

## LECTURERS' ADVOCACY ON SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS

Nguyen Minh Duc, Van Hien University  
Nguyen Duy Cuong, Van Hien University

### Abstract

This research aims to explore the concept of lecturer advocacy on social media and the motivations behind it. In reviewing 31 papers, the research advocates for all employees to engage as communicators and emphasizes empowering them to utilize social media platforms. Consequently, understanding why employees choose to engage, their methods of participation, and the potential implications is valuable for the case company.

### Key words:

- Lecturers' advocacy
- Social media platforms
- Vietnamese private higher education organization (VPHEO)

### INTRODUCTION

Utilizing social media for marketing purposes has become increasingly prevalent. The objective of establishing a brand presence within any social media communication strategy is twofold, catering to both internal and external organizational needs. Such a strategy aims to seize the attention of the desired target audience, foster acceptance, and effectively communicate brand values. Furthermore, it endeavors to stimulate audience engagement through dialogue and promote brand visibility (Yang & Lin, 2011). In the present day, social media represents the quickest avenue for companies to connect with their intended audience, serving as the optimal platform for crafting a company's image and establishing it as a recognized brand (Katila, 2019). Social media management involves overseeing both internal and external communication efforts within a company. This plays a pivotal role in molding the company's perception among the public and its closely affiliated employees. Kompa predicts that in 2023, businesses will continue to concentrate on maximizing the use of commonly utilized social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. This strategy aims to efficiently and conveniently connect the company's products and brands with customers.

The swift evolution of social media has yielded diverse impacts on the realm of human resource management. In addressing this, scholars and professionals have embarked on investigations to explore the numerous ways in which social media shapes the HR practices within organizations (Kluemper et al., 2016). Neglecting social media in their development strategies would be a significant oversight for businesses. Many companies, including large corporations, have faced significant consequences for underestimating its impact. Particularly, disregarding negative feedback on social networks can be perilous. "Don't forget that a small hole can sink a large ship." Nowadays, conducting substantial business without considering social media is impossible. Social media and e-commerce have undergone remarkable advancements in recent years. Vietnam currently boasts over 70 million social media users per day. Similarly, in e-commerce, more than 45 million Vietnamese consumers purchase goods online, with over 70% of consumers researching and buying products on the Internet. Vietnamese individuals spend an average of 2 hours and 21 minutes daily using social media for messaging, connecting, interacting, working, and more. As of January 2021, there are 68 million Facebook accounts (with 87.3% of users over 13 years old) accessible, marking a 7 million increase from the same period in 2020. Additionally, YouTube is thriving with 55.7 million accounts reachable through advertising.

The function of employees as brand advocates or unofficial spokespersons for organizations has been well-established in research for a long time (Linjuan Rita Men, Don Stacks, 2020) Their words or personal messages are frequently perceived as trustworthy by the external audience. The emergence of the internet and numerous media platforms has underscored the significance of employees as advocates for organizations in the digital realm (Sandra Jeanquart Miles, W. Glynn Mangold, 2019). Picture a scenario where a company with 500 LinkedIn followers posts content reflecting its brand ethos, and 20 passionate employees subsequently share this post on their personal LinkedIn profiles. Considering each of these employees has approximately 200 followers, the potential reach becomes significant: 20 shares multiplied by 200 followers equals potentially 4,000 viewers! "An employee stands as one of the most influential spokespersons for a company in the perception of other stakeholders". On average, content shared by employees tends to have an access frequency eight times higher than that shared from official business information sources. Conversations initiated by employees regarding the brand/product have the potential to propagate among customers 24 times more effectively than traditional advertising messages.

Hence, when exploring promotional strategies to attract more potential customers, the employee marketing approach cannot be ignored. Employee backing on social media platforms can offer a competitive edge to organizations, as employees not only participate in promoting positive messages related to the organization but also shield their organization against online criticism (Van Zoonen et al., 2018). Furthermore, employee support can play a significant role in enhancing the company's reputation and cultivating positive relationships with their external stakeholders (Van Zoonen et al., 2018). Numerous studies indicate that when employees advocate for their company on online or offline social media platforms, it yields various benefits. These include enhancing company visibility, strengthening relationships with current customers, and attracting new business opportunities for the organization (Frederiksen et al., 2016).

Nevertheless, the backing of employees can be the deciding factor in the success or failure of an organization (Thelen, 2020) Employees frequently share unfavorable views of their company online, feeling empowered and in control of discussions, especially with substantial audience support. However, from an organizational standpoint, the growing reliance on employee endorsement across online environments, both public and anonymous platforms has become a two-sided blade (Stohl et al., 2017). While employees can serve as powerful proponents by disseminating positive messages about the organization, they can also pose as potential adversaries, effortlessly tarnishing the organization's reputation by circulating negative information to their own audience (Miles & Mangold, 2004). Employees frequently tend to actively seek out and share information about their organization in a positive light, leveraging their communication networks both internally and externally within the organization (Kim & Rhee, 2011) (Kim & Grunig, 2011) (Mazzei, n.d.). Moreover, rallying employees to engage in the organization's branding efforts on social media platforms presents significant challenges. Proper communication of company social media communication policies and guidelines to employees is essential (Thomas, 2020).

According to Walden and Kingsley (2018), mobilizing employee support, termed "advocacy," is viewed as an organizational citizenship behavior where employees willingly defend or advocate for their organization (Men & Sung, 2022) to both internal and external audiences (Thelen & Men, 2020). Employee advocacy in communication, online or offline, yields numerous benefits such as increased company visibility, fostering connections with current customers, and drawing in fresh clientele opportunities (Frederiksen et al., 2016).

Employee support mobilization can be seen as the ultimate test of the relationship between employees and the organization. When employees engage with others and promote their organization, they play a vital role in promoting brand awareness. Additionally, employees partake in brand-building actions when they have confidence in their organization (Punjaisri et al., 2013).

According to Edgett (2002), advocacy mobilization is defined as publicly representing an individual, organization, or idea with the aim of persuading the audience, targeting a positive perception—or accepting the viewpoint—of that individual, organization, or idea. Employee advocacy refers to the verbal, written, or non-verbal expressions of support, suggestions, or defense of an organization or its products by an employee to both internal and external audiences (Thelen, 2020).

Thelen and Men (2020) state that employee support for the organization conceptually relates to positive word-of-mouth and positive endorsements for the organization, but its unique non-verbal aspect is linked to supportive actions, endorsements, or voluntary representation of the company in defending the organization, wearing company attire, or using the organization's brand identifiers on their personal social media profiles. Some scholars view advocacy as positive word-of-mouth (Schweitzer & Lyons, 2008), while some contend that employee advocacy entails not only spreading positive word-of-mouth but also standing up for a company during times of criticism (Thelen & Men, 2020).

Some scholars such as Koçak (2020) and Thelen and Men (2020) further argue that employee mobilization, as an outward-facing function, goes beyond simply spreading positive word-of-mouth (WOM) and also includes protecting the company in times of criticism by external forces. This definition entails employees voluntarily promoting or defending a company, brand, and its products externally, similar to the concept of desire to disseminate favorable information about their company to those in their circles (e.g., family and friends).

### METHODOLOGY

This research aims to explore the concept of lecturer advocacy on social media and the motivations behind it. In reviewing 31 papers, the research advocates for all employees to engage as communicators and emphasizes empowering them to utilize social media platforms.

The inquiry posed by the thesis includes:

- What characterizes lecturer advocacy in social media?
- What motivates lecturer advocacy in social media?

The theoretical review uncovered in response to the initial research query "What characterizes lecturer advocacy in social media?", that lecturer advocacy in social media is primarily voluntary and shows a positive correlation with symmetrical internal communications and a strong employee-organization relationship. Additionally, leadership and engagement can positively influence lecturers' willingness to act as advocates on social media.

To the second research question, What motivates lecturer advocacy in social media?, the theoretical review concluded that it is predominantly the organizational objectives that steer the social media behavior of lecturers. The purpose of the empirical evidence presented in the research is to refine these findings and thus enrich the discourse.

### RESULTS

Thelen and Formanchuk's (2022) research gathered a comprehensive set of 778,979 experimental studies pertaining to the factor "employee support mobilization for the organization." From these, 31 articles were identified as having the strongest correlations with the seminal article "Culture and internal communication in Chile: Linking ethical organizational culture, transparent communication, and employee advocacy" authored by the two researchers.



Source: Compiled by the author\*

Table 1: Studies on Employee Advocacy have been published.

Authors, Year	Independent variable	Mediator	Dependent variable
Dawkins (2004) Du (2007)	Corporate responsibility and ethics		Employees will introduce others to use the company's products or services
Akgunduz & Sanli (2017)	The organization cares about employee benefits and transparency of employee policies		Employee Advocacy and Support
Elsaied (2019) Shehawy et al. (2018)	Leadership support, employee voice behavior, and organizational outcomes	Employee Advocacy	Job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and intention to quit.
Yeh (2014)	Employee ratings of the transparency of the organization's policies and the extent to which the organization values their contributions		Employee Advocacy
Akgunduz & Sanli (2017) Kocak (2020)	Employees are involved in decisions, have autonomy, transparent and practical employee policies, and fair promotions		Employee Advocacy
Walden & Westerman (2018)	Symmetrical Internal Communication		Employee Advocacy
Walz & Celuch (2010)	Employees Organization Relationship		Employee Advocacy



Springer (2015) Kim & Rhee (2011) Cervellon & Lirio (2017) Frederiksen (2015) Godes & Mayzlin (2004)	Employee Advocacy		Increasing employee retention, attract skilled workforce, develop new business and influence growth and revenue
Tsarenko & ctg. (2018)	Belief in the brand value and commitment		engaging in employee support behaviors
Morhart & ctg. (2011)	Transformational leadership style		employee support behaviors
Walden & Westerman (2018)	employee support behaviors		Enhance company reputation, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, work engagement and reduce employee turnover intentions.
Tsarenko & ctg. (2018) Walden & Westerman (2018)	Employee Advocacy		create opportunities to increase sales, build and strengthen company reputation, boost organizational productivity and efficiency and ultimately drive organizational success
Smudde (2013) Wilcox, Cameron, Reber, & Shin (2013)	The level of trust and satisfaction employees feel toward their organization		Employees choose whether to support or defend their organization from criticism.

Kim & Rhee (2011)	Employee Advocacy		Can contribute to improving the effectiveness of an organization by enhancing (boosting) the organization's reputation – they can be seen as an active sounding board that shares positive information about their company with the public. externally with people around them (e.g. family and friends)
Cervellon & Lirio (2017)	Employee Advocacy		Helps attract human capital
Levinson (2018)	Employee Advocacy		Increase employee retention
Godes & Mayzlin (2004) Gremler, Gwinner, & Brown (2001)	Employee Advocacy		Affects business growth and revenue
Vlachos & ctg. (2017)	Genuine, intrinsic or community value-oriented attribution		Increase employee support for the organization
Dawkins (2004) Du & ctg. (2007)	Recognize the company's responsible and ethical practices		Employees become brand/company ambassadors by recommending others to use the company's products or services
Yeunjae Lee (2020)	The behavior of an organization's internal CSR activities.		Employee Advocacy
Kang & Sung (2017)	Employee Advocacy		Employee engagement and loyalty but also influence how external audiences perceive a company's reputation, thereby improving organizational effectiveness

Kang & Sung (2017) Kim & Rhee (2011)	Symmetrical Internal Communication		to promote employee advocacy behavior for the organization.
Bettencourt & Brown (2003) Fullerton (2011)	Employee Advocacy		Helps the organization reach out to external publics such as friends, family, and acquaintances of employees
Schweitzer & Lyons (2008)	Employee Advocacy		attract potential candidates
Seiling (2008)	Employee support by disseminating positive information on social networks		Helps organizations seek reputational benefits for the organization
Frederiksen (2015)	The organization has a program to mobilize employee support		Helps companies attract and develop new business.
Frederiksen (2016)	Become a brand advocate		Helps employees differentiate themselves from their peers by developing their personal brand, creating a variety of benefits such as increasing company visibility, facilitating engagement with current customers, and attracting new business activities.
Frank (2015)	Employee Advocacy		Increases the organization's reputation and plays an important role in managing emerging issues (crisis communication)
Elsaied (2019) Shehawy (2018)	Supportive leadership, employee voice behavior, and organizational outcomes	Employee Advocacy	Influences employee work attitudes, such as job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and turnover intention.

### CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

The research endeavors to uncover that employee backing for an organization can manifest through verbal as well as non-verbal channels. Therefore, this study contributes to the existing body of research on employee supportiveness toward organizations and offers insights into the impact of internal communication within higher education in Vietnam. This research also fills gaps in studies concerning public relations, employee support behaviors towards organizations, and its findings will contribute deep insights into the relationship between organization-employee-brand. Lecturers understand that employees are also considered brand ambassadors, driving the success of the company's brand on social media. By knowing how to foster a supportive culture within the company, these employees become more involved in company decisions, contributing to overall growth. Universities feel more confident when using social media for marketing or public relations because they understand and have solutions to control employee social media behavior by training employees to create content that aligns with the company's desired image. The research contributes to providing businesses with additional tools to build strong relationships between lecturers and their organization, as well as among coworkers themselves. Discussion on the analysis outcomes: Assess the correlations among the research concepts. Highlight the scientific and practical values illustrated by the research results. Furthermore, suggest managerial implications to aid tourism and hotel businesses in deriving innovative experiential insights and strategies for constructing enduring brands. This involves fostering internal communication influenced by employee support for the organization, moderated by brand knowledge, and mediated by personality-brand alignment. Offer recommendations for enhancements and promoting pride in heritage to establish sustainable brand trust for the enterprise.

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