

Association for Information Systems

AIS Electronic Library (AISeL)

Pre-ICIS FRAIS 2022

French (FRAIS)

12-2022

Conceptualizing outcomes of Employee Advocacy platforms

Anaya Kumar

Université Paris-Saclay, Univ Evry, IMT-BS, LITEM

Anuragini Shirish

Université Paris-Saclay, Univ Evry, IMT-BS, LITEM

Imed Boughzala

Université Paris-Saclay, Univ Evry, IMT-BS, LITEM

Follow this and additional works at: https://aisel.aisnet.org/icis_risques2022

Recommended Citation

Kumar, Anaya; Shirish, Anuragini; and Boughzala, Imed, "Conceptualizing outcomes of Employee Advocacy platforms" (2022). *Pre-ICIS FRAIS 2022*. 15.

https://aisel.aisnet.org/icis_risques2022/15

This material is brought to you by the French (FRAIS) at AIS Electronic Library (AISeL). It has been accepted for inclusion in Pre-ICIS FRAIS 2022 by an authorized administrator of AIS Electronic Library (AISeL). For more information, please contact elibrary@aisnet.org.

Conceptualizing outcomes of Employee Advocacy platforms

Short Paper

Anaya Kumar

Université Paris-Saclay, Univ Evry,
IMT-BS, LITEM, 91025,
Evry-Courcouronnes, France
anaya.kumar@imt-bs.eu

Anuragini Shirish

Université Paris-Saclay, Univ Evry,
IMT-BS, LITEM, 91025, Evry-
Courcouronnes, France,
anuragini.shirish@imt-bs.eu

Imed Boughzala

Université Paris-Saclay, Univ Evry,
IMT-BS, LITEM, 91025,
Evry-Courcouronnes, France
imed.boughzala@imt-bs.eu

Abstract

As companies increasingly shift from the physical workplace to hybrid/remote workplace, they need to adopt a people-centric approach to empower employees to embrace the digital workplace platforms such as employee advocacy platforms. However, there is a lack of studies that examine the extent to which such integrated platforms can foster people centric outcomes such as IT enabled employee digital advocacy (EDA) and employee digital connectedness (EDC). In this short paper, explore digital trace data (user review) and leverage needs affordances and features theory to conceptualize the core concept of EDA and EDC. We then use IT identity theory to propose a theoretical model that can be tested by future researchers. Our conceptualization contributes to the scant literature on employee digital advocacy as well as extends the current conversations within the digital workplace literature. Our work helps practioners to concretely measure such people centric outcomes using internal user reviews.

Keywords: Digital workplace, employee advocacy, connectedness, employee engagement

Introduction

Digital workplace design and implementation is a significant theme for organizations and practitioners. Use of the integrated technological platforms within the organization is the core to any digital workplace place strategy as they facilitate more efficiency, productivity, and employee engagement (Attaran et al. 2019). Currently organizations are increasingly shifting from the physical workplace to hybrid/remote workplace (Forbes 2022). In fact, companies are expected to invest \$6.8 trillion on digital transformation between 2020 and 2023 (McGarrity et al. 2021).

However, in order for companies to thrive during the digital transformation, they need to adapt a people-centric approach to ensure that their employees embrace the digital workplace (Deloitte 2021). An employee advocacy platform is one such people-centric platform that aims to not only foster employee engagement, but also improve the connection and bond between employees and their

organization within the digital workplace (Lee and Kim 2020; Williams and Schubert 2018). In fact, such platforms are supposed to also nudge employees interested in displaying organizational citizenship behavior so they can advocate for their organizations to their own social networks (Lee 2021a), thereby vicariously solving the richness and reach issue in an attention deficit disorder economy (Cassidy 2015). Some platforms that promise to cater to *employee advocacy* and *internal communication and connection needs* are Smarp, Socciable, Ambassador and Post Beyond.

The term employee advocacy (EA) is defined as “a verbal (written and spoken) or nonverbal voluntary manifestation of support, recommendation, or defense of an organization or its products by an employee to either internal or external publics” (Thelen 2020). This concept has received more recognition in the past few years as organizations have realized the benefits associated with e-word of mouth enabled by employees, also enacting the discretionary role of brand ambassadors or organizational advocates (Guillot-Soulez and Pezet 2020). By sharing positive information about the company to internal and external audiences, employees can increase brand awareness and attract new talents, subsequently influencing the firm’s financial performance and success (Kim & Rhee, 2011). We see that EA platforms are increasingly adopted by organizations of all sizes, however their efficacy have not been empirically tested by IS scholars.

While organizations experience many benefits by adopting new digital work place tools such as waste reduction and improved productivity (Attaran et al. 2019), there are a few downsides that come along with these new ways of working such as the phenomenon of ‘quiet quitting’ and ‘employee disconnection’ (Poswolsky 2022; Telford 2022). These arise when employees display signs of lack of motivation and low engagement with regards to their work as they feel disconnected from their organization (Telford 2022). We have noted this phenomenon in the recent past due to extensive shift to remote working during the pandemic. EA platforms are designed to help combat these problems as they enable employees to (re)identify and (re)engage with the organization (G2 2022; Lee 2021b; van Zoonen and Treem 2019).

In our research project we explore whether the intended value of employee advocacy and digital connectedness are empirically substantiated by looking at the reviews of EA platform users from various organizations. Before we undertake the empirically study, we would like to conceptualize these two concepts in detail as IS literature do not provide detailed discussion or validated scales to measure both employee digital advocacy and employee digital connectedness. Therefore, the first objective of this paper is to conceptualize employee digital advocacy and employee digital connectedness. In order to advance on our agenda, firstly, we leverage the actualized affordances literature (Karahanna et al. 2018) to conceptualize the two EA platform use outcomes. We then leverage the IT identity theory (Carter et al. 2020) and offer a framework that theorizes how IT identity perceptions of the user (a crucial concept that explains other IT use and usage outcomes) (Carter et al. 2020) enable employee digital advocacy and employee digital connectedness through EA platform use. We choose to incorporate IT identity as the crucial antecedent to these outcomes because the purported organizational connection and identification is solely mediated by the given IT context i.e. the EA platform use. Therefore the second objective of this paper is to theorize how IT identity contributes to employee digital advocacy and employee digital connectedness. In the future studies, we plan to test this theorized model in an empirical setting. In the forthcoming section, we introduce the literature on employee advocacy. Later, we proceed to conceptualize the two EA platform’s outcomes and finally offer a conceptual framework in the subsequent section with perspectives on future work.

Literature

Employee Advocacy

In an age where there is an overstimulation of information on digital platforms, consumers are increasingly turning towards the advice and opinions from people they know, recognize and trust. Employee advocacy acts on this understanding, whereby the employees voluntarily share positive word-of-mouth, promote, or defend their organization internally as well as to their external networks. The action of employee advocacy is predominantly conducted on social networking sites (Lee and Kim 2020; Thelen 2021). To encourage employees to voluntarily advocate for their organization, it is imperative that the employees have a good relationship with the organization, and experience sentiments such as

self-enhancement, altruism and enjoyment along with trust and commitment (Lee and Kim 2020). The above antecedents contribute towards an employee's organizational identification (the extent to which workers define themselves in terms of their membership in and association with an organization), which is an important incentive for employee advocacy as it leads them to act in the company's best interest. (Thelen and Men 2020; van Zoonen and Treem 2019). Moreover, a good system of internal communication makes the employee voice heard, in turn increases their level of satisfaction and engagement with the organization, as well as improved employee organization relationships, boosting employee advocacy (Kang and Sung 2017; Lee and Kim 2020; Men and Yue 2019). This would also mean that EA platforms that can facilitate internal communication can not only stimulate employee advocacy, but also satisfy employee-organization connection needs as well as create a positive workplace culture (G2 2022). This brings to the fore, the need to understand technological factors in addition to organizational level factors when studying the phenomenon of employee advocacy and its related instrumental and humanistic outcomes.

Although, research on employee advocacy span over a decade, only recently have researchers considered employee advocacy facilitated via social networking sites (Lee 2021b; Lee and Kim 2020). So far digital workplace literature has not delved deep into how enabling platforms such as EA platforms are used and appropriated by employees, and whether the expected outcomes from the platforms are actualized, leaving behind a knowledge void in IS literature.

Conceptualization

Actualized Affordances and the Needs-Affordances-Features (NAF) Perceptive

Actualized affordance is the "actualization of a possibility for goal-oriented action afforded by an object for a user" (Bernhard et al. 2013, p. 7). Actualized affordances enables the conceptualization of effective IS use in terms of the affordances they actualize as they work with a system to achieve their goals (Bernhard et al. 2013). In this paper, we choose to conceptualize the two outcomes of a generic EA platform as "actualized affordances" and we assume that such actualization of affordances would have involved the use of the intended features/feature sets embedded in usual EA platforms by its users. We further leverage the NAF perspective to consolidate our ideas, which states that people are driven to use a technology when the actualized affordances, through feature use, satisfy their psychological needs (Karahanna et al. 2018). Some of the features that are common to EA platforms are content sharing, engagement tracking, gamification and KPI tracking.

Employee digital advocacy (EDA)

EDA is the act of an employee advocating for their company to their personal networks digitally via their social networking sites (e.g. LinkedIn, Twitter, Facebook etc.). We conceptualize EDA into two actualized affordances: *content sharing* and *self-presentation*.

In prior literature, employee advocacy behavior is described as "contributing" or "producing" content rather than consuming or sharing (Lee and Kim 2020), however, since EDA is conducted through digital platforms that already produce company content, employees are only required to 'consume' the content and 'share' it in most cases. Although some EA platforms would allow the employees to produce their own content as well, this is not the generic feature in EA platforms. Employee digital advocacy could therefore be enacted when an employee shares positive company content to their personal social networks. As per IS literature, sharing of content is termed as an affordance (Karahanna et al. 2018). Thus, we conceptualize that the *content sharing affordance* should be an essential element of EDA.

According the prior literature, employee advocacy is also a form of self-presentation that is often self-enhancing in nature (Kim et al. 2022; Lee and Kim 2020). This means that employees choose to present themselves on social media in a manner that promotes their self-concept as well as protects them from negative information, which in turn gains them positive recognition and impressions from not only their external networks but also their company (Lee and Kim 2020; Ollier-Malaterre et al. 2013). When employees have a high level of identification with their organization, they are motivated to present themselves positively as representatives of the organization (Lee and Kim 2020). As per IS literature, self-presentation is termed as an affordance that enables users of technologies to reveal and present

information related to themselves in a social media setting (Karahanna et al. 2018). Hence, we posit that, *self-presentation affordance* should be another essential element of EDA.

Employee digital connectedness (EDC)

As per prior research, employee connectedness is viewed as the employees’ ability to engage with each other, stakeholders and customers, with information and knowledge, and with ideas when using digital workplace tools (Dery et al. 2017). Digital workplace tools such as EA platforms offer digital connectivity. Such connectivity is usually pervasive and ubiquitous in nature. It offers them the possibilities to redesign work practices in a way that allows individuals to connect with people, information and activities anytime, anywhere (Dery et al. 2017). From this definition, we conceptualize two affordances that form EDC: *information empowerment* (“connect with information”) and *social empowerment* (“connect with people and activities”). The scales for these affordances are presented in table 1. We further develop on these affordances below.

The *information empowerment affordance*, when actualized, should enable employees to remain current with company news, enabling internal communication that is ‘open and transparent’ and ‘positive’ (Thelen and Men 2020). This means that they are constantly aware of the positive decisions and actions of their organization, enabling them to develop a high-quality relationship with the organization, and a sense of pride of where they work (Thelen 2021). This should lead employees to feel more connected to their organization (Sievert and Scholz 2017), and lead to supportive communicative behaviors. Hence, we conceptualize that the information empowerment affordance is an essential element of EDC.

The *social empowerment affordance*, when actualized, should enable employees to actively engage with and use the EA platform features to actualize communication, collaboration and competition affordances (Karahanna et al. 2018). By being able to continuously stay in touch with colleagues and customers, and participating in company online activities, employees should feel more involved and connected to the organization (Markos and Sridevi 2010; Sievert and Scholz 2017). Therefore, we posit the social empowerment affordance is an essential element of EDC. Both these affordances can help reduce the ‘distanced’ and ‘disconnected’ feeling between the employee and their organization. A preliminary list of items to measure these concepts in an empirical manner is provided in Table 1 below.

EA platform outcomes	Actualized affordances	Proposed Items for Future Scale development
Employee digital advocacy	Content sharing (Karahanna et al. 2018)	- <i>EA platform enables me to distribute content unrelated to myself (i.e. my company/employer related) to others in a social media setting.</i>
	Self-presentation (Lee and Kim 2020)	- <i>I feel good when I can share about my experience at my company/employer to my social media</i> - <i>I like presenting myself on social media as a member of a successful company (i.e., your employer)</i>
Employee digital connectedness	Information empowerment (Shao et al. 2020)	- <i>Getting information from the EA platform is very fast</i> - <i>The information from the EA platform is objective and accurate</i>
	Social empowerment (Karahanna et al. 2018)	- <i>I can directly communicate with my co-workers using the EA platform</i> - <i>I am able to collaborate with my co-workers on projects</i> - <i>I can engage in friendly competition with my colleagues using the gamification features of the EA platform.</i>

Table 1: Actualized affordance scales

Conceptual Framework

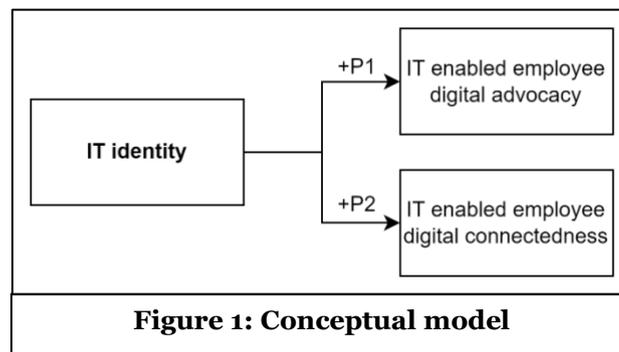
In line with our second research objective, we use the concept of IT identity, a crucial intermediary variable in explaining individuals’ post-adoption technology use (Kumar et al. 2022). IT identity is

defined as “the extent to which a person views use of an IT as integral to his or her sense of self, where a strong IT identity represents positive self-identification”(Carter et al. 2020). IT identity influences a user to want to master a technology’s feature set (Carter et al. 2020). Therefore, in the context of EA platforms, once the employee/user develops a level of IT identity with the platform, they will increase their usage of the features that actualize the aforementioned affordances, referring back to the NAF perspective (Karahanna et al. 2018). Furthermore, identity literature states that workplace platform identification can also increase the user’s connection with coworkers, leading to the EDC outcome, as well as job satisfaction which is an antecedent to EDA (Alahmad et al. 2018). Thus allowing us to explain the link between IT identity, EDC and EDA respectively. We intend to further develop our theorization efforts and propose the following propositions:

P1: IT identity will increase users’ employee digital advocacy

P2: IT identity will increase users’ employee digital connectedness

Figure 1 shows a model the presents the two propositions.



Future work

The next steps for this project is to test the above conceptual framework. We have collected textual data or the ‘digital expressions’ of users of EA platforms extracted in the form of reviews. The data collection was conducted on a reliable third party website. By collecting the digital expressions of users, we aim to capture whether user interactions with the EA platforms are generally successful, and test whether the above outcomes are effectuated. The data will be analyzed using the Sphinx software. In order to do so, we will have to create a thesaurus using the scales in table 1 for the affordances, and using the IT identity scales by Carter et al. (2020). The thesaurus will be used to conduct lexical content analysis to test our model on our data.

References

- Alahmad, R., Carter, M., Pierce, C., and Robert, L. 2018. "The Impact of Enterprise Social Media Identity on Job Performance and Job Satisfaction," in: Americas Conference on Information Systems.
- Attaran, M., Attaran, S., and Kirkland, D. 2019. "The Need for Digital Workplace: Increasing Workforce Productivity in the Information Age," *International Journal of Enterprise Information Systems* (15:1), pp. 1-23.
- Bernhard, E., Recker, J., and Burton-Jones, A. 2013. "Understanding the Actualization of Affordances: A Study in the Process Modeling Context," *Proceedings of the 34th International Conference on Information Systems*
- Carter, M., Petter, S., Grover, V., and Thatcher, J. B. 2020. "Information Technology Identity: A Key Determinant of It Feature and Exploratory Usage," *MIS Quarterly* (44).
- Cassidy, J. 2015. "The Attention-Deficit-Disorder Economy." from <https://www.newyorker.com/news/john-cassidy/twitter-buzzfeed-hurting-economic-growth>
- Deloitte. 2021. "Rebooting the Digital Workplace." Retrieved 02.02.2023, from <https://www2.deloitte.com>
- Dery, K., Sebastian, I. M., and van der Meulen, N. 2017. "Digital Workplace Is Key to Digital Innovation," *MIS Quarterly Executive* (16:2), pp. 135-152.

- Forbes. 2022. "Remote Work Is Here to Stay and Will Increase into 2023, Experts Say." Forbes, from <https://www.forbes.com/sites/bryanrobinson/2022/02/01/remote-work-is-here-to-stay-and-will-increase-into-2023-experts-say>
- G2. 2022. "Best Employee Advocacy Software." Retrieved 10.11.2021, from <https://www.g2.com/categories/employee-advocacy>
- Guillot-Soulez, C., and Pezet, E. 2020. *Marque Employeur Et Travail Expérientiel: La Grh Dans L'économie Des Marques*. Vuibert.
- Kang, M., and Sung, M. 2017. "How Symmetrical Employee Communication Leads to Employee Engagement and Positive Employee Communication Behaviors: The Mediation of Employee-Organization Relationships," *Journal of Communication Management* (21:1), pp. 82-102.
- Karahanna, E., Xin Xu, S., Xu, Y., and Zhang, N. A. 2018. "The Needs–Affordances–Features Perspective for the Use of Social Media," *MIS Quarterly* (42:3), pp. 737-756.
- Kim, T.-Y., David, E. M., Chen, T., and Liang, Y. 2022. "Authenticity or Self-Enhancement? Effects of Self-Presentation and Authentic Leadership on Trust and Performance," *Journal of Management* (49:3), pp. 944-973.
- Kumar, A., Shirish, A., and Boughzala, I. 2022. "Encouraging Employee Advocacy Platform Use: The Crucial Role of It Identity " in: *AIM 2022 : 27ème Conférence de l'Association Information & Management*.
- Lee, Y. 2021a. "Bridging Employee Advocacy in Anonymous Social Media and Internal Corporate Social Responsibility (Csr)," *Management Decision* (59:10), pp. 2473-2495.
- Lee, Y. 2021b. "Linking Internal Csr with the Positive Communicative Behaviors of Employees: The Role of Social Exchange Relationships and Employee Engagement," *Social Responsibility Journal* (18:2), pp. 348-367.
- Lee, Y., and Kim, K. H. 2020. "Enhancing Employee Advocacy on Social Media: The Value of Internal Relationship Management Approach," *Corporate Communications: An International Journal* (26:2), pp. 311-327.
- Markos, S., and Sridevi, M. S. 2010. "Employee Engagement: The Key to Improving Performance," *International journal of business and management* (5:12), p. 89.
- McGarrity, L., Moller, T. H., and Ulrich, P. 2021. "Four Steps to Increase Returns on Your Digital Investments." *Harvard Business Review*
- Men, L. R., and Yue, C. A. 2019. "Creating a Positive Emotional Culture: Effect of Internal Communication and Impact on Employee Supportive Behaviors," *Public Relations Review* (45:3), p. 101764.
- Ollier-Malaterre, A., Rothbard, N. P., and Berg, J. M. 2013. "When Worlds Collide in Cyberspace: How Boundary Work in Online Social Networks Impacts Professional Relationships," *Academy of Management Review* (38:4), pp. 645-669.
- Poswolsky, A. S. 2022. "How Leaders Can Build Connection in a Disconnected Workplace." *Harvard Business Review*, from <https://hbr.org/2022/01/how-leaders-can-build-connection-in-a-disconnected-workplace>
- Shao, Z., Zhang, L., Chen, K., and Zhang, C. 2020. "Examining User Satisfaction and Stickiness in Social Networking Sites from a Technology Affordance Lens: Uncovering the Moderating Effect of User Experience," *Industrial Management & Data Systems* (120:7), pp. 1331-1360.
- Sievert, H., and Scholz, C. 2017. "Engaging Employees in (at Least Partly) Disengaged Companies. Results of an Interview Survey within About 500 German Corporations on the Growing Importance of Digital Engagement Via Internal Social Media," *Public Relations Review* (43:5), pp. 894-903.
- Telford, T. 2022. "'Quiet Quitting' Isn't Really About Quitting. Here Are the Signs." *The Washington Post*, from <https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2022/08/21/quiet-quitting-what-to-know/>
- Thelen, P. D. 2021. "Employee Advocates: Unlocking Their Power through Internal Communication," in *Current Trends and Issues in Internal Communication*, L.R. Men and A. Tkalac Verčič (eds.). Cham: Springer International Publishing, pp. 75-92.
- Thelen, P. D., and Men, L. R. 2020. "Commentary: The Role of Internal Communication in Fostering Employee Advocacy: An Exploratory Study," *International Journal of Business Communication*, pp. 1-14.
- van Zoonen, W., and Treem, J. W. 2019. "The Role of Organizational Identification and the Desire to Succeed in Employees' Use of Personal Twitter Accounts for Work," *Computers in Human Behavior* (100), pp. 26-34.
- Williams, S. P., and Schubert, P. 2018. "Designs for the Digital Workplace," *Procedia Computer Science* (138), pp. 478-485.

