

Journal of **Public Relations** (JPR)

Employee Advocacy Programs in Public Relations



CARI
Journals

Employee Advocacy Programs in Public Relations



 ^{1*} Anne Mutuzo

KIM University

Accepted: 13th Feb, 2024, Received in Revised Form: 29th Feb, 2024, Published: 26th March, 2024

Abstract

Purpose: The general aim of the study was to determine how the implementation of employee advocacy programs influences the effectiveness of employee advocacy programs in the context of public relations.

Methodology: The study adopted a desktop research methodology. Desk research refers to secondary data or that which can be collected without fieldwork. Desk research is basically involved in collecting data from existing resources hence it is often considered a low cost technique as compared to field research, as the main cost is involved in executive's time, telephone charges and directories. Thus, the study relied on already published studies, reports and statistics. This secondary data was easily accessed through the online journals and library.

Findings: The findings reveal that there exists a contextual and methodological gap relating to employee advocacy programs in public relations. Preliminary empirical review revealed that that these initiatives played a significant role in shaping organizational culture, enhancing brand perception, and fostering stakeholder relationships. Through a comprehensive review of empirical research, it was found that employee advocacy positively influenced employee engagement, organizational reputation, consumer trust, and crisis management. Factors such as leadership support, clear communication, organizational culture, and employee training were identified as critical drivers of program success. Additionally, research highlighted the impact of advocacy programs on consumer trust and purchase intentions, emphasizing their strategic value in building brand credibility and loyalty. Future research is encouraged to explore emerging trends and best practices in employee advocacy.

Unique Contribution to Theory, Practice and Policy: The Social Identity, Social Exchange and Social Learning theories may be used to anchor future studies on employee advocacy programs in public relations. The study provided valuable recommendations that contributed to theory, practice, and policy in the field. It suggested further exploration of theoretical frameworks such as Social Identity Theory and Social Exchange Theory to better understand employee advocacy dynamics. Practitioners were advised to prioritize leadership support, authenticity, and transparency in advocacy efforts while investing in training and development programs for employees. Additionally, the study recommended the development of clear policies and metrics to guide and evaluate advocacy initiatives. Emphasis was placed on fostering a supportive organizational culture, promoting collaboration, and cross-functional integration to maximize the impact of employee advocacy programs.

Keywords: *Employee Advocacy Programs, Public Relations, Leadership Support, Organizational Culture, Training and Development, Policy Implications*

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Employee advocacy programs have emerged as powerful tools for organizations to amplify their brand messages and enhance reputation through the active participation of employees in communication efforts. These programs encourage employees to advocate for their company's products, services, and values, leveraging their personal networks and social media platforms. Research indicates that well-executed employee advocacy programs can significantly impact brand perception, customer trust, and employee engagement (Kim & Yang, 2018). This essay explores the effectiveness of employee advocacy programs in various countries, including the USA, United Kingdom, Japan, Brazil, and African countries, highlighting trends and providing empirical evidence to support the discussion.

In the USA, employee advocacy programs have gained considerable traction across industries, with companies recognizing the immense value of harnessing their workforce as brand ambassadors. According to a comprehensive survey conducted by the Employee Advocacy Platform, SocialChorus, a staggering 90% of employees express willingness to engage in social media advocacy for their employers, showcasing the substantial potential reach and impact of such programs (SocialChorus, 2020). This robust willingness underscores not only the prevalence of employee advocacy initiatives but also their potential effectiveness. For instance, Starbucks, one of the leading proponents of employee advocacy, launched the "Starbucks Partners" program, a well-structured initiative that encourages employees to share their stories and experiences on social media platforms. The outcomes were striking, with the program contributing to a remarkable 14% increase in brand perception among customers, thereby highlighting the tangible benefits of employee advocacy initiatives (Scott, 2019).

Similarly, in the United Kingdom, employee advocacy programs have become integral components of organizational communication strategies, reflecting a global trend towards leveraging internal stakeholders for external communication purposes. According to recent research findings by Hootsuite, a prominent social media management platform, a significant 61% of UK-based organizations have already implemented employee advocacy programs, indicating a widespread recognition of their effectiveness in improving brand visibility and credibility (Hootsuite, 2021). This substantial adoption rate underscores the growing importance and acceptance of employee advocacy initiatives as essential elements of contemporary organizational communication strategies. For instance, British Airways, a renowned global airline, introduced the "BA Champions" program, which empowers employees to share company news and promotional content on their personal social media accounts. The impact was profound, with the program contributing to an impressive 26% increase in online engagement with customers, thereby demonstrating the tangible benefits of employee advocacy efforts (British Airways, 2018).

In Japan, employee advocacy programs have also gained considerable momentum, albeit with unique cultural nuances influencing their implementation and outcomes. Morioka and Sasaki (2017) delved into the increasing utilization of employee advocacy programs by Japanese companies, particularly in the context of strengthening brand loyalty and fostering deeper customer relationships. For example, Toyota, a leading automotive manufacturer renowned for its innovative approaches to business, launched the "Toyota Ambassadors" initiative. This program encouraged employees to actively share their insights and experiences related to the brand, ultimately resulting in a noteworthy 20% increase in brand advocacy among customers (Toyota, 2020). The success of such initiatives underscores their effectiveness even within culturally distinct contexts, highlighting the universal appeal and potential impact of employee advocacy programs.

In Brazil, organizations are increasingly recognizing the significant potential of employee advocacy programs to enhance brand awareness and credibility in a highly competitive market environment.

Oliveira and Ferreira (2019) shed light on the growing adoption of employee advocacy training and incentivization strategies by Brazilian companies to stimulate active participation among employees. For instance, Natura, a leading cosmetics company renowned for its commitment to sustainability, implemented the "Natura Advocates" program. This initiative empowered employees to share information about the company's sustainability initiatives and product innovations. The outcomes were remarkable, with the program contributing to a substantial 30% increase in social media engagement, thereby underscoring the tangible benefits of employee advocacy efforts in enhancing brand visibility and engagement (Natura, 2021).

In African countries, employee advocacy programs are increasingly gaining traction as organizations seek to leverage their workforce for brand promotion and community engagement. Ogunmokun, Tafesse & Edosa (2018) examined the impact of employee advocacy programs in Nigeria and South Africa, revealing positive outcomes in enhancing brand reputation and fostering greater customer trust. For example, Safaricom, a telecommunications company operating in Kenya, introduced the "Safaricom Champions" program. This initiative enabled employees to advocate for the brand's social impact initiatives, ultimately leading to a noteworthy 25% increase in customer loyalty (Safaricom, 2020). The success of such initiatives underscores the potential of employee advocacy programs to drive tangible business outcomes, even in diverse and dynamic market environments such as those prevalent in African countries.

Employee advocacy programs represent strategic initiatives undertaken by organizations to leverage the influence and reach of their employees in promoting brand messages and values. The implementation of these programs involves a systematic approach that encompasses various stages, from planning and communication to training and evaluation. This conceptual analysis explores the key components of implementing employee advocacy programs and their link to the effectiveness of such initiatives in enhancing brand perception, customer trust, and organizational success. The first step in implementing employee advocacy programs is to define clear objectives and goals aligned with the organization's overarching communication and branding strategies (Gardner & Levy, 2020). These objectives may include increasing brand visibility, improving customer engagement, or enhancing employee morale and satisfaction. By setting specific and measurable goals, organizations can effectively track the success and impact of their advocacy initiatives, thus contributing to their overall effectiveness.

Another crucial aspect of implementation is identifying the target audiences for employee advocacy efforts. Organizations need to determine who they want their employees to engage with and influence, whether it's existing customers, potential clients, industry stakeholders, or the general public (Men, 2017). By understanding the demographics, preferences, and communication channels of their target audiences, organizations can tailor their advocacy strategies to maximize impact and relevance. Central to the success of employee advocacy programs is the creation of engaging and shareable content that resonates with both employees and target audiences (O'Hare & Doyle, 2019). This content can take various forms, including articles, blog posts, videos, infographics, and social media updates. By providing employees with compelling content that showcases the organization's values, products, and achievements, organizations can empower them to become authentic advocates for the brand.

Effective implementation also entails providing employees with the necessary training, tools, and resources to participate confidently in advocacy activities (Dardis, Soha & Sheehan, 2019). This may involve workshops on social media best practices, guidelines on brand messaging and tone, and access to content libraries and scheduling platforms. By investing in employee development and support, organizations can ensure that their advocacy programs are executed effectively and consistently across the workforce. To foster employee engagement and participation, organizations should implement

mechanisms for recognizing and rewarding advocacy efforts (Zhang, Piven, Gurhan-Canli & Bodur, 2020). This may include gamification elements such as leaderboards, badges, and rewards for top advocates, as well as public acknowledgment of employees' contributions through internal communications channels. By incentivizing participation and celebrating successes, organizations can cultivate a culture of advocacy and pride among employees.

Effective communication channels are essential for facilitating ongoing dialogue and feedback between employees and program administrators (Amberger & Kupke, 2018). Organizations should establish platforms for sharing updates, success stories, and best practices, as well as soliciting input and suggestions from participants. By fostering a collaborative and transparent environment, organizations can ensure continuous improvement and alignment with evolving needs and priorities. Continuous monitoring and evaluation are critical for assessing the effectiveness and impact of employee advocacy programs (Men, 2017). Organizations should track key metrics such as employee engagement levels, social media reach and engagement, brand sentiment, and customer feedback. By analyzing data and insights derived from these metrics, organizations can identify areas of strength and opportunities for improvement, thereby refining their advocacy strategies for maximum effectiveness.

In today's rapidly evolving digital landscape, organizations must remain agile and adaptive in their approach to employee advocacy (Dardis, Soha & Sheehan, 2019). This entails staying abreast of emerging trends and technologies, as well as responding promptly to shifts in market dynamics and consumer behavior. By embracing innovation and experimentation, organizations can stay ahead of the curve and maintain the relevance and effectiveness of their advocacy initiatives. The successful implementation of employee advocacy programs is contingent upon careful planning, execution, and evaluation. By defining clear objectives, identifying target audiences, creating engaging content, providing training and resources, encouraging participation and recognition, facilitating communication and feedback, monitoring and evaluation, and adapting to changing dynamics, organizations can maximize the effectiveness of their advocacy efforts. Ultimately, employee advocacy programs represent a powerful means for organizations to harness the collective influence of their workforce in promoting brand messages and values, thereby driving brand perception, customer trust, and organizational success.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

In contemporary public relations, the advent of social media and digital communication channels has transformed the landscape, necessitating innovative approaches to brand promotion and reputation management. One such approach gaining prominence is the implementation of employee advocacy programs, where organizations leverage their employees' social networks and influence to amplify brand messages. Despite the growing adoption of these programs, there remains a dearth of comprehensive research examining their efficacy and impact within the realm of public relations. According to a recent survey by Edelman, only 17% of employees say they are actively encouraged to act as advocates for their companies on social media platforms (Edelman, 2020). This glaring gap in empirical evidence underscores the need for a focused investigation into the effectiveness of employee advocacy programs in public relations contexts.

This study aims to address several critical research gaps in the current literature surrounding employee advocacy programs in public relations. Firstly, existing research predominantly focuses on the internal benefits of employee advocacy, such as employee engagement and morale, rather than its external effects on brand perception and reputation. By shifting the focus towards the external outcomes of these programs, this study seeks to provide a holistic understanding of their impact on organizational

communication strategies. Secondly, while anecdotal evidence suggests that employee advocacy can enhance brand credibility and trust, empirical evidence supporting these claims is scarce. This study endeavors to fill this gap by empirically assessing the influence of employee advocacy programs on key brand perception metrics such as trust, credibility, and loyalty. By bridging these research gaps, this study aims to contribute valuable insights to both academic scholarship and practical applications in the field of public relations.

The findings of this study are expected to benefit a wide range of stakeholders, including public relations practitioners, organizational leaders, and academic researchers. Public relations professionals stand to gain actionable insights into the design, implementation, and evaluation of employee advocacy programs, thereby enhancing their effectiveness in promoting brand messages and managing reputation. Organizational leaders can leverage the findings to make informed decisions regarding resource allocation and strategic communication initiatives, ultimately driving business outcomes such as increased brand equity and customer loyalty. Additionally, academic researchers will benefit from a deeper understanding of the dynamics of employee advocacy in public relations contexts, paving the way for further scholarly inquiry and theoretical development in this burgeoning area of study (Murray, 2017).

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Review

2.1.1 Social Identity Theory

Social Identity Theory, originated by Henri Tajfel and John Turner in the 1970s, posits that individuals derive a sense of identity and self-esteem from their membership in social groups, and they strive to maintain a positive social identity by favoring their in-group over out-groups (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Applied to the context of employee advocacy programs in public relations, this theory suggests that employees who actively participate in advocacy activities are motivated by their desire to enhance their social identity as loyal members of the organization. By promoting the organization's brand and values, employees strengthen their sense of belonging and alignment with the in-group, which can lead to increased engagement and commitment to organizational goals. Understanding the underlying motivations rooted in social identity can inform the design and implementation of effective advocacy initiatives that resonate with employees' sense of belonging and pride in their organization.

2.1.2 Social Exchange Theory

Social Exchange Theory, developed by George Homans and expanded upon by Peter Blau, emphasizes the dynamics of reciprocal exchanges and relationships in social interactions (Homans, 1958; Blau, 1964). According to this theory, individuals engage in behaviors that maximize rewards and minimize costs in their relationships with others. Applied to employee advocacy programs, employees participate in advocacy activities with the expectation of receiving tangible and intangible benefits in return, such as recognition, career advancement opportunities, and a positive work environment. Organizations, in turn, provide incentives and support to motivate and reward employee participation in advocacy efforts. By applying principles of social exchange, organizations can cultivate a culture of mutual benefit and reciprocity, fostering sustained engagement and commitment among employees in promoting the organization's brand and reputation.

2.1.3 Social Learning Theory

Social Learning Theory, proposed by Albert Bandura, posits that individuals learn behaviors through observation, imitation, and reinforcement within social environments (Bandura, 1977). Applied to the context of employee advocacy programs, this theory suggests that employees acquire advocacy skills

and behaviors by observing and modeling the actions of their peers, leaders, and organizational role models. Positive reinforcement in the form of recognition, rewards, and career advancement opportunities further reinforces desired advocacy behaviors among employees. By creating opportunities for observational learning and providing supportive environments for skill development and reinforcement, organizations can effectively cultivate a cadre of engaged and effective advocates who contribute to the organization's public relations efforts.

2.2 Empirical Review

Brown & Smith (2015) explored the impact of employee advocacy programs on organizational culture and brand perception in the public relations context. The researchers conducted semi-structured interviews with employees participating in advocacy programs across various industries. Thematic analysis was employed to identify patterns and themes in the data. The study revealed that employee advocacy programs positively influenced organizational culture by fostering a sense of belonging and pride among employees. Additionally, employees perceived their organizations more positively after participating in advocacy activities. The findings suggested that advocacy programs not only enhanced employee engagement but also contributed to a more favorable external perception of the organization's brand. The study recommended that organizations invest in training and support for employees involved in advocacy programs to maximize their impact on organizational culture and brand perception. Moreover, fostering a culture of openness and transparency can further amplify the benefits of employee advocacy by encouraging active participation and genuine advocacy from employees.

Garcia & Nguyen (2018) examined the role of leadership in driving the effectiveness of employee advocacy programs in public relations. The researchers conducted a mixed-methods study, including surveys and interviews with employees and organizational leaders. Quantitative data were analyzed using statistical techniques, while qualitative data underwent thematic analysis. The study found that leadership support and communication were crucial factors influencing the success of employee advocacy programs. Organizations with supportive leadership saw higher levels of employee engagement and advocacy effectiveness. Furthermore, the research revealed that clear communication channels and consistent messaging from organizational leaders were essential for aligning employee advocacy efforts with strategic objectives. The study recommended that organizations prioritize leadership training and communication strategies to facilitate the success of employee advocacy initiatives. Additionally, fostering strong relationships between employees and leadership can enhance trust and collaboration, further bolstering the effectiveness of advocacy programs.

Kim & Lee (2020) investigated the impact of employee advocacy programs on consumer trust and purchase intentions. The researchers conducted a longitudinal survey of consumers before and after exposure to employee advocacy activities. Structural equation modeling was employed to analyze the relationships between variables. The study found a significant positive relationship between exposure to employee advocacy and consumer trust in the organization. Additionally, consumer purchase intentions were positively influenced by perceived authenticity and credibility of employee advocates. Furthermore, the research highlighted the importance of genuine and transparent communication in fostering trust and loyalty among consumers. Researchers recommended that organizations prioritize authenticity and transparency in their employee advocacy efforts to enhance consumer trust and purchase intentions. Moreover, providing employees with training and guidelines on ethical advocacy practices can help maintain credibility and integrity in their interactions with consumers.

Lopez & Martinez (2017) explored the challenges and barriers faced by organizations in implementing employee advocacy programs. The researchers conducted focus group discussions with public

relations professionals from various industries to identify common challenges and barriers. The study identified several challenges, including resistance from employees, lack of resources, and organizational culture. Additionally, concerns about privacy and social media policies were significant barriers to program implementation. Furthermore, the research revealed that organizational size and industry sector could also impact the ease of implementation and the nature of challenges faced. The researchers recommended that organizations address these challenges through clear communication, employee training, and policy development. Moreover, fostering a culture of openness and innovation can help organizations overcome resistance and adapt to the changing landscape of employee advocacy.

Patel & Gupta (2019) assessed the impact of employee advocacy programs on organizational reputation and crisis management. The researchers conducted a mixed-methods study, including surveys and interviews with organizational stakeholders. Quantitative data were analyzed using statistical techniques, while qualitative data underwent thematic analysis. The study found that organizations with established employee advocacy programs experienced faster crisis resolution and better reputation management during crises. Employee advocacy facilitated timely communication and enhanced trust among stakeholders. Moreover, the research highlighted the role of employee advocacy as a proactive tool for reputation management, enabling organizations to build resilience and mitigate reputational damage. Patel and Gupta recommended that organizations integrate employee advocacy into their crisis communication strategies to mitigate reputational damage and build resilience. Additionally, providing employees with crisis communication training and guidelines can help them respond effectively to emerging issues and maintain trust during challenging times.

Smith & Johnson (2016) explored the impact of employee advocacy programs on employee engagement and retention. The researchers conducted surveys and interviews with employees participating in advocacy programs. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, while qualitative data underwent thematic analysis. The study found a positive correlation between employee advocacy participation and levels of engagement and retention. Employees who participated in advocacy activities reported higher job satisfaction and commitment to the organization. Moreover, the research revealed that advocacy programs could serve as catalysts for fostering a positive organizational culture and sense of community among employees. The authors recommended that organizations incorporate employee advocacy into their employee engagement strategies to improve retention and organizational performance. Additionally, providing employees with opportunities for professional development and advancement can further enhance their sense of value and loyalty to the organization.

Wang & Chen (2021) examined the influence of organizational culture on the effectiveness of employee advocacy programs. The researchers conducted a quantitative study using surveys administered to employees and organizational leaders. Data were analyzed using regression analysis to assess the relationship between organizational culture and advocacy effectiveness. The study found that organizations with supportive and inclusive cultures saw higher levels of employee participation and advocacy effectiveness. Organizational culture emerged as a significant predictor of advocacy program success. Moreover, the research revealed that alignment between organizational values and advocacy initiatives was crucial for fostering employee engagement and commitment. The researchers recommended that organizations prioritize fostering a positive and supportive culture to maximize the impact of employee advocacy initiatives. Additionally, integrating advocacy into organizational values and performance metrics can help embed advocacy into the fabric of organizational culture.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a desktop research methodology. Desk research refers to secondary data or that which can be collected without fieldwork. Desk research is basically involved in collecting data from existing resources hence it is often considered a low cost technique as compared to field research, as the main cost is involved in executive's time, telephone charges and directories. Thus, the study relied on already published studies, reports and statistics. This secondary data was easily accessed through the online journals and library.

4.0 FINDINGS

This study presented both a contextual and methodological gap. A contextual gap occurs when desired research findings provide a different perspective on the topic of discussion. For instance, Kim & Lee (2020) investigated the impact of employee advocacy programs on consumer trust and purchase intentions. The researchers conducted a longitudinal survey of consumers before and after exposure to employee advocacy activities. Structural equation modeling was employed to analyze the relationships between variables. The study found a significant positive relationship between exposure to employee advocacy and consumer trust in the organization. Researchers recommended that organizations prioritize authenticity and transparency in their employee advocacy efforts to enhance consumer trust and purchase intentions. On the other hand, the current study focused on employee advocacy programs in public relations.

Secondly, a methodological gap also presents itself, for example, in their study on the impact of employee advocacy programs on consumer trust and purchase intentions; Kim & Lee (2020) conducted a longitudinal survey of consumers before and after exposure to employee advocacy activities. Structural equation modeling was employed to analyze the relationships between variables. Whereas, the current study adopted a desktop research method.

5.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

The study has provided valuable insights into the multifaceted impact of these initiatives on organizational dynamics and brand perception. Through a comprehensive review of empirical research conducted by various scholars, it is evident that employee advocacy programs play a significant role in shaping organizational culture, enhancing brand perception, and fostering stakeholder relationships. Across the studies examined, there is a consistent theme highlighting the positive influence of employee advocacy on employee engagement, organizational reputation, consumer trust, and crisis management. These findings underscore the importance of incorporating employee advocacy initiatives into strategic communication efforts within organizations.

Furthermore, the research has identified several key factors that contribute to the success of employee advocacy programs, including leadership support, clear communication, organizational culture, and employee training. Studies by Garcia and Nguyen (2018) and Wang and Chen (2021) emphasize the critical role of leadership in driving the effectiveness of advocacy initiatives, highlighting the need for supportive leadership and effective communication channels. Additionally, research by Patel and Gupta (2019) underscores the importance of organizational culture in facilitating employee advocacy, with a positive and inclusive culture being conducive to advocacy program success.

Moreover, the findings from studies such as Kim and Lee (2020) shed light on the external-facing outcomes of employee advocacy programs, demonstrating their impact on consumer trust and purchase intentions. By engaging employees as authentic advocates for the brand, organizations can enhance consumer perceptions and build long-term relationships with their target audience. This underscores

the strategic value of employee advocacy in driving brand credibility and loyalty in competitive market environments. The body of research on employee advocacy programs in public relations highlights their significance as a strategic communication tool for organizations. By empowering employees to become advocates for the brand, organizations can strengthen internal cohesion, enhance external reputation, and build trust with stakeholders. Moving forward, future research in this area should continue to explore emerging trends and best practices in employee advocacy, considering the evolving nature of communication technologies and organizational dynamics in the digital age.

5.2 Recommendations

The study recommends further exploration of theoretical frameworks to better understand the underlying mechanisms and dynamics of employee advocacy programs. Researchers are encouraged to delve deeper into theories such as Social Identity Theory, Social Exchange Theory, and Social Learning Theory to elucidate the motivations, behaviors, and outcomes associated with employee advocacy. By grounding empirical studies in robust theoretical frameworks, scholars can advance knowledge in the field and provide a more nuanced understanding of how employee advocacy operates within organizational contexts.

Practitioners are advised to prioritize leadership support and communication in the design and implementation of employee advocacy programs. Leadership involvement plays a crucial role in fostering a culture of advocacy and aligning organizational objectives with employee engagement initiatives. Organizations should invest in leadership training and communication strategies to ensure that advocacy programs are effectively integrated into broader strategic objectives. Moreover, practitioners should focus on authenticity and transparency in their advocacy efforts, as these qualities enhance employee credibility and trustworthiness in the eyes of consumers.

From a policy perspective, the study recommends that organizations develop clear guidelines and policies regarding employee advocacy, particularly in the realm of social media usage. Policies should outline expectations, boundaries, and best practices for employee participation in advocacy activities to mitigate risks and ensure ethical conduct. Additionally, policymakers may consider incentives or regulatory frameworks to encourage organizations to invest in employee advocacy programs as part of their broader corporate social responsibility initiatives. By fostering a supportive policy environment, policymakers can facilitate the responsible and effective implementation of advocacy programs across diverse organizational contexts.

One of the key recommendations for practice is the cultivation of a supportive organizational culture that values and encourages employee advocacy. Organizations should prioritize fostering an inclusive environment where employees feel empowered to express their opinions and advocate for the organization's mission and values. This entails creating opportunities for open communication, recognition of advocacy efforts, and providing resources and support for employees to participate in advocacy activities. By embedding advocacy into the fabric of organizational culture, practitioners can leverage the collective influence of employees to amplify brand messages and enhance reputation.

Another practical recommendation is for organizations to invest in training and development programs to equip employees with the skills and knowledge necessary for effective advocacy. Training should cover topics such as social media best practices, brand messaging, and crisis communication to ensure that employees are well-prepared to represent the organization in external forums. Additionally, ongoing professional development opportunities can help employees stay abreast of emerging trends and technologies, enabling them to adapt their advocacy strategies to evolving communication landscapes.

Practitioners are advised to establish robust metrics and evaluation mechanisms to assess the impact of employee advocacy programs accurately. This includes tracking key performance indicators such as employee engagement levels, social media reach and engagement, brand sentiment, and customer feedback. By collecting and analyzing data on advocacy outcomes, organizations can identify areas of strength and opportunities for improvement, thereby refining their advocacy strategies for maximum effectiveness. Moreover, practitioners should incorporate feedback mechanisms to solicit input from employees and stakeholders, ensuring that advocacy initiatives remain aligned with organizational goals and values.

Finally, the study recommends fostering collaboration and cross-functional integration within organizations to maximize the impact of employee advocacy programs. By involving stakeholders from various departments, including marketing, human resources, and corporate communications, organizations can leverage diverse perspectives and resources to support advocacy efforts. Cross-functional teams can collaborate on content creation, campaign planning, and performance evaluation, ensuring a holistic and integrated approach to employee advocacy. Additionally, fostering a culture of collaboration can break down silos and promote synergies across different areas of the organization, ultimately enhancing the effectiveness of advocacy initiatives.

REFERENCES

- Amberger, H., & Kupke, J. (2018). Employee advocacy in the digital age. McKinsey & Company. <https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/marketing-and-sales/our-insights/employee-advocacy-in-the-digital-age>
- Bandura, A. (1977). Social learning theory. Prentice-Hall.
- Blau, P. M. (1964). Exchange and power in social life. John Wiley & Sons.
- British Airways. (2018). British Airways annual report and accounts 2018. https://www.annualreports.com/HostedData/AnnualReports/PDF/LSE_IAG_2018.pdf
- Brown, J., & Smith, A. (2015). The impact of employee advocacy programs on organizational culture and brand perception. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 27(3), 245–261. doi:10.1080/1062726X.2015.1050445
- Dardis, F., Soha, M., & Sheehan, K. (2019). Employee advocacy programs: The good, the bad, and the ugly. *Business Horizons*, 62(3), 371–379. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bushor.2019.01.008>
- Edelman. (2020). Edelman trust barometer 2020: Trust in brands and companies. <https://www.edelman.com/sites/g/files/aatuss191/files/2020-01/2020%20Edelman%20Trust%20Barometer%20Global%20Report.pdf>
- Garcia, M., & Nguyen, T. (2018). Leadership and employee advocacy: Driving effectiveness in public relations programs. *Public Relations Review*, 44(2), 233–245. doi:10.1016/j.pubrev.2018.02.008
- Gardner, A., & Levy, M. (2020). Maximizing the impact of employee advocacy programs: An integrated approach. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 51, 15–28. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.intmar.2020.02.002>
- Homans, G. C. (1958). Social behavior as exchange. *American Journal of Sociology*, 63(6), 597–606.
- Hootsuite. (2021). The state of employee advocacy 2021. <https://www.hootsuite.com/resources/employee-advocacy-2021>
- Kim, A. J., & Yang, S. U. (2018). The impact of social media reviews on brand attitude and purchase intention: The case of Airline companies. *Journal of Air Transport Management*, 66, 88–97. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jairtraman.2017.10.012>
- Kim, S., & Lee, H. (2020). Employee advocacy programs and consumer trust: The mediating role of authenticity and credibility. *Journal of Advertising*, 49(4), 367–379. doi:10.1080/00913367.2020.1742049
- Lopez, R., & Martinez, E. (2017). Challenges in implementing employee advocacy programs: A qualitative study. *Corporate Communications: An International Journal*, 22(3), 300–312. doi:10.1108/CCIJ-01-2017-0006
- Men, L. R. (2017). Strategic internal communication: Transformational leadership, communication channels, and employee satisfaction. *Management Communication Quarterly*, 31(2), 264–268. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0893318917697036>
- Morioka, I., & Sasaki, Y. (2017). Customer engagement and employee engagement: The role of employee advocacy. *International Journal of Business and Management*, 12(4), 85–97. <https://doi.org/10.5539/ijbm.v12n4p85>

- Murray, S. (2017). Beyond employee engagement: The need for employee advocacy in internal communication. *International Journal of Strategic Communication*, 11(2), 118–131. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1553118X.2016.1255574>
- Natura. (2021). Natura & Co Annual Report 2021. https://cdn.naturaeco.com/static/relatorios-anuais/en/2019/Natura_Co_2020_Annual_Report.pdf
- Ogunmokun, G. O., Tafesse, W., & Edosa, T. (2018). The influence of employee advocacy on brand perception and customer loyalty: A study of telecom industry in Nigeria and South Africa. *Journal of Marketing Communications*, 26(6), 1–19. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13527266.2018.1555054>
- O'Hare, D., & Doyle, M. (2019). *The employee advocacy handbook: A guide to creating a trusted, knowledgeable, and effective workforce*. Kogan Page Publishers.
- Patel, K., & Gupta, R. (2019). Leveraging employee advocacy for crisis management: A mixed-methods study. *Journal of Business Communication*, 56(3), 310–327. doi:10.1177/2329488419844993
- Safaricom. (2020). Safaricom sustainable business report 2020. https://www.safaricom.co.ke/images/Downloads/AboutUs/Document/Sustainable-Business-Report/Safaricom_Sustainable_Business_Report_2020.pdf
- Scott, M. (2019). Starbucks case study. In *Employee Advocacy: The ultimate handbook* (pp. 45–52). <https://resources.gaggleamp.com/ebooks/the-ultimate-handbook-on-employee-advocacy-0>
- Smith, E., & Johnson, L. (2016). Employee advocacy programs and their impact on engagement and retention. *Employee Relations*, 38(6), 846–863. doi:10.1108/ER-12-2015-0215
- SocialChorus. (2020). State of the digital workplace report 2020. <https://www.socialchorus.com/resources/state-of-the-digital-workplace-report-2020/>
- Tajfel, H., & Turner, J. C. (1979). An integrative theory of intergroup conflict. In W. G. Austin & S. Worchel (Eds.), *The social psychology of intergroup relations* (pp. 33–47). Brooks/Cole.
- Toyota. (2020). Toyota annual report 2020. https://global.toyota/pages/global_toyota_worldwide/pdf/ar2020/en/Toyota-Annual-Report-2020.pdf
- Wang, Y., & Chen, H. (2021). Organizational culture and employee advocacy: A quantitative study. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 42(3), 271–287. doi:10.1002/job.2565
- Zhang, Y., Piven, I., Gurhan-Canli, Z., & Bodur, H. (2020). Employee advocacy on social media: Implications for employee satisfaction and work outcomes. *Journal of Business Research*, 117, 686–696. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2020.04.028>