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EMPLOYEE ADVOCACY AS A MARKETING STRATEGY TO POWER BRAND PROMOTION: AN EMPLOYEE PERSPECTIVE

Abstract. *Employee Advocacy is an emerging and cost-effective concept of employee amplification to market products and services by enabling employees to build and share the company's brand contents through social media platforms. The paper summarizes the available research-based contents as well as articles and blogs of experts in the field of digital and social media marketing. The study primarily intended to assess employees' awareness and perception of various aspects of employee advocacy. It has identified forms and types of contents shared and social media platforms now used by the employees in the automotive sector for leveraging brand promotion and communicating with the target market. The study has been designed as a descriptive research paper based on the empirical data collected from a sample of 102 employees from automobile showrooms in the southern districts of Kerala using a snowball sampling technique. A questionnaire was drafted with the help of google forms and administered among the respondents via email and WhatsApp. Two-dimensional plot of correspondence analysis, Descriptive statistics, Mann-Whitney U test, and Kruskal-Wallis H test was applied to present and describe the empirical data and to draw inference about the significance of the difference in the awareness and perception of employees about the aspects of employee advocacy on brand promotion in terms of demographic factors. Awareness level and understanding of the elements of employee advocacy is found very low and significantly different among employees according to the designation. This paper also indicates that the social media policies and guidelines of the companies were not rightly imparted to the employees. That's why the involvement and creative use of the potentials of social media platforms by the employees were not up to a remarkable level. Employees perceived that employee advocacy as a cost-effective brand promotion strategy for the future, and it demands the employer's motivation, recognition, and rewards for inspiring employees to be brand ambassadors. This research addressed a relatively new concept in which there has been no extensive empirical researches and calls on the attention of the market as well as academic researchers for contributing the unexplored areas of the novel and powerful idea for utilizing human resources in a platform where they are interested and involved.*

Keywords: content marketing, digital marketing, employee amplification, employee engagement, social media marketing.

Introduction. In today's modern age, no business can move forward without incorporating new types of marketing strategies for their products. While the scope of marketing is expanding, new trends in marketing are sprouting. Traditional marketing has become digital marketing, and social media marketing is evolved as one of the key strategies of marketing in this digital age. Social media has become the biggest platform for communication between individuals and organizations. Any type of content viz. text, images, videos, and other multimedia materials can be easily transmitted and disseminated to a mass of people at a minimal cost. The major social networks of the modern era, such as Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp, WeChat, Instagram, LinkedIn, Tik Tok, QQ, QZone, Flickr, etc. have unlimited possibilities in the field of marketing of products and services. When the organic reach and trust of social media posts are diminishing, it is essential to think strategically about the new social media strategies that companies

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can utilize to promote their brand and result in higher levels of customer and employee loyalty (Durfy, 2018). Digital marketing strategies can influence buyers to a great extent. Corporates can only survive if they understand and adapt to changing consumer needs and behavior over time. Social media enable the timely dissemination of marketing materials, understanding of consumer responses, and behavioral patterns for the corresponding adjustment in the marketing mix. It is observed that social media platforms and brands' employees are sometimes more effective and powerful than traditional advertising channels for creating brand awareness and facilitate easy comparison of various brands (Boudaher, 2019; Sinha et al., 2016; Odhiambo, 2012). Social media marketing strategies aid the automobile industry in creating brand awareness and education among customers (The Digital Gazette, 2018), building a strong bond relationship between company and customers, increasing customer loyalty and retention, improving internal communication, and improving customer service (Devi, 2015). Corporates now use offline and online promotional methods to keep the brand alive and noticeable (Caulton, 2018). But small businesses face specific challenges in brand promotion in online platforms as they have fewer resources to control online damages from negative comments and posts about the brands (Odhiambo, 2012). Overload of contents without substances and quality, trustworthiness, and cost of being online become pitfalls; the management has to diversify the social media strategy to another level to fetch effective results in brand promotion from their pocket.

The automobile industry sector is one of the highly competitive segments in the world. The manufacturers are keen to bring a lot of innovations and technology updates in each facelift and try new concepts in the market year by year. Each brand is made highly competitive in terms of technological changes in the utility and design, in keeping with the ever-changing demands and expectations of the consumer. Society of Indian Automobile Manufacturers reports that the Indian automobile industry experiences the worst downturn in the last two decades. This global economic meltdown, Goods and Services Tax collections, transition BS-IV to BS-VI emission norms, and the outbreak of pandemics, etc. put the industry under pressure. Production was curtailed due to the nation-wide lockdown. However, the industry expects a resurgence in sales due to factors such as the availability of low-cost skilled Labour and cheap steel production. In the current scenario, this industry needs to cut the huge marketing and promotional costs (Boudaher, 2019; Paliwal, 2019) and move to more effective marketing strategies to gear up the revival process. According to (G-Rank, 2019), the automobile industry occupies more than 8 percent of the total digital marketing spending to find solutions to generate leads in the market. Majority of the automobile manufacturers are focusing on inbound marketing strategies for targeting the potential buyers who are not aware of the marketer's brand, i.e., they are focusing on digital marketing strategies such as social media marketing, virtual showrooms and video advertisements on online platforms (Adsyndicate, 2018) because buyers in this sector conduct online research in social media (Kamra, 2015; Grover & Mandan, 2017) to make a purchase decision based on recommendation, online reviews, feedbacks from the users than their personal choice (Boats, 2019; G-Rank, 2019). However, only a few automobiles manufacturers embraced cost-effective digital marketing strategies from a holistic perspective (Sinha et al., 2016; Povaiah, 2017). It is seen that online and social media platforms play a crucial role in the promotion of brands and customer relationships in the automobile sector. The use of cost-effective digital marketing strategies became a necessity to compete in the market. The companies must note that an automotive customer today, takes about 90 days to finalize the brand because of his social presence (Raza, 2017).

A new strategy of digital marketing with help of employees for promoting the brand contents, one of the cost-effective (Sinha et al., 2016; Povaiah, 2017) and reliable methods of approaching the target market with constant contents, i.e., employee advocacy. Social media offers huge opportunities for this kind of marketing strategies to tap better results than expensive traditional marketing channels (Odhiambo, 2012). But the majority of the companies in the automobile sector have not yet begun utilizing

the strategy in full-fledged mode (Sinha et al., 2016; Povaiah, 2017). In addition to the technological and organizational rules of employee advocacy programs, management motivation (Terpening, 2016), employee awareness and willingness (Levinson, 2018), and customer understanding of such content marketing are critical to the successful implementation of the program. Therefore, this study intends to address the research gap by raising some research questions: what is the level of awareness of employees about the employee advocacy strategy? what are the perceptions of employees towards the effect of employee advocacy on brand promotion? What kind of content do the employees share? What social media platforms used by employees for sharing the content?

The study is intended to discuss the research problem and filling the research gap identified. From the review of literature, the researcher understands that employee advocacy in the Indian automobile sector has yet to be improved. It is assumed that awareness, willingness, and perception of employees play a crucial role in the successful implementation of advocacy programs. Therefore, the following objectives were set for addressing the research problem: to identify the kinds of contents shared by the employees via social media or digital platforms; to assess the level of awareness of employees about the aspects of employee advocacy and to assess the perception of employees towards the effect of employee advocacy on brand promotion.

Literature Review. Brand promotion refers to the way of informing, reminding, convincing, and motivating consumers to choose a product or service of a brand. It is a marketing strategy of promoting brand awareness among consumers (Adsyndicate, 2018) to convince and influence them to choose a brand and make them loyal customers by distinguishing products or services from its competitors (Shaw, 2019) by distinguishing products or services from its competitors. It is done through marketing a brand content through social or traditional media and keeping the employees engaged with the company (Bloom, 2018). Promoting a brand is all about creating differences among brands and helping consumers to identify the products and services that clarify the decision to buy (Singh, 2013). Companies adopt different strategies for promoting the existing brand and new brands where the former needs less financial outlays and shorter periods, and the latter requires significant financial outlays and a more extended period with no guarantee of success (Malik et al., 2018).

Moreover, brands face stiff competition from the market and struggle to attain consumers' attention, especially small businesses (Bloom, 2018). But brand promotion is inevitable to any organization as it determines the kind of connections between the company and the customers. It provides satisfaction, assures quality, and communicates the brand contents to the customers to make wise decisions to buy a product or service (Droom, 2020). It amplifies the positivity of the brand by remarking the experiences shares by the employees (Hall, 2017). Spreading positive thoughts and experiences with a brand through social media leads to brand loyalty, which enhances competitiveness and attention. But bad comments and lower ratings online can affect the chances of getting a deal. The industry has to take care of the online reputation management to jump over the hurdles of being in the digital environment (Boats, 2019). Technicality and reliability of the online contents are the major areas needed to be improved to convince and influence potential buyers (Sinha et al., 2016). For a customer, choosing a brand is a difficult task with opportunity losses. People continuously seek reliable information to make decisions accordingly. It is in this context that digital brand promotion becomes relevant to promote information relates to standard and unique features, price, services, and other schemes, convictions to differentiate brands, create and stabilize demand for the product and build brand equity and image. «Employee advocacy» a recent trend in digital marketing strategy is brought to light as an online solution for effective brand promotion in automobile sector.

Employee Advocacy means employees promote the brands and values of the employer company with their supportive actions through social media. They will support the contents, products, or services for which they are marketing. It is considered the most reliable way to promote a brand because the level of

employee involvement in the promotional activities of the brands they work for is high. It is the result of engaging employees to speak up for the brand they work for (Ciceron, 2015). Employee advocacy refers to the willingness of employees to share values of the company and communications on brands with their social networking sites (Latvala, 2017). This marketing strategy has become one of the hot topics in the current marketing era, and social media adds new dimensions to attract and retain new customers, encourage higher levels of employee engagement and to increase consumer trust in brands (Wasylyuk, 2015). Employee advocacy is seen as a strategy to motivate consumers and brand building and promotion by leveraging the potential of social media sites. Companies persuade employees to use their products and then share their personal experience through their social media accounts to gain wider access to people who are more likely to read information shared by friends or connections they trust. Publishing a content as a social media post or a blog article about the company or brands by the employees will get more specific attention from a good number of people in his friends or followers list than a costly direct advertisement by the company for the cold audience (Mallick, 2020) or posts of activist consumers, academics, CEOs and media spokespeople (Ciceron, 2015). Even an average employee has more connections than the organization's official channel (Payne, 2018), and brand contents are shared more frequently within personal connections than official brand channels (Frank, 2015). Employee advocates have the power to enhance the credibility of a brand (Boudaher, 2019). The strategy has as universal acceptance where any organization can tap the possibilities of social media marketing. Employee advocacy is presented as a solution to the economic way of branded content promotion, maintaining the social media presence of companies, and motivating consumers to respond positively to brands. It can provide more transparent solutions for addressing some of the key challenges faced by manufacturers today viz. increased use of ad blockers by the people, highly expensive advertisements, less effective email marketing strategies, and lack of trusted referrals (Seel, 2018). Corporates have already started to follow the new trend in marketing strategy, which is gaining popularity in the market on the realization of unlimited marketing potential lies with the employees and workforce as a most valuable but underutilized asset (Boudaher, 2019; Fisher, 2019; Levinson, 2018) for gaining customers who seek for trusted information and brand preference (Terpening, 2016). People are less likely to trust messages from companies as compared to the percentage of people who trust recommendations from people they know. Thus, effective feedback campaigns through social media platforms by employees help to build consumers' trust in brands (Povaiah, 2017). Employee advocacy is a voluntary activity of satisfied and loyal employees out of genuine interest, so organizations need to create and activate a loyal group of employees to ensure active participation in brand promotion activities (Levinson, 2018). It is not just a new business strategy in digital marketing, and it is an unavoidable necessity of modern business. It offers many opportunities for corporate brands viz. increasing internal collaboration, humanizing the corporations, and reducing the consumer-brand trust gap by creating a lasting impression on existing and prospective customers (Nguyen, 2014). This is a new strategy to promote brands sustainably (Levinson, 2018) in which an internal administrative team is promoting content for promoter employees to consume and share via their private social media accounts. Some employees pride themselves on sharing brand content because they are passionate about the dignity of working for a reputable company, and others view advocacy as an opportunity to enhance their career prospects by constantly maintaining their social presence (Frederiksen, 2016). It relies on individual expertise on social media platforms to support the branding needs of the company (Smarp, 2016). Employee advocacy takes different dimensions in the way of execution. Develop a content schedule and a calendar to customize the content needed for customers, removing ambiguity, and to highlight experiences and stories about the brands. As part of its efforts to achieve maximum effective customer engagement, share content on social media platforms, promote social customer service to detect and resolve customer issues, and leverage social sales to tap the power of networking through social media (Kruse, 2015). Modern employee advocacy aims at promoting brand-

related content, news and information through employees' personal social media networks to increase brand awareness (Bekolli, 2019); gaining peer-to-peer trust (Boudaher, 2019); attract top talent; improve social selling efforts and boost employee satisfaction (Holzman, 2019). Employee Advocacy is not like sharing funny contents on social media platforms to get most views and responses but a thoughtful and planned procedure with clear objectives. It is essential to know the advocacy goals and content strategy in organizations' point of view. Aimless content will not hit the target. It requires good faith in the brand content that the company produces. Only then the staff seeks discussions on social networking sites with others who share similar interests or concerns (Frederiksen, 2016). Not all employees working in an organization are satisfied with the work-related matters. Therefore, it is not expected that all employees will do the same in advocacy. Forcing everyone to do so would seriously affect the company's reputation and their material will not look genuine to the consumers (Katila, 2016). So, start with the most passionate group of satisfied and loyal employees who are active on social media to launch the program for the first time (White, 2020). In the long run, train, nurture, and satisfy (Ciceron, 2015) additional staff who are not socially and technologically savvy with the help of staff already in the same program. Then, educate employees about the importance and value of advocacy for improving the company's thought leadership position, the promotion of their brand contents, reach new audiences, and for improving employee engagements (McClure & Parkinson, 2016) and train employees technologically to prepare attractive contents regularly. Management should understand what motivates employees to engage in advocacy (Terpening, 2016). Creating a culture of organizational support and inspiration is the first step in turning the employees into brand advocates (Bekolli, 2019). It is needed to continuously watch the content postings by the employees, measure the success of advocacy programme by checking organic reach, metrics related to traffic on social media (McClure & Parkinson, 2016) and the engagement rate. Once the program is implemented, motivate employees to do it regularly and keep pace in the advocacy process and empirically measure the outcome of the advocacy program by tracking hits, responses, sharing rates and queries based on postings (Zoukelman, 2018). Employees are to be aligned with the overall brand content and social media strategy (Smarp, 2016). It is better to look into the publishing quality content rather than looking at the quantity of postings by the employees (Katila, 2016). (Morhart et al., 2009) describes that employee advocacy as brand-building behaviour from frontline employees. Such employees interact with customers and act the role of brand representatives. Employee advocates are empowered and personally motivated by management to not only share company content but also to discuss current professional issues on social media as part of enhancing online reputation (Adsyndicate, 2018). A successful employee advocate can create a win-win situation by leveraging the personal and corporate brand advocacy and strengthening the relationship between the individual and the organization (Kuutsa, 2016). Employees must feel part of the company and brand (Hall, 2017). Thus, employees become the brand ambassadors, valuable spokesperson and secret digital public relation weapon (Raman, 2017) of the company in the digital marketplace (Katila, 2016) and the brand will get a human voice that can build up authentic relationships with the target market (Payne, 2018). Employers need to ensure employees participation in brand promotion and management (Richardson et al., 2010) as part of maintaining sustainability of employee engagement initiatives, a necessity in a challenging operating environment (Arrowsmith, 2013) Therefore, it is imperative to understand more about the new trend of social media marketing strategy «employee advocacy» and the perceived effect of advocacy on brand promotion in the automobile sector.

In short, employee advocacy is a recent trend in digital marketing strategy where companies empower the employees to share brand content with their social networks to enable trustworthy interactions with the target market. Although the phenomenon is a topic of discussion in current marketing strategies, the academic literature and research on the topic is nominal and still need to be explored. It is mainly covered in blogs and magazines. There are no extensive research-based contents available on brand promotion

through employee advocacy in the automobile sector in India or abroad. From the available literature, the researcher has identified the research gap in the effect of employee advocacy on brand promotion in the perception of employees in the automobile sector and aims to bridge the gap based on the results of the study.

Methodology and research methods. The research is descriptive. The snowball sampling technique is applied for selecting the participants for the study. Primary data for empirical examination of the objectives were collected from a group of 102 employees from automobile showrooms in southern districts of Kerala by administering an online questionnaire prepared under google doc. environment. The link to fill out the questionnaire was sent to the respondent via email and WhatsApp. Secondary data were mainly collected from journal articles, magazines, websites, and blogs from management experts. Descriptive statistics like arithmetic mean and standard deviation were used for describing the scaled data. Categorical data were presented as percentages to the total responses. Specific hypotheses were formulated based on the research problem and objectives of the study. The demography of the employees makes a significant difference in the level of awareness and the perceived effect of employee advocacy on brand promotion. Non-parametric inferential statistics viz. Mann Whitney U test and Kruskal Wallis H test are used for testing the hypotheses formulated based on the research problem. Two-dimensional plots of correspondence analysis were used to picture the most preferred social media sites and the type of contents often shared by the employees of different designations. The study suffers from certain pitfalls. Since the respondents are selected from automotive showrooms in southern districts Kerala, the empirical findings may not be generalized to the rest of the world. As a promising strategy, there is no adequate research-based literature available on employee advocacy and amplification. Therefore, the researcher relied on blogs and website contents by management experts across the world to build a theoretical background.

Results and Discussion. A total of 102 employees from automobile showrooms participated in this research. Most of the employees participated were male [77 percent] and aged between 26 years and 35 years old [50 percent]. In terms of job position, 47 percent of them were sales executives of the organizations.

Forms of Content Management by Employees. Automobile manufacturers spend a massive amount on digital marketing (Boudaher, 2019; G-Rank, 2019; Paliwal, 2019) to promote its brand and to keep constant relations with the target market. However, the empirical result proves that employee advocacy has not been adequately used in the automobile sector in India. Only a small percentage of employees utilize the potential of social media platforms for promoting brand content. It is found that photos [100 percent], short videos [76.5 percent] and best practices [67.6 percent] of their brands and services are enthusiastically shared by the employees through social platforms rather than their contributions in administering content brainstorming [11.8 percent] content calendar [14.7 percent] and in providing social services [17.6 percent]. A content calendar is a schedule prepared to plan what, when, and where (Dean, 2019) to add contents in social media as part of employee advocacy. It is important to harmonize the act of effective content sharing. Understanding the elements and execution of it demands strategic preparations (Cooper & Tien, 2020), technical training, and orientation. Content brainstorming is a strategy of grabbing and structuring creative ideas for creative content preparation (Benz, 2018) and management via social media. Organizations must provide adequate training and guidance to keep their employees engaged. (Russell, 2018). What can be understood from this matter is that employees are not motivated and technically trained adequately to be aware of and creative in employee advocacy via social media platforms to boost the company. And just like everyone else does, the sharing of photos and some short videos only works through social media. Other contents are not properly managed to reach out to potential buyers, as referred to in figure 1.

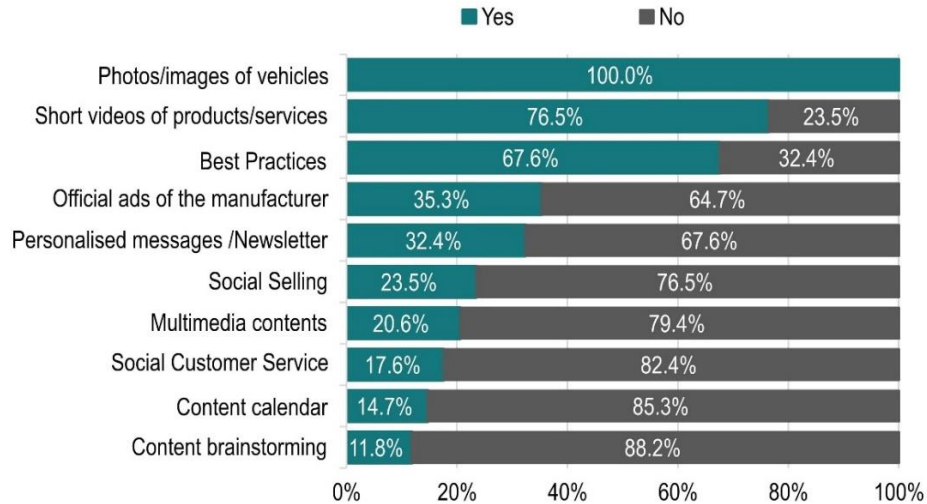


Figure 1. Forms of Contents Managed via Social Media

Source: Primary data collected by the researcher

Types of Contents Shared by the Employees. The brand content that employees share via social media is different. Currently, employees share these types of contents not based on a clear plan or part of an employee advocacy program, instead of for maintaining the company's social presence (Frederiksen, 2016). Correspondence analysis depicts that, depending on the designation of employees, the content they want to share is different. Managers usually promote content about the company's growth, CSR activities, Job offers and functions, company accomplishments, and other general matters of the industry. Sales executives concentrate on the details of the vehicles and upcoming brands, whereas the showroom hostess focuses on discounts and offers by the company to the consumers. It is particularly noted that technicians are also interested in sharing certain content related to customer winnings and job posting in their showrooms. However, they are not in front of marketing assignments. It is learned from the piece of empirical analysis that employees show interest in sharing content via personal social media accounts irrespective of their designation and official responsibilities. This is a matter of great importance. The management should utilize the positive attitude and willingness of employees to create a new revolution in the digital marketing of the company.

Social Media and Tools for Content Sharing and Management. Social media platforms are widely used for content sharing and brand building in a myriad of ways to increase the sales and for maintaining the online presence to converse with the target audience and followers constantly and for digital advertisements. Social Media has grown up far beyond a platform for sharing photos, videos, and other content to a small group. Now it has been professionally utilizing for sharing of ideas and thoughts in various formats privately or publicly, for learning what is happening in the world and the response of the people towards the events and issues at a faster pace than the traditional mediums, for interacting effectively with the followers and target audience and for marketing the contents of the organizations (Gonzales, 2019). It is learned from the analysis that the employees commonly use Facebook, WhatsApp, and YouTube for sharing content irrespective of their designation. In addition to the widely used social media platforms, Sales executives and showroom hostess rely on Instagram and Twitter, too, and managers use personal blogs, LinkedIn, and own websites for sharing brand information with potential buyers. However, the participants were silent about social media tools such as lead generation tools,

analytical tools, content creation, and curation tools, content discovery tools, and filtering tools. What is understood from the fact? Either the employees are unaware of the social media tools used by the manufacturer, or they do not do anything as part of advocacy other than sharing some content related to the brand through social media to inform about their product or showroom details.

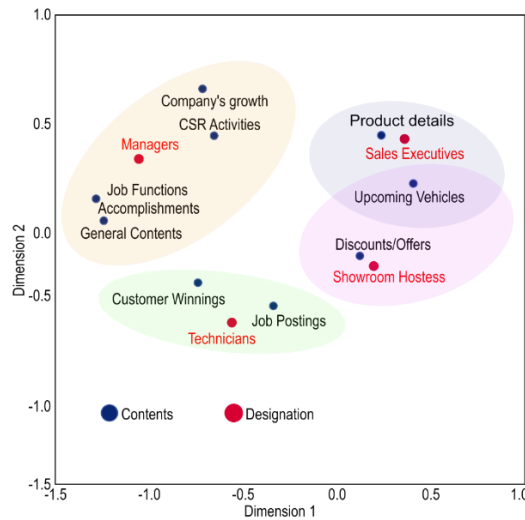


Figure 2. Types of Contents shared

Source: Primary data collected by the researcher

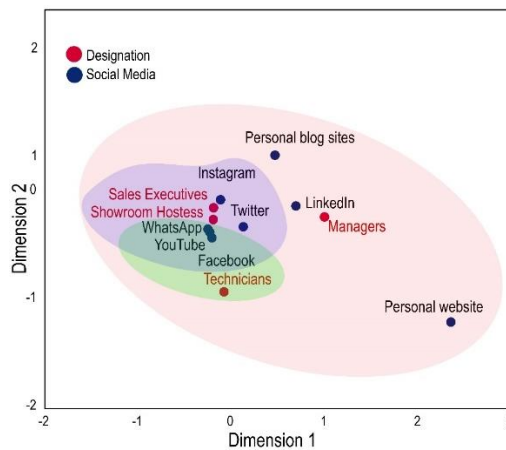


Figure 3. Preference of Social Media Platforms

Source: Primary data collected by the researcher.

Awareness of Employees. Employee advocacy programs have unlimited potential in leveraging the company's brand in the target market (Trier, 2019). But employees can effectively communicate with the target market only when they have knowledge about the brand needs, employee advocacy mechanism, and its platforms (Russell, 2018). Empirical data have been collected from the employees to understand

their level of awareness about employee advocacy and related aspects. It is noticed that employees are aware of digital marketing techniques and at least familiar with Social Media Marketing, Social Selling, and Social Recruiting. However, they are not acquainted with the term employee advocacy and related methods. Employee awareness levels associated with content brainstorming, content calendar, social customer service, and communication are found below. The lack of knowledge in this area makes it clear that there has been a lot of backlash in the employees' content management. Employees, in real sense, have not understood what employee advocacy is. It is clear from the result that the employees are not aware of advocacy aspects and policy of the company (Parker et al., 2019), other than to share some of the company-related and automotive contents through social media, i.e., employees and their social networks are not utilized more smartly. Why are the employees not aware of this cost-effective program? A considerable gap is still there to be filled that causes some consequences in the content marketing of the automobile sector. The management has a more significant role to play to nurture your employees to share content. Make them aware of contents in a variety of forms and accessible, inspire employees to share, and frame a social media policy to regulate content marketing (Skrba, 2017). Therefore, it is imperative in the current situation that employees be given explicit training and orientation in an employee advocacy program.

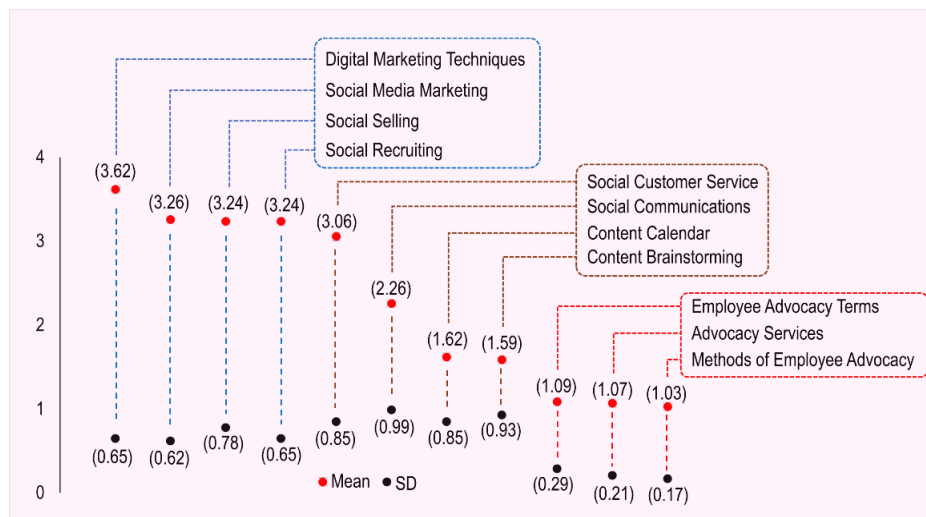


Figure 4. Awareness of Employees about Employee Advocacy

Source: Primary data collected by the researcher

Hypotheses Testing – Awareness. This research is based on certain hypotheses about the awareness of employees towards advocacy aspects based on their gender and designation. The normality of the variable awareness is tested in terms of grouping variables using the Shapiro-Wilk test and found that the test variable does not satisfy the normality assumption based on gender. Therefore, non-parametric inferential statistical tools Mann-Whitney U test and Kruskal-Wallis H test were applied to test the significance. The study wants to establish who is having more awareness of the employee advocacy aspects; male or female employees [H₁]. The Mann-Whitney U test (table 1) indicates that the awareness level of male and female employees is not significantly different [U = 909, p > 0.05]. Gender has no effect on the awareness of employees on employee advocacy. The study also aimed to test the significant difference in the level of awareness of employees in terms of designation [H₂] statistically. The Kruskal

Wallis H test (table 1) indicates that the awareness level of employees is significantly different across the different designations [K-W H = 31.658, p < 0.05]. It is understood that Managers are more aware of employee advocacy aspects than employees of other categories. Technicians, however, have very little knowledge in this regard.

Table 1. Hypotheses Testing - Awareness based on Gender and Designation

Awareness of Employee Advocacy							
Gender	Mean Rank	Test Statistics		Designation	Mean Rank	Test Statistics	
Male	51.85	M-W U*	909	Sales Executive	54.69	K-W H**	31.658
				Showroom Hostess	41.75		
				Technicians	37.73		
Female	50.38	<i>p</i>	.830	Managers	98.00	<i>p</i>	.000***

Source: Primary data [*Mann-Whitney U, **Kruskal-Wallis H, *** significant]

Perception of Employees towards Employee Advocacy. Employee advocacy is perceived as a self-imposed act of employees to elevate the brands in the marketplace. The employers cannot compel employees to share brand contents through their personal social media accounts. Instead, creating a conducive work environment can gradually turn employees into happier and dedicated people, and incorporate them into a culture that engages in the promotion of companies in the long run (Trier, 2019). It happens when employees are inspired to spread positive words about the brand. Understanding the perception of employees towards advocacy for brand promotion is inevitable in implementing the program successfully.

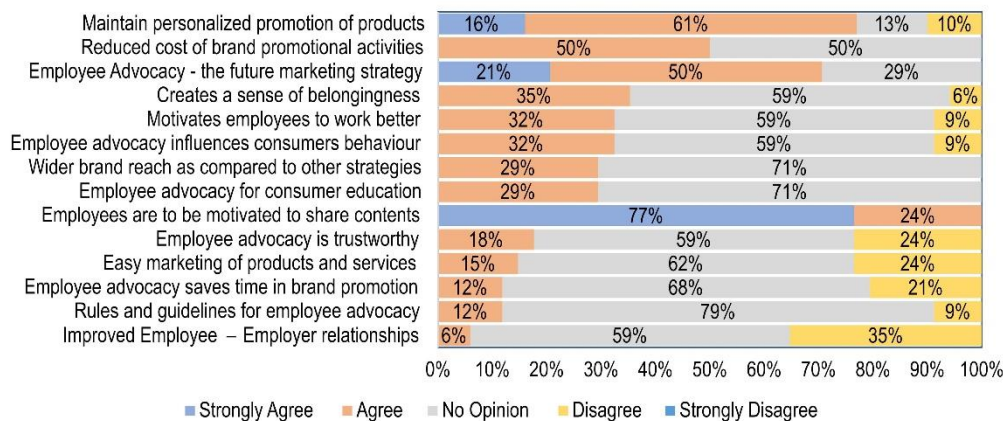


Figure 5. Perception of employees on advocacy for brand promotion

Source: Primary data collected by the researcher

Figure 5 depicts how employees perceive the various aspects of employee advocacy. The empirical analysis shows that employee motivation is the key aspect of employee advocacy (Skrba, 2017). Employee advocacy is getting popularity and will become one of the most influential marketing strategies in the future. The main attractions of this strategy are its cost-effectiveness (Kuligowski, 2019) and the opportunity for maintaining the personalized promotion of brands among the known networks of

employees. It is noted that most of the participants have no opinion about the matters as they are not thoroughly aware of the terms of employee advocacy (figure 4).

Hypotheses Testing – Perception. The study had certain assumptions about the perception of employees towards employee advocacy in terms of their gender and designation. As the test variable, perception did not satisfy the parametric assumptions, Mann-Whitney U test, and Kruskal-Wallis H test was applied to test the hypotheses formulated on perception in terms of gender and designation of the employees. The research wants to test whether gender [H₃] and designation [H₄] determine a significant difference in the perception of employees.

Table 2. Hypotheses Testing - Perception based on Gender and Designation

Employee Perception of Employee Advocacy							
Gender	Mean Rank	Test Statistics		Designation	Mean Rank	Test Statistics	
Male	51.96	M-W U	900	Sales Executive	54.41	K-W H	30.280
				Showroom Hostess	40.25		
Female	50.00	<i>p</i>	.775	Technicians	38.82	<i>p</i>	.000*
				Managers	97.50		

Source: Primary data [M-W U: Mann-Whitney U, K-W H: Kruskal-Wallis H, * significant]

The Mann Whitney U test statistics (table 2) indicate that the perception of male and female employees is not significantly different [U = 900, p > 0.05]. The Kruskal Wallis H test (table 2) shows that the perception of employees towards employee advocacy is significantly different between the different designations [K-W H = 30.280, p < 0.05]. Managers have a distinct opinion about the emerging strategy, whereas others have no clear understanding of its effect on brand promotion.

Conclusion. This research paper throws light on the potential of the most valuable asset (Boudaher, 2019; Fisher, 2019; Levinson, 2018) and the greatest resource for building trust (Nicole, 2020) of automobile companies in India. Currently, the world is moving into the «screen-age» era, and social media become an inevitable part of the life of people. Therefore, the situation demands a paradigm shift in the approach of corporates in the field of marketing and brand building. Companies, now equipped with digital means in conjunction with traditional methods (Caulton, 2018) for promoting brands, educating consumers about products and services, tracking feedback, build trust, and thus maximize the sales. But, the things are getting tough; brand promotion in offline and online modes is becoming expensive (Boudaher, 2019; Paliwal, 2019), the credibility of the promotional activities, attention, and responses of the target audiences are in the shadow of a doubt. Companies need to have a highly cost-effective, credible, attractive, and quick-paced brand promotion strategy of mapping companies existing customer base (Chen, 2020).

The research introduces the possibilities of Employee advocacy, an evolving concept that has gained great momentum (Feldman, 2017) in digital marketing through social media platforms in recent years. It embraces tremendous opportunities for humanizing the brands (Nguyen, 2014), enhancing employee morale, trustworthy communication, and turning them as advocates or ambassadors of the company (Feldman, 2017). Promotional activities by employees through personal social media accounts help to enhance consumers' trust brands (Nicole, 2020; Povaiah, 2017). The empirical data are reaffirming that inspiration and incentives (Nicole, 2020) from the employer encourages employees to enthusiastically should pay attention to employee satisfaction (Holzman, 2019) for bringing up a culture of amplifying the brand contents and other organizational matters. Full-fledged planning is required to implement and sustain employee advocacy at an expected level. Employee advocacy should not be considered simply an act of sharing photos and videos of company-related matters or encouraging employees to be in social networks during their free time for the employer. There must be explicit rules and guidelines for using social media platforms for amplification activities. According to the result of the study (table 2), the majority of the employees opined that their companies have not provided them adequate guidelines (Djukanovic,

2020) for doing brand promotion through social media. Adequate orientation and training programs are to be convened for professionalizing the employee aspirants for dealing with online engagements, tackling customer, grievances, queries, and negative trolls, resonating target audience (Djukanovic, 2020), content curation, employee advocacy tools (Chronicles, 2018), technicalities of being online, and legal concerns (Heald, 2020). The study gives certain indications about the lack of competence in the current advocacy system in automotive showrooms. As part of their amplification initiatives, employees share mainly photos and videos (figure 1), just like ordinary people do. There are a handful of content forms to be administered via social media for boosting the brands (Coles, 2019) and sustain organic reaches of the contents. Photos, videos, live telecasting, newsletters, statistics of performances, sponsored articles, blogs, animated contents, stories, quotations, testimonials, customer ratings and reviews, industry news, teasers, discounts and offers, customer or dealer contests, events, launchings, surveys, media mentions, vehicle reviews, positive trolls, memes, and customer achievements are some of the examples of content ideas to be shared. Managers know about advocacy tools (table 1) and how to strategically use it for content management. But, it was not imparted properly to the lower hierarchical levels; thus they face the problem of lack of awareness in tools and training on how to administer employee advocacy in an effective way. However, employees show interest in engaging with social media for the company.

From a practical point of view, employee advocacy is potentially effective in grabbing the attention of the target market (Chronicles, 2018). It is advantageous to the companies in different ways viz. for the customer as well as employee loyalty-building, increasing the sales, recruiting digitally talented candidates (Chronicles, 2018; O'Donnell, 2017), and maintaining vibrancy in brand presence. The companies are required to do certain preparations to create a conducive environment for implementing the strategy. The most important thing is to have a social media policy (O'Donnell, 2017; Sehl, 2020) to provide employees necessary guidelines for the effective use of social media for brand promotion and to protect legal risks associated with content sharing. Discuss the digital marketing strategies with the aspirant employees, empower them with orientation and training (Heald, 2020) on cybersecurity, objectives and goals, technological aspects, advocacy tools, content management and measuring, tackle issues and attacks, rule and regulations to engage positively. Companies should convene employee meetings (Heald, 2020) to have open discussions to understand the trends and confrontations in social media platforms and provide leadership support to appreciate the genuine interest and top performers with (Chronicles, 2018) monetary or non-monetary rewards.

This research addressed only employee awareness and perception of employee advocacy. Since an untapped research area, future researches may examine the effect of employee advocacy on consumer behavior and customer loyalty, employee satisfaction and intention to employee advocacy, consumer perception and acceptability of advocacy initiatives, factors motivating employees for advocacy, and about social media policy for employees.

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Комунікаційно-контентна стратегія бренду компанії: переваги для співробітників

Ця стаття узагальнює аргументи та контраргументи в межах наукової дискусії з питання формування комунікаційно-контентної стратегії бренду компанії її працівниками. Розкрито економічну сутність соціальної ініціативи співробітників компанії на ринку товарів та послуг за рахунок створення та розповсюдження контенту бренду компанії у соціальних мережах. Проведено бібліометричний аналіз професійних журналів, експертних блогів присвячених темі digital-маркетингу та маркетингу у соціальних мережах. Основною метою проведеного дослідження є аналіз рівня обізнаності та сприйняття працівниками різних аспектів комунікаційно-контентної стратегії бренду компанії. Емпіричне дослідження проведено на основі панельних даних, сформованих за результатами опитування 102 співробітників автомобільних салонів у південних районах Кералу (Індія). Опитування здійснювалося за допомогою інструменту Google Forms. Інформування респондентів про необхідність заповнення анкети здійснювалося за допомогою електронної пошти та месенджеру WhatsApp. Методичним інструментарієм проведеного дослідження стали методи двомірного графу відповідності, описової статистики, U-критерію Манна-Уїтні та критерію Краскела-Уолліса. Результати емпіричного аналізу підтвердили висунуту гіпотезу щодо дивергентного характеру участі працівників в комунікаційно-контентній стратегії бренду компанії залежно від функціональних обов'язків та їх посади. Дослідження емпірично підтверджує та теоретично доводить, що відсутність чіткої політики та рекомендацій ведення соціальних мереж, мотиваційних механізмів заохочення такої діяльності призводить до втрати потенційно можливих шляхів сталого розвитку компанії. Відзначено, що співробітники сприймають використання соціальних мереж як один із напрямків реалізацією політики корпоративної соціальної відповідальності. Результати проведеного дослідження можуть бути корисними менеджерам компанії при формуванні нової політики використання людських ресурсів за їх інтересами та професійною діяльністю в соціальних мережах для реалізації комунікаційно-контентної стратегії бренду компанії.

Ключові слова: контент маркетинг, діджитал маркетинг, ампліфікація співробітників, залучення співробітників, маркетинг в соціальних мережах.

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