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EMPLOYEE ADVOCACY IN SOCIAL MEDIA: EMPLOYEES' POINT OF VIEW IN FINNISH B2B ORGANIZATIONS

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to understand what employees are talking about their work and employer in their personal social media channels. The study aims to highlight the importance for companies to be aware what is said about them in today's digital era. There is a clear research gap on employee advocacy on social media, and how companies could benefit from it. Furthermore, little discussion has been on previous literature about the content of eWOM. Thus, this thesis aims to fill these gaps. Seven interviewees from different Finnish B2B companies were part of the empirical, qualitative study.

The findings of the study indicate that satisfaction, commitment and trust with the company, as well as the company having a strong social media brand, can lead to increase in employees' advocacy intentions. In addition, main motivations for employee eWOM seems to the want to help others and showcase own interests and work projects. Content shared by the employees often reflects their interests and work matters directly linked to them.

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Tämän tutkimuksen tavoite on ymmärtää mitä työntekijät sanovat omasta työstään ja työnantajastaan henkilökohtaisissa sosiaalisen median kanavissaan. Tutkimus pyrkii lisäksi korostamaan, kuinka tärkeää yritysten on seurata mitä heistä puhutaan sosiaalisessa mediassa digitaalisena aikana. Nykyisin on olemassa tutkimusaukko työntekijälähettilyydestä sosiaalisessa mediassa, ja siitä kuinka yritykset voisivat hyötyä siitä. Lisäksi ei juuri ole olemassa tutkimusta eWOMin sisällöstä. Tämän vuoksi tämä tutkielma pyrkii täyttämään edellä mainitut aukot. Seitsemää eri suomalaisia B2B-yrityksiä edustavaa henkilä haastateltiin empiirisessä, laadullisessa tutkimuksessa.

Tulokset osoittavat, että yritykseen kohdistuva tyytyväisyys, sitoutuminen ja luottamus, sekä yrityksen vahva sosiaalisen median brändi voivat johtaa työntekijöiden lähettiläisyyshalukkuuteen. Lisäksi tärkeimpiä motivaatioita työntekijä-eWOMiin vaikuttaa olevan halu auttaa muita sekä näyttää omia kiinnostuksenkohteita ja työprojekteja. Työntekijöiden jakama sisältö vastaa usein heidän kiinnostuksiaan ja työasioita, jotka viittaavat suoraan heihin.

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1. INTRODUCTION

This thesis focuses on employee advocacy in social media and understanding the employees' point of view in Finnish b2b companies. This chapter is the introduction to the whole study, giving the background and the aim for the study and defining the research problem. Also, previous literature, theoretical framework, key concepts and limitations of the study are introduced in this chapter.

1.1. Background of the study

Since the emergence of multiple social media channels, people have discovered new ways to have their voices and stories to heard by more people than ever before. Employees have always had their voices and they have shared their opinions of their employer and its products and services to the people in their networks. Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and many other online platforms have broadened their networks and now with a few keystrokes, they can reach thousands of people to tell how much they adore *or hate* their employer's new product or new company policy.

The word-of-mouth (WOM) of consumers and customers on social media has been widely researched in marketing (See e.g. Luís Abrantes, Seabra, Raquel Lages & Jayawardhena 2013; See-To & Ho 2014; Prahalad & Ramaswamy 2004) but the importance of managing the employee advocacy especially in this era of social media networks is still not as widely discussed. The research gap of employee advocacy in social media and what factors contribute to advocacy intentions in employees is huge, and this study aims to contribute to this gap. The study focuses on so-called employee eWOM and how companies could try to manage it and bring competitive advantage to the company by viewing it as a unique marketing strategy. While there are plenty of previous studies done on eWOM, it has mainly focused on whether or not it is positive, and less attention has been given to the actual content of eWOM messages (Pauwels, Aksehirli & Lackman 2016). This study aims to bring more understanding to both the

content of employee eWOM messages, as well as to the benefits the companies can gain from employee eWOM.

One growing challenge in today's digital world is the ever-increasing number of eWOM (Park & Lee 2007). Customers have accustomated to running into WOM wherever they go and companies have taken notice of it. As more and more companies are trying to implement and take advantage of word-of-mouth, customers are starting to doubt the authenticity and credibility of electronic word-of-mouth (Morokane, Chiba & Kleyn 2016). As generally content created by employees of a company, rather than the company itself, is seen as more credible (Men & Stacks 2013), companies should start paying more attention to what their employees are and are not saying about their work in their social media channels.

1.2. The aim of the study and the research problem

This study looks at the social media presence of employees, who discuss about their work and employer on their personal social media accounts on LinkedIn and Twitter. The aim is to understand the reasons why employees engage in work related discussions voluntarily on their social media accounts and why the social media content produced by employees can be a marketing advantage for the organizations. By investigating which elements influence the decision to advocate their organization, employers can try to enhance their social media presence and their marketing communications through their employees.

The research material will be collected from employees, but the gathered insights should help organizations understand the phenomenon of employee eWOM better and thus, help organizations take actions to encourage it in their employees as well and take employee eWOM to be part of their marketing strategies. Employee eWOM in this study refers to concept of employees sharing about their work and employer on social media channels, whereas employee advocacy, on the other hand, refers to employees

sharing about their work and employer in any channel, be it social media or talking to their friends and families, or other form of communications.

The aim of the study is also to describe what is employee advocacy in social media, and contribute to previous research on marketing, human resource management, and eWOM by introducing the term employee eWOM, and how it links theories from all the aforementioned research areas to better understand employees' behavior from marketing perspective.

Based on these aims, the main research problem is:

How does employee advocacy occur in social media?

Main research problem is supported by the following sub-questions:

What leads to employee advocacy intentions and behavior in social media?

How do employees advocate in social media?

What is the advocacy content in social media and what factors influence it?

1.3. Preliminary literature review

Advocacy has been discussed in studies both in relation to customer advocacy (Fullerton 2011) as well as to employee advocacy (Tsarenko, Leo & Tse 2018). In both cases, advocacy can be seen resulting in positive word-of-mouth communications. Essentially, advocacy is a result of satisfaction, trust and commitment. Of these, especially satisfaction has a strong influence on positive word-of-mouth and employee advocacy (Fullerton 2011)

Employee advocacy is summarized by Tsarenko, Leo and Tse (2018) to include tasks such as pleading, supporting and recommending, which often can be viewed as extra duties to promote the overall success of an organization. Especially those employees facing customers are ideal to engage in employee advocacy from the organization's perspective as research suggests that organization's internal features are tied to the external world of customers (Bowen & Schneider 2013, Hong, Liao, Hu & Jiang 2013, Bettencourt 2001, Tsarenko, Leo & Tse 2018). Tsarenko, Leo and Tse 2018 list building and strengthening the reputation of a brand, creating opportunities to increase sales and driving the effectiveness and performance of an organization as the benefits of employee advocacy behavior. They continue that the employee advocacy should be viewed as a unique marketing strategy that strengthens the competitive advantage. Employee advocacy is a part of organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) and is thus voluntary and the employee is not asked or paid to do so. Therefore, companies looking to promote such behavior need to understand the whole concept of OCB. Often employee advocacy arises when the employees are committed, believe in the value of the brand and when there is a strong alignment with the employee's and the company's values, but many theories have arisen around advocacy behavior. (Tsarenko, Leo & Tse 2018)

One common theory that researches have used as a guide to study employee advocacy, is the social exchange theory, which basic tenet is that relationships grow and evolve over time into trusting, loyal and mutual commitments (Cropanzano & Mitchell 2005). Based on the theory, researchers suggest that employees are more likely to talk about the organization in positive light to external communities and are more committed to the organization, which can be encouraged by communicating with the employees in supportive and appropriate manner (Tsarenko, Leo & Tse 2018, Walden & Westerman 2018). Internal communications have a main role in encouraging organizational citizenship behavior, of which employee advocacy is a part (Walden & Westerman 2018). In similar matter, social network theory has been applied by researches to study how employee voice can be impacted by employee's and leader's formal and informal relationships (Venkataramani, Zhou, Wang, Liao & Shi 2016).

Very often employee advocacy related studies have been conducted in the context of human resource management (c.f. Dundon, Wilkinson, Marchington & Ackers 2004) and applied psychology (e.g. Bettencourt 2001), but studies from the marketing perspective exist as well (e.g. Morhart, Herzong & Tomczak 2009), where especially employee brand engagement has gained interest. In a boarder look, a lot of attention in marketing literature has been paid to brand engagement, a concept of rational or emotional attachments forming between customers or other stakeholders and brands. Especially with the emergence of social media, the brand engagement is evolving constantly. (Pitt, Botha, Ferreira & Kietzmann 2018) Similarly, in the research area of internal brand management, the importance of customer-facing employees acting as champions for the company and its brand is noted and different leadership models have been identified to influence employees to engage in brand representative behavior (Morhart, Herzong & Tomczak 2009). Most of these studies do not involve social media aspect of employee advocacy.

Social media enables the employees to have a voice outside the company thanks to the multiple social media channels of today and allowing an employee to reach thousands of people with one message. This concept of employee voice has been found in research and in managerial perspective to be both a positive and negative resource for the companies. However, researchers believe that the employee voice can be managed after understanding its purposes, which Dundon, Wilkinson, Marchington and Ackers (2004) list as contribution to management decision making, demonstration of partnership, articulation of individual dissatisfaction and expression of collective bargaining. Miles and Mangold (2014) note that employee voice can be used for good as well: it can preserve organizational reputations, enhance marketing and public relations efforts and defend the employer, making the employee voice a competitive advantage, as long as it is positive.

A positive role of word-of-mouth (WOM) by employees of a brand in influencing customer acquisition and retention is well established in marketing literature, and this has led to marketers to generate promotional WOM-campaigns, with negative results,

leaving us to believe that brand managers should focus more on extending brand knowledge internally than creating WOM-campaigns (Morokane, Chiba & Kleyn 2016). Typically, WOM has been considered as customer-to-customer communications in the marketing literature and word-of-mouth marketing as a company trying to influence this communication between customers (Kozinets, Valck, Wojnicki & Wilner 2010). In their study, Kozinets et al. (2010) bring attention to the fact that the subjects of their study (bloggers participating in word-of-mouth marketing) were both a target and a marketer. The subjects had first been a target for the company's marketing and then became a marketer for the blog's audience. This is one of the first studies to bring to light the motivations for word-of-mouth: what previously was a result of altruism of a customer, is now a result of more complex motivations, such as gaining something, be it money or status within a community.

eWOM is a form of word-of-mouth, where the messages are in electrical format, in other words existing in different websites and web-based platforms and can happen anonymously and often occurs between people who have no relationship with each other (Lee & Youn 2009). It is notable that in a study conducted by Doh and Hwang (2009) they found that the credibility of eWOM messages can be damaged in the long run if all the messages considering the same issue are positive.

1.4. Theoretical framework

The framework for this study is that the employee voice and advocacy can be turned into eWOM and that can be used to as a part of a company's marketing strategy and supporting its marketing message both in digital networks as well as outside the scope of digital context. The company in question can manage and influence the employee advocacy through its actions, as employee advocacy is a result of trust, satisfaction and commitment to the company.

The figure below visualizes the framework of this study, roughly dividing the studied environment into two: digital world with its digital networks, and non-digital world or

offline environment. The focus area of this study is in the digital networks, mainly different social media channels.
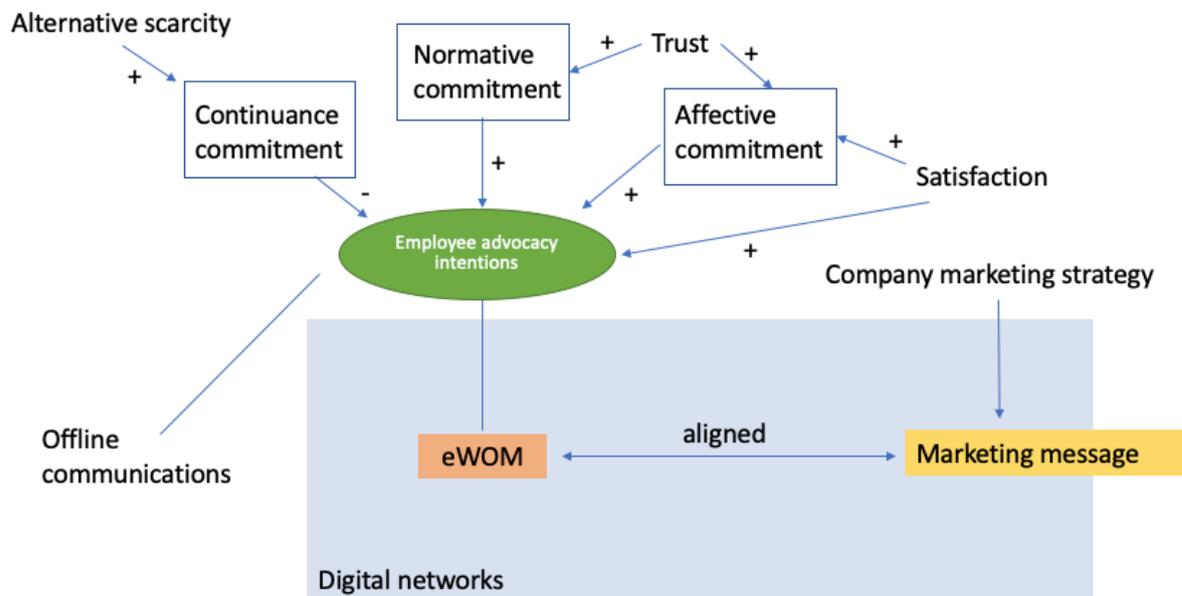
Figure 1. Theoretical framework

The basis of this study is in the employee advocacy, and how it is a combination of job satisfaction, organizational trust and organizational commitment as presented in Fullerton's 2011 study on advocacy intentions. Employee advocacy intentions are positively enhanced by satisfaction, affective and normative commitment, of whics affective and normative commitment are positively enhanced by trust. Employee advocacy intentions are then reduced by continuance commitment, which is positively enhanced by alternative scarcity.

Employee advocacy then is divided to offline communications and online communications, or eWOM, as it is referred in this study. eWOM is then positive communication about the company by its employees, whereas the company itself has its own marketing communications in the same digital channels, which is derived from

the company's marketing strategy. In ideal situation, both the eWOM and the company's marketing message are aligned in the social media platforms.

1.5. Definitions of the key concepts

Employee advocacy in this study refers to a voluntary, positive behavior outside of defined job responsibilities that means to promote or defend either their employer or organization or product or brand. Employee advocacy is one dimension of organizational citizenship behavior. (Tsarenko, Leo & Tse 2018; Walz & Celuch 2010)

(Job) satisfaction is one of the key elements resulting in employee advocacy (Fullerton 2011). In this study refers to satisfaction experienced by an employee as a result of appraisal of the employee's job or job experiences (Locke 1976, p. 1304).

(Organizational) trust is the second element in creating employee advocacy (Fullerton 2011). Trust is defined as both trust in people at the company, as well as trust in organized systems, roles and reputation at the company (Vanhala & Ahteela 2011).

(Organizational) commitment is the final element to employee advocacy (Fullerton 2011). It simply refers to employee's attachment to their organization (Pierro, Raven, Amato & Bélanger 2013), but can be further divided into three different types of commitment: continuance commitment, normative commitment and affective commitment. Affective commitment means an employee feels happy with the company and is emotionally attached to it. Continuance commitment means an employee has a need to stay with the company, for example the employee needs the salary from the job. Normative commitment means that there is an obligation to stay with the company, or feeling that it is the right thing to do. (Meyer & Allen 1991)

Alternative scarcity means having only one choice of a specific type (Fullerton 2011), in this study's framework, there is alternative scarcity of suitable jobs available to employees.

Organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) is a group of activities that go beyond role descriptions and are voluntary, including activities such as those that are creative and innovative, meant to improve work tasks or the performance of the whole organization (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Paine & Bachrach 2000). Employee advocacy is seen as being part of organizational citizenship behavior (Tsarenko, Leo & Tse 2018).

Advocacy intention in this study refers to a willingness to recommend something or speak favorably of it. While it doesn't mean that person is actively advocating something, it means that they might do so in the future if the opportunity arises. (Ryals 2009, 206)

Advocacy behavior is the end goal of organizational activities trying to enhance advocacy. In this study, advocacy behavior is the next step after advocacy intention, where the employee is actively speaking or writing positively about their organization. (Ryals 2009, 206)

Social media networks are web-based applications, which support interpersonal communications and collaboration, that have features such as digital profile, relational ties, search and privacy and network transparency (Kane, Alavi, Labianca & Borgatti 2014). In this study, of all the countless social media networks available today, the focus is on LinkedIn and Twitter as these two are the most used social media channels for business-to-business companies (Beets & Handley 2018). **LinkedIn** is the largest professional network platform in the world (LinkedIn Corporation 2019), and **Twitter** is known for its short messages, with a low character limit, meant for spreading information fast (Forsey 2019).

Marketing strategy in its simple form means defining the target audience and composing the marketing mix, while there are many interpretations on how to define the term (Shaw 2012). In this thesis, the marketing strategy means a defined plan by the company on what marketing activities to do, where and towards whom.

Marketing message refers to the communications the company does and especially to what it wants to say about its offerings to its customers and prospects (Peattie & Prothero 1992).

Word-of-mouth (WOM) is defined in this study as an informal information exchange between individuals, that can either be a positive recommendation or otherwise discussion related to a specific company, organization, brand or a product (Sweeney, Soutar & Mazzarol 2012). While word-of-mouth messaging is not always positive towards the object discussed, this study is more focused on the positive side of word-of-mouth, because employee advocacy is expressively positive.

Electronical word-of-mouth (eWOM) is defined in a similar way to word-of-mouth, but the distinct feature is that eWOM appears in electronical platforms, today mostly in different social media platforms, but also in emails, blogs and instant messages (Ahrens, Coyle & Strahilevitz 2013). This study focuses on eWOM messages in social media platforms, where the message is aimed for more than one recipient and where there is a chance for collaboration between other users of the platform.

Employee eWOM is a term used in this study to put together the concepts of employee advocacy and eWOM. This is done to easily refer to eWOM behavior that is done by employees, targeted to advocate their organization, and that the behavior is voluntary and beyond role descriptions. However, while the act of employee eWOM is voluntary, organizations can encourage e.g. sharing company social media posts on employee's own accounts and highlighting topics that could be worth sharing by employees. One example of sharing organization's content is by re-tweeting it on Twitter (Kim, Sung &

Kang 2014). Employee eWOM refers solely to positive eWOM, as it measures the actual advocacy behavior in employees.

1.6. Delimitations of the study

The study is limited to research only the behavior in Finnish business-to-business companies to get a national view from individuals who come from a similar cultural background, as culture affects the way we humans communicate and what is considered as a good communication style in one country might not work in another country or area (Jonasson & Lauring 2012). It is also interesting to see how this behavior appears in Finnish context, as most of the research on employee advocacy and eWOM is conducted in Anglo-American countries.

The study is also limited to two social media platforms from among the countless platforms. LinkedIn and Twitter are the focus of this study as they are seen as the most useful platforms among the Finnish business-to-business environment (Asikainen 2018, Vilperi 2015, Suomen Digimarkkinointi 2019).

The persons interviewed in this study are also limited by their job roles: to get insights on the results of employee advocacy enhancing actions, only those, whose job is not to manage company social media accounts or otherwise explicitly told by their managers to be active on their social media and promote the organization, are interviewed. This limitation in today's world can be quite difficult to achieve as many sales people and recruiters might use social media to do research on leads but as long as their social media usage is not declared in their role descriptions, they can be seen fit to participate with these criteria. Also, those whose role includes internal employee advocacy development are excluded from this study.

1.7. Research methodology

This study is conducted as a qualitative research. The data is collected by interviewing persons who are employed in business-to-business companies operating in Finland and who frequently engage in employee eWOM in LinkedIn and/or Twitter. As stated before, the persons interviewed must not work in social media related tasks, e.g. managing the company social media accounts. The persons interviewed are recruited from LinkedIn and Twitter.

The data is then used to analyze and understand the development and existence of employee advocacy in the form of eWOM. The results of the data collection are then applied to the theoretical background of this study, with the focus on developing employee eWOM in organizational level, looking at theories and frameworks of employee advocacy and (electronical) word-of-mouth. More in-depth information on this study's methodology can be found in Chapter 4.

1.8. Structure of thesis

This thesis began with an introduction chapter, explaining the background of the study and why it matters, as well as defining the research problem and delimitations of the study. To introduce the subject before going more in-depth in the later chapters, a short literature review and definitions of the main concepts were provided along with the theoretical framework.

Chapters 2 and 3 of this study focused on the theoretical background of this study. The first theory chapter introduced the concepts of employee advocacy, electronical word-of-mouth and employee eWOM, while the second theory chapter dived more deeply into how organizations can aim to enhance employee eWOM in its employees.

Research design and methods were explained in more detail in Chapter 4 in addition to the summary of data collection and the interviewees of this study. Then the following chapter 5 presented the findings of the study. Finally, the final chapter concluded the thesis and listed the both theoretical and practical implications of this study. The limitations and future research opportunities then closed Chapter 6 and the whole thesis.

2. EMPLOYEE ADVOCACY IN THE FORM OF EWOM

Employee advocacy is one of the dimensions of organizational citizenship behavior and it includes tasks such as supporting and recommending hence promoting the company they work for currently (Tsarenko, Leo & Tse 2018). eWOM, on the other hand, is a form of word-of-mouth, that specifically occurs in an electronical format, such as social media platforms and other web-based applications (Lee & Youn 2009).

In this section, the first subsection focuses on employee advocacy and its different theories and frameworks, and the second subsection discusses current eWOM literature, its benefits, drivers and platforms. Finally, in the last subsection, the two terms are connected to the concept of employee eWOM, in which the employee is the spreader of the electronical word-of-mouth message.

2.1. Employee advocacy

Employee advocacy has been widely researched in the human resource management literature. The main theories and frameworks include satisfaction, trust and commitment model, social exchange theory and employee brand engagement framework (Fullerton 2011; Cropanzano & Mitchell 2005; Pitt, Botha, Ferreira & Kietzmann 2018). The first two concepts come from the human resource management and organizational psychology literature, whereas the latter of the three is based on marketing perspective. These three concepts are discussed in more detail later in this section to better understand the concept of employee advocacy and what are its drivers.

Employee advocacy is often perceived by external public and stakeholders more neutral and credible than the messages generated by the company itself, making it an important asset for any company (Men & Stacks 2013). Walz and Celuch (2010) define advocacy as a behavioral construct that is the voluntary promotion or defense of a company, product or a brand, which includes positive word-of-mouth, but is also a

result of a strong relationship. In this study, the definition is applied to employee advocacy, meaning that when engaging in employee advocacy, employees are voluntarily promoting or defending the company, its products or brands. Schweitzer and Lyons (2008) refer to employee advocacy as employee's willingness to act as a part-time marketer of the organization to potential customers and employees. In the same study Schweitzer and Lyons (2008) suggest that employee advocacy leads to stability and better performance of the organization, as the employees help the organization to gain resources in the forms of customers and new employees. Studies also suggest that when there is a strong alignment with employee's personal values and organizational values, employees will advocate for their organization (Tsarenko, Leo, and Tse 2018).

2.1.1. Satisfaction, trust and commitment

One widely recognized way of looking at the evolvement of employee advocacy is through the employees' feelings towards the company and the networks within the company. Satisfaction, trust and commitment have arisen as main three components to result in all kinds of advocacy, not limited to employees (Fullerton 2011). However, it can be generalized to have a similar effect to employees as it has on customers, as employees can be seen as the customers for a company's internal communications and managerial actions (Carly 2001). A study conducted in Turkish hospitals focused on these three components found out that transformational leadership style best helped to create the feelings of job satisfaction, organizational commitment and organizational trust in employees (Top, Akdere & Tarcan 2015).

Satisfaction in this context refers mainly to the job satisfaction experienced by an employee of an organization. Job satisfaction has been defined as "a pleasurable or positive emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one's job or job experiences" by Locke (1976, p. 1304) and it is argued to be the most-used research definition for the term. Saari and Judge (2004) classify the causes of employee attitudes in three different categories: dispositional influences, cultural influences and work situation influences. Of these, dispositional influences and work situation influences directly

affect job satisfaction. Dispositional influences refer to personality traits, such as core self-evaluation, extraversion and conscientiousness, (Judge & Bono 2001; Judge, Heller & Mount 2002) and these have shown to influence stabile job satisfaction in a person even when the person changes jobs or companies (Saari & Judge 2004). The work itself also has an effect on how satisfied a person is with their job. Studies show that employees rank the nature of the work as the most important facet of their job, and that the satisfaction with the nature of the work best predicts the overall job satisfaction (Saari & Judge 2004).

Commitment is understood in this study as an employee's experienced organizational commitment, in other words, the person's attachment to their organization (Pierro, Raven, Amato & Bélanger 2013). Meyer and Allen (1991) have differentiated three reasons for an employee to stay committed to an organization: 1) affective commitment: a desire, a person feels happy with their organization and is emotionally attached to the company, 2) continuance commitment: a need, a person needs for example the salary from the job, and 3) normative commitment: an obligation, staying with the organization because it is the right thing to do.

Finally, by trust, this study refers to organizational trust. Organizational trust includes in its broader form both interpersonal trust and impersonal trust, where in interpersonal aspect a person trusts in people, i.e. co-workers and managers, and in impersonal aspect a person's trust is based on organized systems, roles and reputation (Vanhala & Ahteela 2011). Trust is also defined as willingness to be vulnerable to the discretionary actions of another party, and it is shown to be one of the key enablers of organizational success (Davis, Schoorman, Mayer & Tan 2000). A more specific definition adds that the willingness to be vulnerable to actions of others is based on positive expectations to other's motivations and/or behaviors (Ferrell 2004). Pirson and Malhotra (2011) summarize in their article that trust can equal in more efficient business transactions, increase in customer satisfaction and employee motivation and commitment, and also cooperative behavior within organizations.

In conclusion, in employee perspective, satisfaction, commitment and trust lead to employee advocacy intentions, it is possible to apply the model of the effects on the employees. The model is shown in Figure 2.
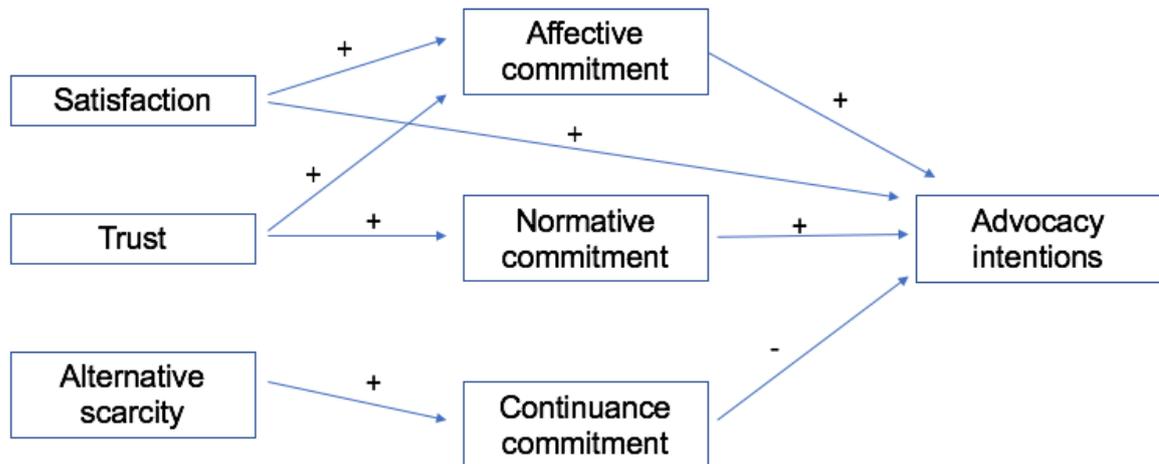
Figure 2. Model of the effects of satisfaction, trust and commitment on advocacy, per Fullerton (2011)

In the first column are the sources of different types of commitment, which are satisfaction, trust and alternative scarcity. Alternative scarcity refers to having only one choice of a specific type, in this example either an employer or a partner. This results in continuance commitment, where an individual feels bound to a relational partner. Trust towards the organization leads to both normative commitment and affective commitment. Affective commitment refers to a situation where an individual identifies with, feels a positive attachment to and enjoys being affiliated with an organization. Normative commitment means that an individual feels obligated to do business with an organization and that being involved with it is the right thing to do. Satisfaction leads to affective commitment as well as directly to advocacy intentions. All types of commitments mentioned above influence these intentions as well, with affective and normative commitment having a positive effect and continuance commitment a negative effect. (Fullerton 2011)

2.1.2. Social exchange theory

Social exchange theory is widely used in human resource management literature to discuss multiple phenomena, including employee advocacy. The basic tenet of social exchange theory is that relationships grow and evolve over time into trusting, loyal and mutual commitments (Cropanzano & Mitchell 2005). Social exchange theory involves intangible social costs and benefits, but it doesn't guarantee any reciprocal outcome as there are no rules or agreements set (Liao 2008). From an employee viewpoint, employee job engagement is an exchange of benefits with the organization in certain forms and employees will act in a way that they psychologically expect to receive organizational rewards from their job engagement (Yin 2018).

Social exchange theory is an important theory from an employee advocacy point of view. In the context of social exchange theory, Tsarenko, Leo, and Tse (2018) propose that when co-workers and managers offer social support to employees and they perceive them as helpful and wanted, the employees will reciprocate to the exchange and go beyond the requirements of the job and engage in behaviors such as employee advocacy. A study by van Knippenberg and Sleebos (2006) found that the social exchange theory has the most influence on organizational commitment, rather than organizational identification. This supports the previous assumptions made in this study that social exchange theory enables explaining employee advocacy and this linkage is through organizational (affective and normative) commitment. Konovsky and Pugh (1994) summarize that because of social exchange relationship between employees and supervisors, supervisor fairness leads to employee citizenship, in which employee is likely to reciprocate, likely in organizational citizenship behavior. Organizational citizenship behavior includes many activities that go beyond role descriptions, including such activities that are oriented toward maintaining existing working relationships or arrangements, and voluntary tasks that are creative and innovative, designed to improve the work task or the performance of the organization (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Paine & Bachrach 2000). Employee advocacy is seen as being one task linked to organizational citizenship behavior (Tsarenko, Leo & Tse 2018).

A study by Birtch, Chiang and van Esch (2016) created a framework for social exchange theory process (figure 3), that shows job characteristics through psychological contract fulfillment do influence both job satisfaction and organizational commitment, which, as shown in the previous section above, both in turn encourage advocacy intentions. The framework proposes that job demands have a negative effect on psychological contract fulfillment, whereas job control and support might counteract that negative effect. Psychological contract represents employee's beliefs and perceptions about between the employee and employer, and when that contract is fulfilled in employee's mind, it usually results in job satisfaction and organizational commitment. (Birtch et al. 2016)
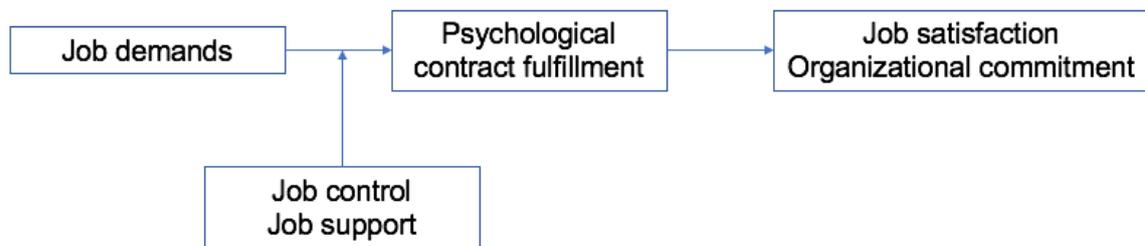
Figure 3. Social exchange theory process framework, per Birtch et al. (2016)

2.1.3. Employee brand engagement

Employee brand engagement and employee engagement are terms that relate to employee advocacy from a marketing perspective. With the emergence of social media, brand engagement even in a broader sense has evolved a lot with social media creating new ways to engage with brands (Pitt, Botha, Ferreira & Kietzmann 2018).

The cycle of employee brand engagement is shown in figure 4. According to the framework, employee brand engagement is the result of the organization's brand experienced by the employees. The circle can be both vicious and virtuous: in best

scenario, the employee brand engagement betters the firm performance, creating an even stronger brand, which again influences employee brand engagement. However, the brand of the organization can also negatively affect employee brand engagement, which then reflects the negative effects to the customer relationships and firm performance as well, possibly weakening the brand. (Pitt et al. 2018)
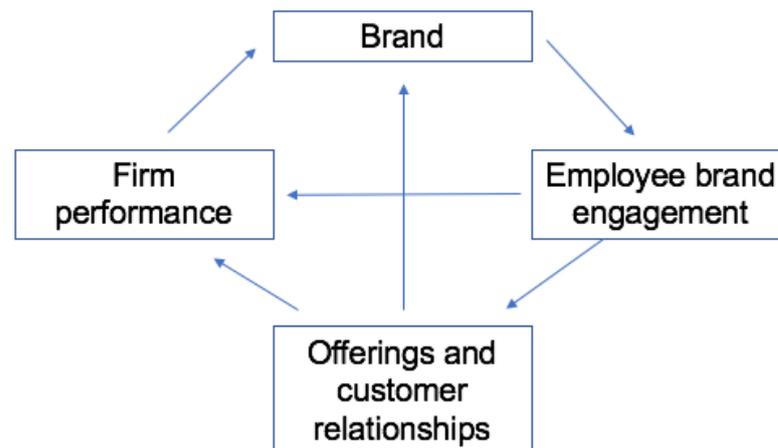
Figure 4. The cycle of employee brand engagement per Pitt et al. (2018)

In literature, there has been a lot of discussion on employee engagement and its importance for the firm performance. Kumar and Pansari (2014, 55) have defined employee engagement as "a multidimensional construct which comprises of all the different facets of the attitudes and behaviors of employees towards the organization", with the dimension comprising employee satisfaction, identification, commitment, loyalty and performance.

2.2. EWOM

Word-of-mouth has been often discussed in the marketing literature, and with the emergence of social media and other forms of internet-based communications, the term eWOM has emerged to define the electronical format of word-of-mouth. This section takes a closer look into the benefits, drivers and the different platforms of the (e)WOM after giving a definition for the concept.

Anderson (1998, 6) was one of the first researches to define word-of-mouth as "informal communication between private parties concerning evaluations of goods and services". The conceptualization of word-of-mouth differs from researcher to researcher on the level explicitness of message content: some view WOM as recommendation, some as giving or receiving any comment about product or service and others include both in the concept of word-of-mouth (Sweeney, Soutar & Mazzarol 2012).

Ahrens, Coyle and Strahilevitz (2013) refer to electronic word-of-mouth as ereferrals, which individuals generate through emails, instant messages, blog and message platforms, and social networking sites, prompted by an individual or by a company encouragement. eWOM comprises of three key dimensions: opinion leadership, individuals sharing information and influencing others' attitudes and behaviors; opinion seeking, individuals searching for advice and information from others; and opinion passing, individual passing along and forwarding information (Kim, Sung & Kang 2014).

Differences between traditional and electronical word-of-mouth include several aspects, of which the most notable are message sources, accessibility and feedbacks. More often the source of eWOM can be anonymous or from individuals who have no real connections between each other, whereas traditional WOM is usually from acquaintances; eWOM is more accessible having no geographical and time limitations compared to traditional; and feedbacks from eWOM are more measurable than from traditional word-of-mouth (Wang, Yeh, Chen & Tsydypov 2016).

2.2.1. Benefits of eWOM to companies

Electronical word-of-mouth has been studied a lot from the consumer perspective and how eWOM can affect purchasing intentions in social network sites, especially from

the point of view of how eWOM can benefit companies. eWOM has been shown to have impact on customer loyalty intentions, influencing sales and ultimately the firm's revenue (Luís Abrantes, Seabra, Raquel Lages & Jayawardhena 2013). Some research has even shown electronic word-of-mouth to be more effective than traditional marketing media (Cheung, Lee & Rabjohn 2008).

See-To and Ho (2014) summarized in their research that eWOM impacts purchasing intentions directly, and indirectly impacts purchasing intentions moderated by consumer's trust on the product in question, and that eWOM impacts value co-creation which also has an impact on purchasing intentions. Value co-creation means that the value of a service or a product is not created by the company/supplier alone, but together in interaction with the customer (Prahalad & Ramaswamy 2004).

Apart from directly influencing sales, eWOM has also been shown to affect customer value and loyalty impacted by customer-to-customer know how exchange (Gruen, Osmonbekov & Czaplewski 2006). Furthermore, new product introductions have been shown to be more successful with the help of electronical word-of-mouth (Clemons, Gao & Hitt 2006).

Most of the research on eWOM has focused on its impact on its quantity, sentiment (i.e. is it negative or positive) and dispersion, whereas the analysis of the eWOM message content has received less attention, even though understanding and measuring the content is seen as important, as it offers valuable insights about what generates the electronical word-of-mouth (Pauwels, Aksehirli & Lackman 2016). There is also little understanding on the benefits of employee eWOM from companies' perspective.

2.2.2. Drivers of eWOM

For companies to gain the benefits from electronical word-of-mouth, it is important to understand what causes and drives the behavior. From consumer's side of eWOM drivers, consumers' desire for social interaction, desire for economic incentives, concern for other consumers and the potential to enhance own self-worth were found to be key drivers for the behavior (Henning-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh & Gremler 2004). In addition, study conducted by Whiting, Williams and Hair (2019) found six motives for why consumers post positive eWOM on social media: help company, altruism, express positive feelings, help employees, product involvement and self-enhancement. Some sub-categories from the same study include helping others, informing others, self-expression and personal interest (Whiting, Williams & Hair 2019).

On a more general side, a study conducted by Wang et al. (2016) found that tie strength positively influences the intention to engage in electronical word-of-mouth and individual motivations facilitate eWOM so that innovative people are likely to engage in word-of-mouth behavior in social media. Individual feelings were found to be related to increase in word-of-mouth also in a study by Luís Abrantes et al. (2013), as mood enhancement was found to influence electronic word-of-mouth in relation to escapism and social interaction. Another study by Ho and Dempsey (2010) identified that people who are more individualistic and/or altruistic are more likely to forward online content.

2.2.3. eWOM platforms

In word-of-mouth literature, the contextual factor of the communication platform, Internet, is the differencing aspect between traditional word-of-mouth and electronic word-of-mouth (Cheung & Thadani 2012). While electronic word-of-mouth appears in all online platforms allowing users to create content, in this study, LinkedIn and Twitter are chosen as the main platforms to explore further. These two social network sites are the most used social media channels for business-to-business content marketing (Beets & Handley 2018). Most of the other well-known social media platforms, for

example Instagram, benefit more the business-to-consumers -companies. Many Finnish marketing experts recommend LinkedIn for Finnish business-to-business companies as the main social media platform and Twitter as a close second for information sharing (Asikainen 2018, Vilperi 2015, Suomen Digimarkkinointi 2019).

LinkedIn is the largest professional network in the world, with more than 610 million users, with a mission to "connect the world's professionals to make them more productive and successful" (LinkedIn Corporation 2019). In the eWOM context there hasn't been much previous academic literature but LinkedIn has been shown to be used for ambassadorship behavior (van Zoonen, Bartels, van Prooijen & Schouten 2018).

Twitter describes itself as "what's happening in the world and what people are talking about right now" (Twitter 2019a) and it has 126 million daily users (Twitter 2019b). Research on Twitter has included studies on customers' behavior and electronical word-of-mouth in Twitter, for example, in the re-tweeting behavior (e.g. Ibrahim, Wang & Bourne 2017; Rudat, Buder & Hesse 2014). In a research conducted by Kim, Sung and Kang (2014) consumer-brand relationship was found to be a significant factor in consumers' willingness to engage in brand eWOM by retweeting brand's content. Re-tweeting has been found to be a quick and easy way to spread existing information, with majority of re-tweets consisting of news items of high informational value (Rudat et al., 2014).

2.3. Employee eWOM

In this section, the study is linking the concepts of employee advocacy and eWOM to form an assumption that employees do get involved and initiate conversations in the online discussion by spreading their recommendations and support for the company they work for, voluntarily and without obligation from their employer.

Employee eWOM has been known in literature also as ambassadorship especially when linked to a specific social media platform such as LinkedIn (van Zoonen et al. 2018). In this study the term employee eWOM is used to highlight the fact that the ambassadors in this study are companies' own employees and that the advocacy behavior happens in online environment, more specifically social media platforms LinkedIn and Twitter.

In the increasingly digital world, employees have more tools to initiate conversations about the company in public domain, making the influence of employees an important communications and marketing asset for any company (Men 2014). This is why next chapter takes a closer look on how companies can try to manage the employee eWOM with different tactics.

3. EMPLOYEE EWOM AS A MARKETING STRATEGY

In this section employee eWOM is looked at in more strategic level: how to develop employee advocacy internally and how to align employee eWOM to company's external marketing message. The first subsection focuses on developing employee advocacy through the positive employee attitudes detailed in the previous section, and the second subsection will take a different point-of-view in looking more in detail about the content of employee eWOM and the message that the company wants to send to its stakeholders, and how an organization should focus to its internal communication to reinforce the culture of employee eWOM.

3.1. Developing employee advocacy

Men (2014) sums up in her study why internal communication is important: it has a big role in developing positive employee reactions, such as employee satisfaction, organizational trust and commitment, and positive employee-organization relationships. As demonstrated in the previous section with the satisfaction, trust and commitment –model, these positive employee reactions influence advocacy intentions and behavior. Therefore, companies should focus on enhancing and creating the aforementioned reactions.

3.1.1. Satisfaction

In the previous section, job satisfaction was declared to be a result of different influences: dispositional and work situation influences. Dispositional influences have more to do with the person themselves and their characteristics, and it was shown that some personality traits result in job satisfaction even when changing jobs and work situations (Saari & Judge 2004). These characteristics are something that the organization itself cannot create or develop.

However, Saari and Judge (2004) also mentioned work situation influences, and through these influences, organizations can try to make their employees more satisfied with their jobs. They claim that the satisfaction with the nature of the work best predicts overall job satisfaction. Organizations should thus try to influence the nature of the work their employees are doing. A study conducted on Finnish professionals found four work characteristics that resulted in positive and significant way to job satisfaction: autonomy, feedback, task significance and variety (Hytti, Kautonen & Akola 2013).

Besides the above discussed work characteristics, also the whole organization itself can affect job satisfaction and can be managed. Findings by Bellou (2010) suggest that employees are more likely to be satisfied with their job when the organizational processes and evaluations are thought to be fair, when employees are given opportunities to grow and develop, when employees feel that they are supported both in their personal and professional life, and when employees consider their employer to be respectable. Other findings from the same study found that younger and older workers value different things and what brings them job satisfaction: younger employees' satisfaction can be predicted by the opportunities they have for personal growth, whereas older employees value their job's benefits (Bellou 2010). Another study on organizational culture's influence on job satisfaction found that clan culture, emphasizing mentoring, loyalty and tradition, and adhocracy culture, emphasizing innovation, entrepreneurship and flexibility, resulted usually in higher levels of job satisfaction than cultures emphasizing competition, goal achievement, bureaucratic order, and rules and regulation (Lund 2003). From these findings, it is evitable that employees value a good organizational culture and support from their managers. Besides influencing the nature of the work, organizations should really pay attention on their culture and developing it in alignment with their employees' values.

3.1.2. Trust

As shown in the previous chapter, trust is a key enabler for employee advocacy (Fullerton 2011). We know that trust enhances organizational performance in many ways and that it is defined as willingness to be vulnerable to others' actions based on

positive expectations, and that in employees it refers to both co-workers and managers, and the organization as a whole (Vanhala & Ahteela 2011). What we do not know, yet, is how to develop trust in employees.

As the basis of the trust is in positive expectations towards the people an individual need to trust, five attributes have been recognized in literature that the trustees should have in order to create trust. These attributes are ability, benevolence, integrity, identification and transparency (Pirson & Malhotra 2011; Mayer, Davis & Schoorman 1995; Tschannen-Moran 2001). Ability refers to whether a trustee has the competence to perform their tasks, benevolence to whether a trustee exhibits goodwill and concern of wellbeing to trustor, integrity to a trustee's character, whether they are honest and forthcoming, identification refers to understanding the interests and intentions of the other party, and finally, transparency refers to a trustee's willingness to share trust-relevant information (Pirson & Malhotra 2011).

A study by Pirson and Malhotra (2011) found out that for internal parties, employees, there are different sources of organizational trust than for external stakeholders. The trust-resulting attributes for internal stakeholders are summarized in table 1.

Table 1. Trust-resulting attributes for internal stakeholders per Pirson & Malhotra (2011)

Internal stakeholders	Transparency Benevolence Ability Identification	Integrity Ability Identification
	High	**Low**
	Depth (of the relationship)	

From the results, it is apparent that the attributes needed to develop trust in an employee depends on the employee's relationship to the company, where we can argue that, for example, a summer worker or a part-time student worker would have a low relationship, whereas a more senior specialist would have a deeper relationship with the organization. Both low and high depth relationships require ability and identifications from a trustee, but it seems that in low depth it is more important to have a trustee to be known as an honest person, whereas in a high depth to increase trust a trustee need to express goodwill towards the trustor (Pirson & Malhotra 2011). Similarly, in another study trust in management has been shown to be the reason why trust adds value to an organization: trusting the management to do their jobs (=ability) allows employees to focus on their own jobs (Mayer & Gavin 2005).

3.1.3. Commitment

In the previous section three different types for organizational commitment were recognized: affective, continuance and normative commitment (Meyer and Allen 1991). When looking at the satisfaction, trust and commitment –framework, it was shown that job satisfaction resulted in affective commitment and organizational trust in both affective and continuance commitment. From organization's point of view, the normative commitment is not desired, as it results negatively to the advocacy intensions. (Fullerton 2011).

From this we can detect that when company focuses on developing its employees' job satisfaction and organizational trust, it should result in organizational commitment as well. A study by Sloan, Buckham and Lee (2017) suggests that to enhance organizational commitment organization-wide, managers should seek to recruit individuals who have a high degree of differentiation of self, i.e. an individual is able to balance emotions with rational thought with autonomy in relations with others, as these individuals are show to be more inclined towards affective and normative organizational commitment. Affective commitment can also be enhanced through different types of leadership: studies have shown transformational leadership styles increasing affective organizational commitment, meaning that transformational leaders are more likely to utilize soft power bases, as in that the leader's influence stems from referent and expert powers rather than (legal) position power (Pierro et al. 2013).

3.2. Aligning employee eWOM and external marketing messages

In the previous section, we have established that electronical word-of-mouth has many benefits and we have established that in today's digital world, employees are important messengers and marketing assets for a company. Still left to uncover is what kind of eWOM content is desirable and how to keep the employee eWOM message aligned with the company's own external marketing messages.

In this section, this study explores different types of eWOM content and trying to find recommendations from existing eWOM literature. Also, internal marketing is looked more thoroughly to explain its role in encouraging and guiding employees to produce their own online content.

3.2.1. Content

In the most generic form, word-of-mouth in online context have been shown to increase sales, but the content and what has been said has been more affecting variable than how much is said (Gopinath, Thomas & Krishnamurthi 2014). It is also noted, that when comparing offline and online word-of-mouth content, online content is more deliberated, thought through and reasoned, and the threshold to communicate about a brand or an organization is higher, whereas offline content is more spontaneous (Eelen, Özturan & Verlegh 2017). Similarly, when an individual posts something online, they have already considered whether or not the information is interesting or useful to others (Berger & Iyengar 2013).

The online platform where the electronical word-of-mouth is published on has an impact on the content of the message: Twitter allows only 280 characters per one post and different analyses show that shorter tweets, between 70 and 100 characters, get more retweets and engagement, whereas LinkedIn allows up to 1,300 characters per post, making it easier to post more elaborate content (Social Report 2019).

Even though the content of the electronical word-of-mouth has to be deliberated and especially from marketing's point of view there should be a reason to why the message is posted, previous studies have found that the credibility of eWOM messages can be damaged in the long run if all the messages considering the same issue are positive (Doh and Hwang 2009) and that promotional eWOM can resonate negatively with external parties as with the increased number of eWOM messaging people have come suspect even seemingly voluntary messaging by individuals (Morokane, Chiba & Kleyn 2016). However, employee eWOM is still seen by public more neutral and credible than the actual marketing and communication department generated messages (Men & Stacks 2013).

3.2.2. Internal communication

As Men (2014) has stated in her study, internal communication has a huge role in developing positive employee attitudes as well as encouraging advocacy intentions in employees. Internal communication has been defined as a way to describe organizations and a central process by which employees can share information, create relationships and develop organizational culture and values (Men 2014).

Internal communication, especially symmetric communication where there is dialogue and listening equally between managers and employees, has been shown to advance employee-organization relationships for better (Men 2014). A study by Kim and Rhee (2011) has linked employees with good long-term relationships with their organizations to likely feel as if the organization's problems are theirs as well, and thus, share supportive information about the organization to external parties. Frank (2011) suggests that by highlighting what employees can get out of employee eWOM – personal brand, networks and market value – is important in the internal communications when trying to enhance advocacy behavior in the employees.

4. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHOD

This study seeks to understand the motivations behind employee electronical word-of-mouth, as well as if and how organizations could further develop it. To achieve the best understanding of the issue, related theoretical frameworks are studied to guide in creating interview questions to interview employees in business-to-business companies operating in Finland who engage in LinkedIn and/or Twitter about their work life. The study is a qualitative study, which uses exploratory research methods.

4.1. Research design

The purpose of this section is to describe research design in order to provide a plan for data collection and analysis. In this thesis, the chosen research method is qualitative research. Qualitative research aims to describe real life phenomena, and it takes into account that reality is multifarious and that events shape other events simultaneously, making it a fit research method for understanding motivations and reasons behind employee advocacy (Hirsjärvi, Remes & Sajavaara 2004, 152). This type of research also looks at the source material as a whole entity, helping to understand the big picture of a phenomenon (Alasuutari 2011, 38). Qualitative research includes several different research methods, such as interviews, observations, existing literature and personal experiences (Metsämuuronen 2005, 198; 222; Denzin & Lincoln 2000, 3). In this study, the interviews are chosen as a fit method.

Exploratory research is useful when trying to understand and gain information on an unfamiliar topic, which is why it is a very suitable method for understanding employees' motivations around social media behavior (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill 2009, 139). There are three ways to conduct exploratory research, which are literature review, expert interviews and focus group interviews (Saunders et al. 2009, 139-140). This study uses both existing literature as well as expert interviews as the source material.

4.2. Data collection and analysis

The interviewees of this study were selected on the following criteria: 1) the interviewee is active on LinkedIn and/or Twitter and writes about their work/workplace, 2) the interviewee works at a B2B-company that operates in Finland, and 3) the interviewee's job description does not include tasks related to social media or advancing employee advocacy.

The interviewees were found through social media using researchers' personal social media accounts by writing posts on LinkedIn and Twitter about needing interviewees for a master's thesis and participating in LinkedIn conversations regarding similar topics as presented in this study. This method was chosen to gain attention of the active users of the both social media channels. The data was collected from face-to-face and phone interviews. Interviewing was selected as the data collection method because it fits well studies that circle around phenomena that are relatively unknown and not well understood (Hirsjärvi, Remes and Sajavaara 2009, 207). The interviews are semi-structured, meaning that the questions were formed beforehand, but their order and structure could be changed during each interview (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 1995, 36). The questions were formed beforehand to ensure that all relevant topics are discussed, but the format of semi-structured interview allows for additional questions during the interview when needed (Saunders et al. 2009, 320).

The research data consists of several interviews, and the basic information of each interview is presented in the Table 2 below. The interview question structure can be seen in Appendix 1, but it should be noted that additional questions have been asked during the interviews depending on the interviewees' answers. The data analysis begins with listening to and transcribing each of the recorded interviews. This is done to increase the reliability of the study as well as to make the analyzing of the data easier.

Table 2. Basic information about the conducted interviews

Interviewee	Length of employment	Social media channels	Data gathering method	Time and duration of the interview
1. Sales Manager, male, 20-30-years old	7 years	LinkedIn, Twitter	Phone interview	24.7.2019 19 min
2. Junior UX Designer, male, 20-30-years old	Less than a year	LinkedIn	Phone interview	26.7.2019 16 min
3. Cognitive Developer, male, 20-30-years old	1,5 years	LinkedIn	Face-to-face interview	13.8.2019 20 min
4. Key Account Manager, female, 30-40-years old	7 years	LinkedIn	Phone interview	30.8.2019 18 min
5. Marketing Leader, female, 40-50-years old	27 years	LinkedIn, Twitter	Phone interview	6.9.2019 20 min
6. eCommerce Consultant, male, 20-30-years old	2,5 years	LinkedIn	Phone interview	12.9.2019 18 min
7. Vice President, Brand, female, 30-40-years old	1,5 years	LinkedIn	Phone interview	18.9.2019 20 min

After all the interviews are transcribed, they are first analyzed separately in their own context, followed by a comparison to other interviews. The method of cross-case synthesis used in this study is adopted from case studies, meaning that the interviews are compared to each to find commonalities and differences in the way the interviewees describe the same phenomena. (Yin 2009, 156-160)

4.3. Reliability and validity

Yin (2009, 40) identifies four different tests for judging the quality of research in qualitative studies: construct validity, internal validity, external validity and reliability. Starting with reliability, it refers to ability to repeat the study with the same results. In other words, another researcher should be able to repeat the study following the same procedures than the original study and arrive to the same results. Reliability aims to minimize the errors and bias in research, and there are two tactics for it: the use of case story protocol and the development of case study database. (Yin 2009, 45). This master's thesis includes information on the research questions and interview questions, with a list of interviewees and research methods. All of the interviews in the study are recorded and transcribed, to enhance the reliability of the data. Regarding to reliability in qualitative studies, Schreier (2012, 26) points out that the context and researcher have significant roles in the study compared to quantitative studies. In qualitative studies the same degree of reliability as in quantitative studies is not necessarily achieved, nor is it as important to achieve as long as the subjectivity of the results are kept in mind.

The validity of the study is divided to three different types. Several methods are used in this study to maintain its validity. In this study, there are seven interviewees, representing different people in different circumstances but within the same preset criteria, making sure that the evidence is supported by multiple uses, whereas everything related to interviews are well documented with length and time of recording available for everyone. In the same manner, all the external sources all well cited and everyone should be able to identify and find the original sources.

External validity is a sub-type of validity that deals with the problem of whether the results of the study can be generalized (Yin 2009, 43). In other words, when replicating the study, the results should be similar. The interview questions as well as research methods are presented in this study as clearly as possible should anyone want to replicate the study; however, it should be noted that since the interviews are semi-structured and the study is exploratory in nature, there have been possible additional questions presented during the interviews based on the answers. It should also be noted that while this study is limited precisely to Finnish B2B-companies, with different limitations the results could be different.

5. FINDINGS

The results of conducted interviews are presented in this chapter, starting with a look at personal motivations behind employee eWOM, the effect of a work environment to eWOM and finishing with taking a look at the alignment of employee eWOM and organizational communication. Interviewees are numbered from 1 to 7, as presented in the table 2 in previous chapter. Each interview is discussed at the same time, combining the answers to same topic in each subtitle. The themes below are in the same order as during the interview.

Each interview started with short introductions, where their job roles, time at the company and social media channels in use where discussed (see table 2). Some of the interviewees were more active than others in social media, and others had both LinkedIn and Twitter in use, while most only used LinkedIn actively. What was common for everyone was that they all worked in B2B companies, all had shared something related to their work from their personal social media accounts and no one was involved in their organization's social media presence or employee advocacy promotion internally.

5.1. Reasons behind employee eWOM

This section focuses on different situations where employees engage in eWOM and their own reflections on why they think they do that, in order to understand the context and their behavior in social media more generally. The section is divided into three subsections, each corresponding to one interview question.

5.1.1. Employee eWOM context

The first interview question asked the interviewees to think about different situations where they typically share something about their work or work organization either on

LinkedIn or Twitter. Most of the typical situations for sharing work related content are summarized in table 3.

A lot of the answers highlighted the fact that personal social media accounts are used very selectively when it comes to sharing company materials: most answers focused on the fact that the typical situation to share content is when they are themselves somewhat included in the company's messaging:

"At least when (seldom) the company posts something that is directly related to me, I share it." Interviewee 3

While interviewee 3's experience here is saying that the situation included sharing content featuring themselves, that's not the only case when the shared content is somehow personal to the employee. Interviewee 2 mentioned that he had recently wrote a blog post for their company's website and that he had wanted to share that from his own account as well. In similar manner, own projects, events and campaigns rose as a popular situation to share organizational or work related content. Interviewees 4, 5 and 7 all mentioned them as their primary situations to share work related content:

"I post with a strict focus, I don't share everything that our company posts, as that can be three times a day, but with selection. Of course, my own projects are the most important ones." Interviewee 7

Besides own projects, recruiting was mentioned as one situation that feels personal to interviewee 4 and leads to wanting to share the open positions on their own social media account as well. Interviewee 1 on the other hand says that they typically post on social media when they have a new realization about some topic related to their work and thinks it could be interesting for their followers as well. Interviewee 6 was the

only one to mention that they typically shared something work related when there was direct encouragement from the organization to share something:

"Someone from our unit encourages that "hey, would you mind sharing this [from your account], it's really cheap advertising for us if we share it ourselves and get visibility." Interviewee 6

Table 3. Typical employee eWOM situations

Interviewee	Answer
1	New thoughts and ideas regarding own work
2	Content creation
3	Features the employee themselves
4	Recruiting, interesting customer project
5	Events, what's going on at the work right now
6	Encouragement from the company to share
7	Own campaigns and projects

Many of the interviewees also mentioned that they sometimes repost some content from their colleagues and organization when they just happen to come across something interesting on their LinkedIn or Twitter feed. Both interviewees working in marketing related roles, 6 and 7, mentioned to posting on LinkedIn and/or Twitter daily and that the medias were always open during the work day.

5.1.2. Employee eWOM topics

The second interview question was about the topics themselves that the interviewees wrote about or re-shared from their organization or about their work life in general. The answers are combined in table 4 and analyzed more in-depth below.

The most common topic among the seven interviewees was industry-related topics. Examples given for industry-related topics were different technologies and platforms that the company operates with, such as artificial intelligence, machine learning, software and e-commerce. Other clear category that arouse from the answers was company related topics, such as events, company's own employees, products and services, and different customer cases and references. While the different categories remain same with the people, the actual content within the categories might vary a lot from time to time:

"It changes a lot depending on my [current] job role, at the moment the topics relate to cloud technology." Interviewee 4

Own interests not directly related to the place of employment were also mentioned as popular topics to write and share about; these included themes such as work life in general, wellbeing at work and sales processes and sustainability. Interviewee 7 stated that they share everything to do with sustainability, their main object of interest at the moment, whether or not it was related to their company or not.

Table 4. Employee eWOM topics

Interviewee	Answer
1	Industry-related, general thoughts on working, management, sales and customer service
2	Own work
3	Industry-related, studied technologies, quite technical topics
4	Own interests, innovations, wellbeing at work
5	Industry-related, company's events, blogs, analyst reports and what thoughts they evoke
6	Company's events, products and services, customer references, industry-related
7	Employee-related, industry-related, customer cases, sustainability

For the most people interviewed, it seemed that the platforms were mainly used for work-related communications and not that much for personal use:

"I consider LinkedIn largely to be a work-related [platform], or career or career development related." Interviewee 3

Interviewee 1, however, mentioned that Twitter is even more about their whole life than LinkedIn, and that in Twitter work is just one topic among everything else happening in their life. Interviewee 5 was on the same line and explained that for them, LinkedIn and Twitter were quite similar platforms topic-wise, but Twitter may have a bit more light content.

5.1.3. Employee eWOM motivations

The third question asked the interviewees to consider why they actually share that company-related content on their personal accounts and what motivates them. This section links to the research question on what leads to employee advocacy. Interviewees 2 and 6 exclaimed *"Good question!"* after hearing the question, not having given their actions any conscious thought before.

Table 5 gives a brief summary on the employee eWOM motivations that the interviewees mentioned. Two of the main themes that emerged from the answers are information and knowledge sharing, and helping the company. Information and knowledge sharing could be categorized into two sub-sections based on the answers: interviewees 3 and 7 stated that they purely so interested in the topics they wrote and shared that they thought someone else in their networks could be interested as well, whereas interviewee 1 thought of the information and knowledge sharing as more of concretely helping someone else by doing it:

"You get to help someone, advice someone who needs help and be of assistance, a bit like collecting good karma." Interviewee 1

The other main theme seems to be helping the employer. Many of the interviewees mentioned how knowledgeable they are of the way LinkedIn works and that by being active there and sharing the company's posts and other content, they can help in gaining more visibility for the company. As interviewee 4 stated on the topic:

"There's been a lot of talk from marketing department how big of a reach you can gain in LinkedIn by commenting or liking posts, so maybe that's motivating – making the company more well-know." Interviewee 4

All of the help wasn't directed to the company, many of the interviewees also realized that they can personally benefit their career and get good business cases by being active on social media. Interviewee 5 mentioned that they believe in social selling, and that is one of the biggest reasons they engage so much in social media. Interviewee 6 mentioned also career development as a result of helping their company in gaining visibility:

"I see it as a beneficial for me personally as well, that our team does good job and gets results and we get good cases [with a help of gaining visibility on social media], so I can progress in my own career." Interviewee 6

Table 5. Employee eWOM motivations

Interviewee	Answer:
1	Helping others and sharing information/knowledge
2	Loyalty towards the company
3	Sharing information/knowledge, building own professional profile
4	Increasing the company's visibility, proud of working at the company
5	Marketing supposed to be active on social media, social selling and creating business opportunities
6	Working as a team and getting visibility, creating business opportunities
7	Sharing information/knowledge

Surprisingly little the interviewees mentioned building their own personal brand on social media; only interviewee 3 mentioned that by talking about the topics they work with in social media, they can showcase their portfolio of different technologies that they work with and be branded towards those. Interviewee 7 on the other hand explicitly mentioned that by sharing on LinkedIn they are not trying to build their personal brand but shares information because it is interesting.

5.2. Work environment and employee eWOM

This section focuses on the work environment and how it can affect the employee eWOM. This section links strongly to the research question on what leads to employee advocacy intentions and behavior. The section splits into two subsections, where the first one discusses external factors, such as colleagues and the organization, and the second one looks into satisfaction, trust and commitment of the interviewee. Five interview questions were asked in this section.

5.2.1. Employer and colleague encouragement

In this section, two questions were asked: how common it was for the employees to post something related to their organization and if and how the organization encouraged its employees to be active on social media. The results for both questions are combined in table 6.

Table 6. Employee's activity on social media and employer encouragement

Interviewee	Employees active on social media	Employer encouraging employees to be active on social media
1	No	Yes
2	No	Yes
3	Yes	Yes
4	Yes	Yes
5	No	Yes
6	Yes	Yes
7	No	Yes, recently

The results clearly show that while all companies included in this study encourage their employees to use social media, only some of them are successful. Only in case 7 the interviewee claimed that at one point, the organization didn't want to encourage its employees to share too much on LinkedIn in the fear of the employees getting headhunted to other companies.

The most popular ways of encouraging employees' activity on social media are different social media trainings and companies providing either ready-made content to share or suggestions on things that could be shared. Table 7 combines the data from table 6 and adds the different methods for encouraging employees' social media activity to show which methods seem to be the most effective.

Table 7. Methods for encouraging employees' social media activity

Interviewee	Employers' methods for encouraging social media activity	Success based on employees' activity
1	Trainings, provides content that could be shared	No
2	Asks relevant people to share relevant contents directly from their personal accounts	No
3	Provides content that could be shared	Yes
4	Training, shares statistics on how employee's social media activity boosts company's visibility on LinkedIn	Yes
5	Provides technology to share relevant content easily, trainings	No
6	Provides content that could be shared and encourages the sharing by showing statistics	Yes
7	Provides technology to share relevant content easily, trainings	No

Based on these two tables, interviewees 3, 4 and 6 seem to be working for companies where the employer has managed to activate its employees on social media. Successful methods include company providing shareable content, training and showing social media statistics to its employees. Interviewees 4 and 6 both commented on understanding the importance of social media:

"[The company] has shown statistics on how many people have seen the posts and how many have shared them, and how the reach of the post has increased. These statistics have shown to employees that it really has a big impact that the employees like and share these posts." Interviewee 4

"Almost weekly we get messages from higher-ups or own manager that "hi, we have this event coming up, remember to share it because it's a small thing of you to do but

it has [a big impact on] reach and possibly even to our profits." It's not mandatory, but very desired." Interviewee 6

This concrete highlighting of results achieved by employees' social media activity seems to work on these two companies, when combined with either social media trainings or providing different content and topics to share on social media.

5.2.2. Satisfaction, trust and commitment

The next three questions of the interview asked the interviewees to describe their job satisfaction, trust and commitment. The results for all three questions are summarized in table 8.

Table 8. Employees' job satisfaction, trust and commitment

Interviewee	Satisfaction	Trust	Commitment
1	Good	Good	Good
2	Fair	Good	Poor
3	Good	Good	Fair
4	Good	Good	Fair
5	Good	Fair	Good
6	Good	Good	Good
7	Good	Good	Good

Interviewees mentioned factors such as job tasks and variety in them, workplace itself, flexible employer, good team and interesting subjects to work with as a source for their good job satisfaction. Good trust on the other, was seen as building from stable organization, colleagues and their help, transparent communication in the organization, easily approachable manager, ethical business and a team with good attitude and skills. Interviewee 5 pointed one factor that they felt lowered trust in the organization:

"You can't avoid politics in a big global company, and I feel that it lowers my trust from time to time." Interviewee 5

Sources for good commitment to the organization included having worked at the company for a long time already, job tasks varied over the years, promotions and progressing in career, unwillingness to start learning new company policies in a new company, good team spirit, low hierarchy at work and high work ethic.

"In my opinion, you can't do any of these marketing/communications/branding sort of work if you aren't committed. Otherwise it will show in your doing." Interviewee 7

Interviewee 2 reported that they were not committed to the company at all and that they were planning to leave the company by the end of the year. They explained that the current organizational culture didn't fit them as the main reason for the decision to leave.

5.3. Alignment of employees and organizations in social media

The third and final section of this chapter focuses on how employees and their organizations align in social media with their content and audiences, as well as with employees' private and work personalities. The first subsection looks into the interviewees' companies in social media and how the company content aligns with employee's content. Second subsection looks into the different ways employees share company and work related content. Third subsection compares their target audiences and finally in the last subsection the interviewees reflect their private and work personalities in social media and how they align. Seven questions were asked in this section.

5.3.1. Content alignment

In this section the interviewees were asked to describe if their organizations were active on LinkedIn and Twitter, and the kind of content the organizations shared. After this they were asked to compare their own social media messages to that of their organizations. All interviewees agreed that their companies were active at least on LinkedIn, and some also on Twitter. The organizations' contents in social media are listed in table 9

Table 9. Companies' content in social media

Interviewee	Company's social media content
1	Tips and information regarding the industry, employer branding
2	Employer branding, product information
3	Current projects, product development, career stories, lighter content such as Pride
4	Blog posts, customer references, career stories
5	Blogs, light content, events
6	Success stories, customer projects, product launches, job postings
7	Press releases, product information, podcasts, videos

Interviewee 1 feels that both they and the company share tips and information about the industry, but they have different agendas: interviewee tries to get contacted personally, while the company has more focus in employer branding. Interviewee 2 admits that they are not even sure what the company is trying to communicate, but thinks that the little content they have posted regarding the company is aligned as the content has come from marketing department.

Interviewee 3 says that the alignment with the company comes in part from acting in a neutral manner in social media and not being too loud with strong opinions in any specific topic. They continue that also the topics in their social media are aligned, only that the spectrum of topics is narrower than the company's. Interviewee 4 agrees and

explains that their LinkedIn posts are only about the company and work there. They also recognize the benefits an employee can have in LinkedIn:

"I want to be more active in posting; in social media, you can see what's going on with each customer and think what value we could bring them." Interviewee 4

Interviewee 5 feels that their own content is aimed to customers who are further in the customer journey versus the content in the company's social media, but the alignment in topics is there and that interviewee 5 also uses a lot of company's own content in their social media. Interviewee 6 adds that when seldom they are not just clicking share on LinkedIn without adding any text, they like to write with more personal style than the company, but of the same topics. Interviewee 7 summarizes that for the most part the content is aligned, just with a narrower scope in topics and sometimes with topics about industry that are not yet timely with the company.

Table 10. Areas of misalignment in employees' and company's social media

Area	Misalignment
Topics	Narrower scope of topics in employees' accounts
Tone of voice	Employees have a more personal touch and interest in the topic
Goal	Especially people in sales/business development roles are interested in generating business with the help of social media versus companies' focus is on general awareness

In summary, usually employees' content in social media channels is aligned with the company's message as the base of the topics is often in company's own social media posts or other content available online. The few misalignments are summarized in table 10 above.

5.3.2. Employees' sharing habits in social media

In this section, interviewees were asked about how they share the content related to their work and company and think how it is distributed between creating own posts, sharing company's social media posts with own comments added, and sharing company's social media posts without adding anything to them.

Table 11. Sharing methods for work-related content

Sharing method	Interviewee						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Own posts	Mostly	Some	Some	Some	Some	Rarely	Mostly
Sharing content and adding own comments	Some	Some	Mostly	Mostly	Some	Some	Some
Sharing content without own comments	Never	Never	Never	Some	Never	Mostly	Rarely

Table 11 summarizes the answers to sharing methods question. For the most part interviewees seem to favor creating own posts and sharing company's social media posts with additional comments. Only interviewee 6 favors sharing company's content without additional comments:

"If it's in some way relevant for me, in a way that I'm involved in [the company's LinkedIn post] I like to write additional comments to it. If it's only some generic company topics, I just create visibility by sharing it." Interviewee 6

The easiness and effortlessness of sharing company's social media updates was mentioned many times as the main reason for not creating own posts:

"Maybe the biggest part is sharing employer's posts, maybe because it's the easiest. I usually add my own comments to them, that this is cool in my opinion." Interviewee 3

However, interviewees mostly wanted to keep their own personality and voice in their own profiles, as well as wanting to speak to their audiences, even if they shared the company's social media posts:

"I usually add my own words, that would somehow target [the post] to my own contacts, to that network I have." Interviewee 4

5.3.3. Target audiences in social media

This section handles the target audiences both the employer and the employee have in social media, and how they might differ. Interviewees were also asked to reflect on what kind of content they feel works best with their target audiences and which sort of posts get the most comments and/or likes.

Table 12. Target audiences in social media

Interviewee	Employee's audience	Company's audience
1	Customers, prospects	Customers, potential recruits, prospects
2	Has not defined target audience	Potential recruits
3	Technically advanced people	Customers, prospects
4	Prospects, own professional network	Potential recruits, prospects
5	Very industry specific prospects and customers, personal professional network	Prospects, customers
6	People in the same industry	People in the same industry
7	Less technical people than company's	Technical people

Table 12 summarizes the different target audiences the interviewees and their companies have in interviewees' minds. Most interviewees agreed that outside of their personal contacts, their target audiences were quite similar to that of companies'. Only interviewee 2 had difficulties defining their target audience, yet alone to compare to their employer's target audience, as they didn't follow their own employer, or any other company, on LinkedIn. Also, interviewee 3 expressed that they are not necessarily targeting customers or prospects as their company, but except a certain level of technological knowledge to be present in their network:

"I at least hope and assume that those who see my posts [about AI and machine learning] understand at least something about the topic." Interviewee 3

Those interviewees who had in previous questions expressed understanding of social selling and creating business through social media (interviewees 1, 4, 5) had also more defined target audiences and had more customers and prospects in the target audience.

Table 13. Most engagement generating topics

Interviewee	Most engagement generating topics
1	Tips related to the industry that help many and are not obvious
2	General topics that are easy to relate to, not about work
3	Posts that include the interviewee themselves strongly, posts about trending topics
4	Topics such as climate change, circulation economy; recruiting posts
5	Personal development, such as graduation; photo from an event; light content
6	Post with picture or video
7	Slush-related posts, sustainability, marketing philosophies

Table 13 summarizes topics in the interviewees' social media that lead to most engagement, i.e. comments and likes. In general, topics that are not directly about the company get the most engagement in the interviewees' social media. Different topics that are "trending" or otherwise very much in general public's mind generate a lot of engagement. Interviewees also recognized that in LinkedIn, having a picture or video with the post usually leads to more engagement compared to just having text. Many also admit that they don't fully understand what is behind the engagement:

"I've actually tried to figure out that myself, but I feel like sometimes you spend two hours creating a post and no one reacts, and some other day you get hundreds of likes to a post you didn't plan at all." Interviewee 2

5.3.4. Combining private and work personalities in social media

As the last questions, interviewees were asked whether they also post content that is not at all related to their work from the same social media accounts, and if yes, how is that content compared to the work-related content.

Interviewees 1, 2, 5 and 7 shared a lot of non-work related content from their LinkedIn and/or Twitter accounts, whereas interviewee 3 did it seldom. Interviewees 4 and 6 reported to never posting anything non-work related from their accounts. Interviewee 4 had thought about doing posts about more general topics, such as wellness, but the possibility of gaining a lot of visibility to those kinds of posts made them a bit vary. Interviewee 6 on the other hand, had no plans to start expanding from work-related posts, even though they had seen some interesting general topics discussed on LinkedIn.

"To me [LinkedIn] is purely a professional platform, I don't bring any personal matters there and I don't see why would I. The target audience is not like that." Interviewee 6

All of them had experienced that the non-work related content was more well received especially on Twitter, and in both channels received more engagement. Interviewee 1 admitted that they would be happy if some work-related tweet would ever gain as much visibility as some joke tweet. However, interviewees who posted other content as well all agreed that there was no conflict in posting professional work-related content and personal, non-work related content from the same accounts. Interviewee 3 pointed out that LinkedIn account is their personal account and that content that is interesting for them is shared there. Interviewee 5 also thought that the point is also in whether you are the same person at work and at home, and how that affects the behavior in social media as well:

"I don't think my social media person and [offline] person are separated. I am the same person in work and personal life." Interviewee 6

6. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This final chapter sums up the whole study and links the empirical findings to the earlier studies presented in the theory chapters. Section 6.1. answers to the research questions and presents this study's theoretical contributions, while section 6.2. focuses on the practical implications that could be applied in b2b companies in Finland. Lastly, section 6.3. finishes the study with limitations and possible future research topics.

The goal of this study is to state why companies in Finnish b2b sector should pay attention to how their employees behave in social media. The focus of this study has been especially on what factors contribute to employees sharing about their work and company on LinkedIn and Twitter, and what is the content they post and is it aligned to their employer's content on the same social media channels. The findings of this study are compared to the theory of previous research to see if they go hand in hand, or are there differences.

6.1. Theoretical contributions

This study tries to contribute to the gap in existing literature about employee advocacy in the social media era. The focus of this study is the understanding of different motives and factors why employees engage in this voluntary action of promoting their companies on their personal social media accounts. To understand the so called "employee eWOM", this study looked into literature about employee advocacy (such as Fullerton 2011; Cropanzano & Mitchell 2005; Pitt, Botha, Ferreira & Kietzmann 2018) and eWOM (such as Ahrens, Coyle and Strahilevitz 2013; Kim, Sung & Kang 2014; (Wang, Yeh, Chen & Tsydypov 2016) as there was little existing literature about employee advocacy on social media. That said, the biggest contribution to theory is the new concept of employee eWOM, combining elements of employee advocacy and eWOM into one, and looking at the phenomenon from the employees' perspective.

Secondly, this study looks into what kind of content the employees share about their work and employers on their social media, and what aspects might affect the content they produce. Especially the research gap of employee eWOM content has been previously significant, and this study has tried to bridge it. The term employee eWOM has not existed in previous literature, and employees as a marketing asset has been almost overlooked on marketing literature. This study has aimed to highlight the importance of employees' digital communications in today's digital age.

The rest of the theoretical contributions are discussed alongside research questions, with the sub-questions building the answer to this study's main research question: How does employee advocacy occur in social media?

SQ1: What leads to employee advocacy intentions and behavior?

According to Fullerton (2011), trust towards employer leads to normative and affective commitment, which along with job satisfaction, leads to heightened advocacy intentions. Almost all interviewees of this study showed positive trust, satisfaction and commitment towards their employer, and they all participated in advocacy behavior. One theme that arose from the interviews was the notion that advocacy behavior was felt to be beneficial not only to the employer, but to the advocator themselves and their team. In different studies, motivational factors such as want for social interaction (Henning-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh & Gremler 2004) and individual characteristics such as altruism (Ho and Dempsey 2010) have been pointed out to be affecting electronical word-of-mouth. While potential for personal brand building, or self-enhancement, had been identified as one motivational factor for eWOM (Henning-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh & Gremler 2004), it was mentioned surprisingly little in the interviews when asked about motivations for advocacy behavior, only one interviewee mentioned building own professional profile as a motivation to posting about own work and employer.

Wanting to help other people, be it sharing knowledge or offering own expertise, was one of the most prominent answers from interviewees when asked about their motives

for posting positive aspects related to things they work with. This aligns well with findings of Whiting et al. (2019) when they analyzed the different motivations for eWOM: altruism and its sub-categories helping others and sharing information. However, the existence of social desirability bias should be acknowledged with these answers: the interviewees might have answered in a way that seems like the more socially accepted answer (Krumpal 2013), such as bringing less attention towards motivation of self-promoting and more attention towards helping others. Other themes that arose from this study include loyalty towards the employer, increasing the company's visibility and creating business opportunities, which all align with the categories helping the company and altruism from the study of Whiting et al. (2019). Thus, we can draw a conclusion that at least some of the motivational drivers of eWOM for consumers are also applicable when it comes to employee eWOM, namely motivational drivers such as altruism, helping others, sharing information, self-enhancement and helping the company. This study has brought more attention to different factors that influence employee advocacy, and especially in social media. Previous studies have been unable to bring eWOM thinking to employees and draw similarities between customers' behavior and employees' behavior when it comes to advocacy intentions, while this study showed that those factors influencing traditional customer eWOM also apply to employee eWOM to some extent.

SQ2: How do employees advocate in social media?

In this study the ways employees advocate in social media can be split into two categories: sharing ready-made content from the employer either through special applications or re-sharing employer's social media posts on different social media platforms, or creating entirely unique own content. Of these two, sharing ready-made content was the more popular option and it was felt as an easier and more effortless way to advocate, which aligns with Rudat et al. (2014) finding of re-tweets being a quickest and easiest way to share existing content. Same should be applicable for LinkedIn as well. Although the ready-made content or an option to re-share company's social media posts was the more popular option, interviewees rarely shared them without adding some own thoughts to the post.

Employee advocacy and eWOM is for the most part voluntary action, but companies do try to encourage the behavior. Internal communication is seen as an important part of developing positive employee attitudes (Men 2014). Another study has found that employees with good long-term relationships with their employers are more likely to share supportive information to external parties (Kim & Rhee 2011). Some interviewees felt like they were expected to be active on social media as part of their job, and these interviewees had already been part of the organization for a long time and were very committed. Out of all seven interviews, everyone claimed that their employers had taken actions to encourage their employees to share content on their personal social media channels. Of these seven interviews, three interviewees thought that the companies had succeeded in getting their employees to be active on social media. Successful methods included providing ready-made content to be shared, showing statistics on how much employees can boost the company's visibility on different social media platforms by being active themselves, as well as offering trainings on social media. Different methods for companies to encourage employee advocacy in social media have not been presented before in marketing literature, and this study managed to find some practices that seemed to work in the interviewees' companies.

All companies presented in the interviews were active on social media as well. According to employee brand engagement theory presented by Pitt, Botha, Ferreira and Kietzmann (2018) employees are more likely to engage, or advocate, the company when they experience the company's brand positively. With the companies present in the social media platforms, the employees can get guidance on e.g. different topics to share in regards to the company and the brand's tone of voice. Thus, companies' social media presence probably can encourage its employees to be active as well in terms of employee advocacy. This study compared also employees' views on how aligned their social media content was to that of their company's social media content. This way of studying how employees have bought their company's marketing message and taken it as a part of their own work related communications is quite new to the marketing and organizational research. A few of the interviewees also mentioned that they believed in social selling and tried to actively engage in it. While they don't

necessarily talk about the company, they are trying to promote their own professional skills and that indirectly relates to the company by having its employees selling their services at the company.

SQ3: What is the advocacy content in social media and what factors influence it?

Most of the content shared by the interviewees in this study included sharing knowledge, promoting own projects, building own personal brand and showcasing own expertise and social selling. Even though many of the interviewees included some sales-y materials in their posts, in general employee eWOM is seen as more credible than messages generated by the company itself (Men & Stacks 2013).

This study supports previous studies in which eWOM often consists of information sharing and passing along and forwarding information (Kim, Sung & Kan 2014). Sharing information and forwarding information from the employer were the two most popular topics for the interviewees. Many of the interviewees stated that they worked in a position that was close to their own interests and thus shared the content for their networks as well, as they though their networks included like-minded people. Similarly, Berger and Iyengar (2013) found in their study that when an individual posts something online, they have already considered the information to be useful or interesting for others. In that way, employees curate their employers content to be fitting for their own personal brand and to showcase their interests. While these findings are nothing new when it comes to eWOM content, previously there have been little to no mentions of employee eWOM content in marketing literature.

Furthermore, content that included the interviewees own projects or otherwise showcased work that involved them was a popular topic on social media posts. Especially when the employer's own social media posts included the interviewee or their project, they were eager to re-post it.

6.2. Practical implications

The aim of this study was to understand the concept of employee eWOM and factors linked to it, including motivational factors and content of employee eWOM. This study can help managers get a quick overlook on what is employee eWOM, how it could be developed and used as a marketing strategy, and what topics are common among employees. The study found that it was important for the company itself have a strong social media presence to encourage its employees to be active there as well. Having a strong key marketing message is also beneficial for company, so that its employees can use similar messaging in their own social media channels. It is also important to have employees trained in social media, how to use it in business-related matters, and how employee eWOM can impact the company's visibility and performance in social media. Companies can also provide ready-made content or suggestions on topics, that the employees can then use in their own channels.

Common topics on employees' own social media channels included employees' own interests in their work, information they found useful for themselves or their followers, and showcases of their work or current projects. One way for employers to try engage their employees in social media is to make sure their employees are working on projects that fit their own interests.

Managers can also get a view on what methods are commonly used in distributing the organizational messages to social networks, which include re-sharing the company's own material and content, and posting original content. This again highlights the importance of the company's strong presence on social media and producing of content that is interesting and informative, and that employees can have own thoughts and ideas about. The most important thing that managers could gain from this study, is the change in attitude towards employee advocacy, in a way that no company would on this day try to limit their employees' visibility on social media in fear of them getting recruited elsewhere, as was the case in one interviewee's company. Managers should realize that in the chance of getting their employees to be active on social media, the benefits outride the possible downsides of headhunters.

The theory section of this study can give managers perception on different factors that drive employee eWOM, as well as some suggestions on how these factors could be developed as a company. The findings section on the other hand, gives managers an overlook on how actual employees feel about using social media for informing their networks about their careers and jobs. Especially important for managers is to read what methods are used in different companies and which of them have proved to be effective.

As one interviewee mentioned in their interview, the company had had restrictions for encouraging its employees to grow their social media presence linked to their own work. In the light of this study, this view is clearly outdated and it fails to see the benefits of having active employees in different professional social media platforms. First thing employers should understand about employee advocacy is that it's in many ways out of their control and this goes in two ways: employers can't make their employees to be active on social media and neither can they forbid them to be. However, there are factors that can encourage employee advocacy intentions.

Basically, it all begins with ensuring that the employees are satisfied, have trust on the organization and are committed (Fullerton 2011; Birch et al. 2016). The study showed that all the social media active interviewees checked the three aforementioned factors. Even though advocacy intentions are or aren't present in an individual, companies have different tactics for educating and making sharing on social media easier for its employees, which this study found to be ready-made content for employees to share, social media training as well as internal communications on how employee advocacy boosts the company's visibility on social media.

Employee eWOM matters because employee eWOM is more neutral and credible than company's own content (Men & Stacks 2013). Employee eWOM is also more and more common in this digital age making the influence of employees an important marketing tool for companies, when done right (Men 2014). Some benefits include increase in

sales and more successful product launches (See-To & Ho 2014; Clemons, Gao & Hitt 2006).

Finally, managers should understand after reading this study, that first and foremost employee eWOM is voluntarily action that is to some extent influenced by personal characteristics of an individual, and thus nothing that a company does can reach each employee.

6.3. Limitations and future research

While this study has made both theoretical and managerial contributions, the study has its limitations. First of all, all results are highly context-dependent and might differ with in other kinds of research conditions, such as when applying to non-Finnish employees or to b2c companies.

Secondly, this thesis also makes an assumption that advocacy behavior is a result of awaken advocacy intentions in employees. Thus, similar factors can be said behind advocacy behavior as advocacy intentions. What should be noted is that not all advocacy intentions, however, lead to advocacy behavior. There might be factors that influence advocacy behavior but not advocacy intentions, and thus make the transition from mere intentions to actual behavior in employees. As all the interviewees of this study were enforcing advocacy behavior, based on the interviewees it cannot be pointed out what could be such factors.

Finally, the data collected is quite narrow as only seven people were interviewed. All the interviewees were also found through posting on LinkedIn, meaning that only a very narrow group of people were able to see the post. Thus, future research might study the topic with a larger number of participants in various contexts.

This study found that the role of an employee had influence in the way they perceived social media and its uses for their work. In the future, it could be interesting to do more research in this area with a focus on sales and other customer-facing roles to see how they create business with their use of social media.

It would also be highly informative to do a comparison study of employees active on social media and non-active employees to see what are the differences between their job satisfaction, trust and commitment, and other factors presented in this study to affect employee advocacy. This could also further amplify the theory that satisfaction, trust and commitment have influence on employee advocacy intentions.

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Appendix 1. Interview structure

Background information

Title and job description, duration of the employment, social media channels in use

Motivations in social media usage

In which situations do you publish content related to your work/employer on LinkedIn or Twitter?

What are typical topics that you write about?

Which factors motivate you to publish content related to your work?

Workplace

Is it common within your workplace to publish on social media?

Does your employer encourage to use social media in your work and if yes, how?

How would you describe your satisfaction towards your work/your workplace?

How would you describe your trust towards your workplace currently?

How committed are you to your workplace?

Content

Is your employer as a company active on LinkedIn an/or Twitter and what kind of content do they publish?

Do you feel that your message on social media aligns with that of your employer's? In which ways/which ways not?

How do you share content related to your employer? Re-tweeting/re-sharing the content published by the company, re-sharing and adding your own comments, mainly creating own social media posts and own comments? What is the ratio between these?

What is your target audience on LinkedIn and/or Twitter and is it different from that or your employer's? What kind of content works best with your audience? What kind of social media posts generate most comments/likes/other reactions to your posts?

Do you also publish content not related to your work from the same social media accounts, what kind of? How is this content in relation to that of your work related content (more/less popular with your followers, more interesting to write)?