

[Dutch below]

Icebreaker & Introduction

- Thank you for your time and effort during these crazy times
- Informed consent:
 - › Goal: understanding of the experiences and motivations of employees to engage in advocating activities on behalf of their employer
 - › Questions: your experiences with online activities to recommend the company and the thoughts and feelings behind this
 - › Permission to audio tape
 - › Rights: throughout the interview decide to withdraw or refuse answering questions
 - › No compensation

- You responded to my call for working professionals, so could you tell me a bit about your current job/position?
- How long have you been working for this company and in this role?
- In what business is the company? (products/services, industry)
- Would you be willing to share the name of the company?
- Verbally go through some important points of informed consent and let the interviewee agree/refuse

Defining activities/behavior

1. When responding to this call for people who have experience with advocating on behalf of a company, what activities came to mind that made you respond?
 - Can you tell me more about your personal experience with such activities?
 - Was this at your current job? Or previous experience?
 - *How long did you work for your previous employer?*
 - Do you have concrete examples? What exactly did you do?
 - Does your employer encourages you to do so? And how?
 - Can you recall the first time you advocated? What made you do it?
 - Is this a formal requirement (or subtle expectation) of your position/job? Please explain.

➔ *Be mindful to listen to hints of **implicit activities** (using products/services)*

2. Do you think its employees responsibility/role to engage in such activities?

- Do you think its employees responsibility/role to protect the company from negative (e)WOM when they hear/see it? Please explain.
- Do you have experience with this?

Digital advocacy

Now that we have discussed some examples/experiences, I would like go a bit deeper into the digital/social media part of all this.

3. What social media channels are you active on?
4. Do you ever use your personal social media account(s) to talk about your employer?
 - Which channels did you use to engage in the aforementioned behaviour? And why these channels and not others?
 - (If not already discussed) Do you have concrete examples of this? (e.g. sharing, liking, creating content)
5. How much freedom do you get from your employer to engage in these activities? (regarding room for creativity/authenticity)
 - Do you feel like your employer trusts in your ability to advocate for the company?

Motivations

Now that I know all about your experience, I would like to get a better understanding of your thoughts behind these activities.

6. What motivated you to engage in the afore discussed activities?
 - What happened prior to these activities/how did you get the idea to engage in the activities?
 - How do you see the following factors as motivators to engage in advocating activities? Are they important motivators for you? Please explain.
 - o Getting rewarded/recognized for your engagement (could be directly e.g. awards, or indirectly e.g. verbal recognition)
 - o The values of the company/message reflect your personal values – engagement in advocacy is a mean to express yourself to others (e.g. being part of the membership of the company, your profession etc.)
 - o Receiving support from your employer/manager/co-workers motivates to engage in advocating activities (e.g. supportive working environment, relationships with colleagues, receiving support to achieve goals)
7. Are there internal guidelines/tools that you (can) use/follow to engage in the aforementioned activities?
 - o If yes: does this work for you? Please explain

- If no: do you think this would work for you? Please explain
8. Do you have any suggestions how your employer could motivate you more/better?

Moving forward from motivations, I would like to talk about the possible outcomes and/or benefits of employee advocacy.

9. I would like to ask you to list the outcomes and/or benefits of such advocating activities on
- A) Personal level: what do you think you gain/benefit from engaging in the activities?
 - B) Organizational level: what do you think the company gains/benefits from having its employees advocating on behalf of the company?
- When engaging in advocacy, which outcome/benefit do you mainly try to achieve? Organizational or personal goals/driven? Please explain.

Challenges

Besides your experience and motivations, I would like to talk about the boundaries of employee advocacy and obstacles that you might face/have faced with advocating.

10. Have you ever doubted or refused to engage in any activities?
- What made you refuse/doubt?
 - Have you ever felt uncomfortable/pressured while engaging in activities?
 - Are there any other considerations you make before deciding whether or not to engage?
11. Existing literature about the topic points out the issue of blurring lines between people's private and professional lives. Is that something you struggle with yourself?
- Where do you draw the line between your private and professional life?
 - How is this with your private and professional use of your social media account(s)? Do you struggle with blurring lines there? How do you try to set these boundaries?
 - (If applicable) How do you think your employer should handle this issue?
12. Have you ever been corrected/restricted by your employer on your social media usage? Please explain
13. Have you ever shared negative thoughts about your employer online?
- (If applicable) Where and with who did you share these thoughts?
 - Why did you share these thoughts in this way?

Wrap-up

I found our conversation very interesting and I think I got a good understanding of your experience, and thoughts and feelings behind it.

- Is there anything you would like to add that I might have missed?
- I would like to ask you some last background questions:
 - What is your age?
 - In which country do you work/live?
 - What is the highest education you followed?
 - How many years of (professional) working experience do you have in total?
- Use of personal information: do you give me permission to use your personal information in my research report, or do you prefer to stay anonymous
- If I have further questions, is it okay that I send you an e-mail? Here is my e-mail, if there is anything you would like to mention or ask as well, feel free to contact me.
- Are there other people within your network you think might be helpful for my research? Can I have their names and contact details? Or could you ask them to contact me?
- Would you like to receive a copy of research when I am done?

Thank you again for your time and effort, it is very helpful! Take care and stay healthy!

Introductie

- Heel erg bedankt voor je tijd met deze bizarre omstandigheden
- Toestemmingsformulier:
 - › Doel: inzicht krijgen in de ervaringen en motivaties van werknemers om deel te nemen aan online activiteiten ter promotie van hun werkgever
 - › Vragen: uw ervaringen met het online promoten/aanbevelen van een werkgever en de gedachtegang hierachter
 - › Audio opname toestemming
 - › Rechten: gedurende het hele interview mag u het gesprek stoppen/onderbreken of weigeren vragen te beantwoorden.
 - › Geen compensatie
- Je hebt gereageerd op mijn oproep voor werkenden in een vaste functie, zou je mij iets meer kunnen vertellen of je huidige baan/functie?
- Hoe lang werk je al voor dit bedrijf en in deze functie?
- In welke sector/branche zit het bedrijf en wat doen/verkopten jullie? (producten/dienstverlening, industrie)
- Zou je de naam van het bedrijf willen delen?

Advocacy activiteiten/gedrag definiëren

1. Toen je reageerde op mijn oproep voor mensen met ervaring met het online promoten van hun werkgever, welke activiteiten kwamen toen in je op?
 - Kan je mij vertellen over je persoonlijke ervaring met zulke activiteiten?
 - o Was dit bij je huidige baan? Of bij een vorige werkgever?
 - o *Hoelang was je in dienst bij je vorige werkgever?*
 - Heb je concrete voorbeelden van activiteiten? Wat heb je toen precies gedaan?
 - Moedigt je werkgever je aan om dit te doen? En op welke manier?
 - Kan je je de eerste keer herinneren dat je iets van je werkgever promootte/aanbeval? Wat zorgde er toen voor dat je dit deed?
 - Zijn deze activiteiten een onderdeel van het takenpakket (of een indirecte verwachting) van je functie? Graag toelichten.
- ➔ *Let op hints die wijzen op **indirecte activiteiten** (zelf gebruiken van producten/dienstverlening)*
2. Denk jij dat het de verantwoordelijkheid van werknemers is om deel te nemen aan zulke activiteiten?
 - Denk je dat werknemers verantwoordelijk zijn voor het beschermen/verdedigen van het bedrijf als ze in aanmerking komen met negatieve content over het bedrijf?
 - Heb je hier ervaring mee? Graag toelichten.

Online advocacy

Nu we wat ervaringen/voorbeelden besproken hebben, zo ik graag wat dieper ingang op het digitale/social media gedeelte hiervan.

3. Op welke sociale media ben je actief?
4. Gebruik je ooit je persoonlijke social media accounts om over je werkgever te praten?
 - Welke kanalen gebruik je hiervoor? En waarom deze kanalen en niet anderen?
 - (Als dit nog niet besproken is) Heb je hier concrete voorbeelden van? (Bijv. delen, liken, zelf content creëren en plaatsen)
5. Hoeveel vrijheid krijg je hierin van je werkgever? (omtrent ruimte voor creativiteit/authenticiteit)
 - Heb je het gevoel dat jouw werkgever vertrouwen heeft in jouw kunnen (om het bedrijf te promoten/aanbevelen)?

Motivaties

Nu ik alles weet over jouw ervaring, zou ik graag meer inzicht krijgen in je gedachten achter deze activiteiten.

6. Wat motiveerde je om deel te nemen aan de besproken activiteiten?
 - Wat ging er vooraf aan deze activiteiten/hoe kreeg je het idee om dit te doen?
 - Hoe zie jij de volgende factoren als motivatie om je werkgever te promoten/aanbevelen? Zijn deze voor jou belangrijk? Graag toelichten.
 - o Beloond/erkend worden voor je deelname/inzet (kan direct zijn bijv. prijzen, of indirect bijv. verbale erkenning)
 - o De waarden van het bedrijf/bericht komen overeen met mijn persoonlijke waarden – deelnemen aan deze activiteiten is een manier om mijn persoonlijkheid te uiten (bijv. een onderdeel zijn van het bedrijf/team, je beroep)
 - o Support van je werkgever/leidinggevende/collega's is een motivatie voor het deelnemen aan promotende activiteiten (bijv. een supportieve/ondersteunende werkomgeving, relaties met collega's, support bij het bereiken van je doelen)
7. Zijn er interne richtlijnen/handleidingen/tools die je kan gebruiken/volgen voor employee advocacy?
 - o Antwoord ja: Werkt dit voor jou? Graag toelichten.
 - o Antwoord nee: Denk je dat dit zou werken voor jou? Graag toelichten.
8. Hoe zou je werkgever jou beter/meer kunnen motiveren? Suggesties?

Nu we je motivaties besproken hebben, zou ik het graag hebben over de mogelijke uitkomsten en voordelen van employee advocacy.

9. Ik wil je vragen om de uitkomsten en/of voordelen van employee advocacy te noemen, op twee verschillende aspecten:
 - A) Persoonlijk aspect: wat denk je dat het jouzelf oplevert om deel te nemen aan de activiteiten?
 - B) Organisatie aspect: wat denk je dat het het bedrijf oplevert als werknemers deel nemen aan de activiteiten?
 - Welke uitkomst probeer jij voornamelijk te bereiken als je deelneemt aan de activiteiten? Is dit meer persoonlijk of organisatie gedreven? Graag toelichten.

Uitdagingen

Naast jouw ervaring en motivaties, zou ik het graag hebben over de grenzen van employee advocacy en de obstakels die je misschien tegenkomt hierbij.

10. Heb je ooit getwijfeld of geweigerd deel te nemen aan promotende/aanbevelende activiteiten?
 - Wat zorgde ervoor dat je twijfelde/weigerde?

- Heb je je ooit ongemakkelijk/gedwongen gevoeld om dit te doen?
 - Zijn er andere overwegingen die je doet voor je besluit deel te nemen?
11. Bestaand onderzoek naar dit onderwerp wijst op het vervagen van de grenzen tussen mensen hun privé en professionele leven. Is dit iets waar jij zelf wel eens moeite mee hebt?
- Waar ligt voor jou de grens tussen je privé en professionele leven?
 - Hoe zit dit met je privé en professionele gebruik van je social media accounts? Heb je hier moeite met vervangende grenzen? Hoe probeer jij deze grenzen te bewaken?
 - (Wanneer van toepassing) Hoe vind je dat jouw werkgever om moet gaan met dit probleem?
12. Ben je ooit gecorrigeerd of aangesproken door je werkgever op je social media gebruik? Graag toelichten.
13. Heb je ooit negatieve uitlatingen over je werkgever gedaan op social media?
- (Wanneer van toepassing) Waar en met wie heb je dit toen gedeeld?
 - Waarom heb je dit op die manier gedaan?

Wrap-up

Ik vond ons gesprek erg interessant en leerzaam. Ik heb het idee dat ik voldoende inzicht heb gekregen in jouw ervaringen en de gedachtegang hierachter.

- o Is er iets wat je zou willen toevoegen?
- o Dan zou ik je nog wat laatste achtergrond vragen willen stellen:
 - Wat is je leeftijd?
 - In welk land woon/werk je?
 - Wat is de hoogste opleiding die je hebt gevolgd?
 - Hoeveel jaar (professionele) werkervaring heb je in totaal?
- o Gebruik van persoonlijke informatie: heeft u er bezwaar tegen als ik uw persoonlijke informatie gebruik in mijn onderzoeksrapport, of blijf u liever anoniem?
- o Mocht ik nog verdere vragen hebben, mag ik je dan een e-mail sturen? Hier heb je in ieder geval mijn contact gegevens, mocht je nog iets willen delen of vragen, zoek dan gerust contact op!
- o Zijn er misschien andere mensen binnen jouw netwerk die relevant zijn voor mijn onderzoek? Zou ik hun namen en contactgegevens mogen hebben? Of zou je ze kunnen vragen om contact op te nemen met mij?
- o Zou je een kopie willen ontvangen van mijn uiteindelijk werk?

Nogmaals ontzettend bedankt voor je tijd en moeite, je hebt mij enorm geholpen! Fijne dag nog verder en blijf gezond!

Appendix C: Coding schemes

Advocating activities		
Selective codes	Axial codes	Open codes
Employee advocacy is a heterogeneous construct	Online advocating activities vary from passive to active engagement	Creating work/company related content; reposting company content; reposting company content and adding a text above; commenting on company content; liking company content.
	Variety in preferred way of engagement	Self-creation of content to retain authenticity; reposting company content to retain quality; reposting company content to retain security; adding personal text above repost to make message more personal.
	Variety in used social media platforms to advocate on	Preferring LinkedIn because of professional nature; preferring LinkedIn because of clear boundaries between private and professional – for professional use only; the more personal the platform, the less active advocating; prefer Instagram to update family and friends; prefer Instagram to reach younger audience.
Digital employee advocacy is perceived as extra-role behavior	Advocating activities not a part of formal requirements	If expected to do on a regular basis it should be in contract; would refuse to engage if it would become obligated.
	Engaging in digital advocacy not the responsibility of employees	Company brand should be strong enough by itself; communication department should do their job right; responsibility depending on role within company (e.g. marketing, communication, sales); success of the company should not rely on employees participation; should advocate because you like your work/employer, not because your employer asks you to.
	Defending/protecting the company from negative eWOM not the responsibility of employees	Should report internally to the right person; personally responding to negative eWOM will not solve the

		issue, might worsen situation; responding to negative eWOM forbidden.
--	--	---

Motivations and challenges		
Selective codes	Axial codes	Open codes
Digital employee advocacy intertwines the personal and organizational	Pursuing personal <i>and</i> organizational interest with engagement	Reach targets (e.g. marketing targets, recruiting new employees); proud of personal success/involvement; building a portfolio; inform network; show work to family/friends/followers; knowledge of the value of employees' participation for company's reputation; satisfied with job/employer/working environment; set example for others; proud of the company and its accomplishments; recruiting new people.
	Perceived personal <i>and</i> organizational benefits of their engagement	Self-promotion; taking and giving; contact with family/friends/followers; expression personal beliefs; recruiting new 'nice' colleagues; marketing for the company; increasing visibility of the company; image as a good employer; increasing company sales; positive reputation for the company.
	Managing merging personal and professional reputations – identification is key	Organizational identification criterion to engage in advocacy; would not advocate on behalf of an organization they do not support; particular content needs to relate to profession/network/identity; aware of impact of online behavior on personal and professional reputation; afraid to overkill people with work-related content.
	Acknowledging blurring lines between private and professional lives	Communication in work group chats outside office hours; when colleagues become friends; when clients become friends;

		<p>hardly any boundaries colleagues – friends; private and professional life intertwined – do not mind working outside office hours; does not mind being contacted during weekends; in order to be successful private and professional life should be mixed – incorporate work into private life because you are passionate; setting boundaries responsibility of employees; private phone and work phone; do not open LinkedIn during weekends; do not connect with colleagues/clients on social media (besides LinkedIn); shielded social media account to control who sees content.</p>
Encouragement versus surveillance	Efforts perceived as encouragement	<p>Requested to share/post/like/comment; provided with content to share; online interaction with employees' content (e.g. liking/reposting/commenting employee content); involvement in social media strategy; special ambassador's track; social media training; provided with results of engagement.</p>
	Efforts perceived as pressure/surveillance	<p>Social pressure; felt uncomfortable sharing things; felt uncomfortable not sharing things; expecting it too much from employees; checking if employees engage, if not sending a follow-up request; felt obligated to respond to work e-mails during weekends; addressed by employer/colleague about personal social media use.</p>
	Guidelines/restrictions	<p>Provided with guidelines; brand book; use of hashtags; content sharing apps; internal Facebook; a lot of freedom; stick to company content; social media/writing workshop;</p>

		check with marketing employee before posting; perceived trust of employer in their ability to represent the company.
	Recommendations for employers to motivate engagement	Provide more ready to share content; leave participation up to employees – do not pressure; original company content – repost more; directly asking for engagement; provide insights into the outcome/result of their engagement; set the example with posting interesting content (manager/company); give (marketing manager) long-term targets (e.g. followers, likes company page); workshop.