Transformation of the Employees into Brand Advocates through Employer Branding

Muhammad Awais Ilyas[1], Hasnizam Shaari[2], Ahmad Said Ibrahim Alshuaibi[3]

[1]PhD Candidate. School of Business Management, Univrsiti Utara Malaysia, Sintok, Malaysia,
Email: awaisee99@yahoo.com
[2]Faculty of School of Business Management, College of Business, Universiti Utara Malaysia,
Malaysia, Email: zamree@uum.edu,my
[3] Faculty of School of Business Management, College of Business, Universiti Utara Malaysia,
Malaysia, Email: Ahmad_alshuaibi@uum.edu.my

Abstract
In the social media era, the extra ordinary enhancement in communication power of employee aroused the challenge for organizations how to effectively manage the benefits and risks which associated with employees thoughts sharing about their employer with external stakeholders, thus the employee's communication power about their brand has made employee brand advocacy a buzzword in internal marketing literature. The limitation and restriction for branding is no longer for only products even organizations resorting to branding for attracting and retaining the best talent, now time changed the people more trust on the organization based on the existing employees word of mouth in recruitment which means talent attraction also dependent on employee brand advocacy. Existing literature indicates the clear gap as employee brand advocacy not studied as a pure focal concept. Hence, the present study conceptualised the employer branding relationship with employee brand advocacy.
Keywords: Employee Brand Advocacy, Employer Branding, Internal Marketing, Employer Brand Reputation

Introduction
The social media digital era provides the growing number of means and mediums of communication which provides number of interaction channels for employees with external public to initiate the conversation about their organization's brand (Men, 2014; J.kim & Rhee, 2011). As compared with formal public relations massages of organization with those brand messages deliver by employees who act as brand advocates or informal spokespersons are more effective, credible and neutral because employees use their personal links and networks to spread positive word of mouth to promote and defend the organization's brand in public

(Men & Stacks, 2013). In the social media era, the extra ordinary enhancement in communication power of employee aroused the challenge for organizations how to effectively manage the benefits and risks which associated with employees thoughts sharing about their employer with external stakeholders, thus the employee's communication power about their brand has made employee brand advocacy a buzzword in internal marketing literature (Dreher, 2014; Men, 2014). The employees who spread positive word of mouth about their organization's brand are known as brand advocates or brand ambassadors (Commander, 2007). Likewise, Men (2014) also defined employee brand advocacy as "the voluntary promotion of organization brand by employee externally". As a result, this employee's brand supporting behaviours further leads to enhance the brand image, reputation and customer's brand satisfaction of the organization.

In services industry employees are directly interact with customers, the services brand is different from product brand because in product brand customer's brand perception and expectations can be identified through tangible features of product but in service brand the customer's brand expectations primarily depends upon employees attitude and behaviour (Morhart, 2009). According to Schiffenbauer (2001), the credibility of brand message will lost when it is not supported by unified behaviour of employee. In services sector it's essential, that employees of organization become the brand ambassadors or brand advocates of organization when they are delivering services to customers (Nickson et al., 2005). Now days the biggest challenge for organizations is to attract and retain the best talent. Brand advocacy also enables the organizations to attract and retain the best talent (Mosley, 2015; Tanwar & Prasad, 2016). The recent global survey in 2015 reported that the becoming challenge for global employers is talent shortage; the top management are more concerned about to compete in this new war for talent attraction and retention (Mosley, 2015). The limitation and restriction for branding is no longer for only products even organizations resorting to branding for attracting and retaining the best talent, now time changed the people more trust on the organization based on the existing employees word of mouth in recruitment which means talent attraction also dependent on employee brand advocacy (Mosley, 2015; Men, 2014; Tanwar & Prasad, 2016). Literature has suggested (Babin & Boles, 1998; Brown & Peterson, 1993; Mowday, Steers &Porter, 1979; Katoen & Macioschak, 2007; Schweitzer & Lyons, 2008; Men, 2014; Tanwar & Prasad, 2016) that employee brand advocacy reduce the turnover intention and enhance the organizational performance and stability. The employees who transform in to brand advocates also contributes to secure organizational resources in form of talent retention and their own strength of high level satisfaction, loyalty and commitment with organization (Schweitzer & Lyons, 2008). In today era employers realized that the appropriate way to become attractive in employment market is by having strong, distinguishable and clear employer brand (Gozukara & Hatipoglu, 2016; Kucherov & Samokish, 2016; Leekha & Sharma, 2014; Tanwar & Prasad, 2017). Likewise the consumer brand aim is to attract and retain the customers by emerging consumer brand advocacy; similarly the aim of employer brand is attraction and retention of the best talent by developing employee brand advocacy. The study of Tanwar and Prasad (2016) suggested that it is necessary to find that brand advocates is directly developed by employer branding practices or another variable can mediate between employer branding and employee brand advocacy. Existing literature indicates the clear gap as employee brand advocacy not studied as a pure focal concept (Rokka et al., 2013; Men, 2014). Hence, the present study conceptualised the employer branding relationship with employee brand advocacy.

The Objective of Study

The aim of the paper is to conceptualize the concept of employee brand advocacy and its relationship with employer branding. Existing literature indicates the clear gap as employee brand advocacy not studied as a pure focal concept (Rokka et al., 2013; Men, 2014). Therefore, the current study aims to review the employee brand advocacy as outcome of employer branding, and comprehensive view of developing brand advocacy through employer branding.

Literature Review

Conceptualizing the Employee Brand Advocacy

Keller (1993) defined brand advocacy as the favorable communication about a brand to accelerate adoption and acceptance of brand from consumers. Individuals who spread positive word of mouth or their positive opinions about a brand are known as brand ambassadors or brand advocates (Commander, 2007). The consumer's connection with brand accelerates to spread positive word of mouth about that brand which leads towards brand advocacy (Anderson, 1998). Walz and Celuch (2010) argue that the brand advocacy behavior of consumers is not only include spreading positive word of mouth about brand its more than positive word of mouth which results in strong relationship of consumer with brand or company at that stage consumer defends the brand or company against critics thus the brand advocacy is more influential or supportive behavior than positive word of mouth. Similarly the brand advocacy principle can be applied to HRM in internal marketing context an employees can be a brand advocates of their organization (Tanwar & Prasad, 2016). And employees are valuable brand advocates for their brand or organization (Commander, 2007). Literature on brand advocacy has extensively discussed the consumer's brand advocacy in context on external marketing (Howard & Kerin, 2013; Kemp, Childers & Williams, 2012; Russel & Morgan, 2009; Urban, 2005; Walz & Celuch, 2010; Parrott, Danbury & Kanthavanich, 2015; Vishag & Laverie, 2013). According to Heskett et al., (1997) argues that customer advocacy starts with the employee's advocacy because employee satisfaction has strong correlation with customer satisfaction but employee brand advocacy has not yet studied as a focal concept and there is paucity of research in that area (Men, 2014; Tanwar & Prasad, 2016). The concept firstly discussed by Kennedy (1977), his empirical study explains the employee's significant influence external stakeholders of the organization. The employees as part time marketer concept discussed by the study of Gummesson (1991) according to him employee's interaction with customers influence the customer's perception about organization. The employee's commitment and satisfaction will leads towards employee advocacy behavior or employee's willingness to behave like part time marketers (Gronroos, 1990; Peck et al., 1999) and willingness means to spread positive word of mouth and recommend the organization to potential employees and potential customers (Buttle, 1998; Hennig Thurau et al., 2002). Men (2014) defined employee brand advocacy as "the voluntary promotion of organization brand to external stakeholders by employee". The employees as brand advocates or informal spokesperson for the organization are more influential on organization public relationship (Dozier et al., 1995). Compared formal public relations massages of organization with those brand messages deliver by employees who act as brand advocates or informal spokespersons are more effective, credible and neutral because employees use their personal links and networks to spread positive word of mouth to promote and defend the organization's brand in public (Men & Stacks, 2013). In the social media digital era provides the growing number means and mediums of communication which

provides number of interaction channels for employees with external public to initiate the conversation about their brand or employer (Men, 2014; J.kim & Rhee, 2011). The extra ordinary enhancement in communication power of employee aroused the challenge for organizations how to effectively manage the benefits and risks which associated with employees thoughts sharing about their employer on the social media channels, thus the employee's communication power about their brand has made employee brand advocacy a buzzword in internal marketing literature (Dreher, 2014; Men, 2014).

From the human resource management perspective, employee brand advocacy also helps in attraction and retention of talent. The number of research studies (Breaugh, 1992; Mosley 2015; Schweitzer & Lyons, 2008; Shinnar, Young & Meana, 2004; Tanwar & Prasad, 2016; Ilyas et al., 2017) suggests that those employees who recruited due to existing employee's advocacy or referrals showed high level of satisfaction, loyalty and quality with squat level of turnover intensions. Now time changed in this social media digital era the people more trust on the organization based on the existing employees word of mouth in recruitment which means talent attraction also dependent on employee brand advocacy (Mosley, 2015). The employees who act as brand advocates also contribute in talent attraction and also have positive effect on recruitment cost efficiencies and positive organizational outcomes (Morehart, 2001) enhance the employee performance (Kirnan et al., 1989) and pre-employment knowledge which consequently have positive impact on organizational socialization (Williams et al., 1993). Literature has suggests that the employee satisfaction and commitment leads towards employee brand advocacy, highly committed employees further act as brand advocates of organization to external public (Babin & Boles,1998; Brown & Peterson, 1993; Mowday, Steers &Porter,1979; Katoen & Macioschak, 2007; Tanwar & Prasad, 2016) which reduce the turnover intention and enhance the organizational performance and stability (Schweitzer & Lyons, 2008). The employees who transform in to brand advocates also contributes to secure organizational resources in form of talent retention and their own strength of high level satisfaction and commitment with organization (Schweitzer & Lyons, 2008).

Conceptualizing Employer Branding:
The employer branding considered as most appropriate strategy for attraction and retention of best talent and concept is still in developing and evolving stage, the concept was introduced almost before two decades but still there is no a single indication that the concept of employer branding passing fad as a part of past (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Rampl & Kenning, 2014; Tanwar & Prasad, 2017). Basically the theoretical foundation of employer branding concept is derived from brand marketing. In consumer market, a brand can provide functional, economical and psychological benefits to their consumer, aiming to attract and retain the consumers similarly in employment market the employer brand provides functional, economical and psychological benefits to their employees to attract and retain them (Tanwar & Prasad, 2017). In 1996, the employer branding term was firstly introduced by Ambler and barrow by emerging the human resource management and brand marketing concepts. Ambler and Barrow (1996) defined employer branding as "the package of functional, economic, and psychological benefits provided by employment, and identified with the employing company" (p. 18). Further the numerous studies on employer branding concept stimulated by this definition. The study of Moroko and Uncles (2008) stated that there are many similarities among the consumer brand and employer brand. According to Backhaus and Tikoo (2004), the organizations make distinction with other organizations by

strengthening their employer brand through distinct employment offerings. According to the study of Ruch (2002) stated that the employer brand's key concern is the "employment experience", including both tangible and intangible benefits like salary and organization culture. While the organizations should ascertain the compelling and attractive attributes while strong employer brand development which attract the potential and retain the existing employees (Tanwar & Prasad, 2017). Existing literature enlightens that the numerous studies on employer branding much focused on potential employees as the target audience and its related outcomes like employer attractiveness (Alniacik, Alniacik, Eart &Akcin, 2014; App & Merk, 2012; Berthon et al., 2005; Born & Kang, 2015; Lievens et al., 2007; Rampl & Kenning, 2014; Schweitzer & Lyons, 2008; Shaker & Ahmed, 2014; Sivertzen, Nilsen & Olafsen, 2013). According to Maxwell and Knox (2009), the desired benefits of employer branding is only attained, if existing employees considered their employer brand as attractive or employer of choice. Existing literatures shows paucity of research on employer branding in context of existing or current employees (Tanwar & Prasad, 2017). Employer branding also enables existing employees to become loyal and brand advocates through engaging, motivating and retaining (Mosley, 2015; Tanwar & Prasad, 2016). Therefore, the current study conceptualised the employer branding outcomes in context of existing employees.

Discussion
The study of Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) provides the conceptual foundation of employer branding. In early literature the employer brand considered as talent attraction tool but later studies realized that the employer brand is not only for talent attraction, it has also contribution in motivating, engaging and retaining the existing talent (Alniacik, Alniacik, Eart &Akcin, 2014; Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Berthon et al., 2005; Born & Kang, 2015; Mosley, 2015; Rampl & Kenning, 2014; Tanwar & Prasad, 2017). There are two processes in employer branding, first external marketing and second is internal marketing, while external marketing has aim to become employer brand more attractive to attract the best talent in employment market, whereas the internal marketing enables the existing employees to become brand loyal and further act as brand advocates of their employer brand (Van Hoye, 2008; Tanwar & Prasad, 2016). According to the Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) stated that, employer brand has significant influence on organizational identity and organizational culture which further effects the employee's brand loyalty, further the brand loyal employees have key role in enhancement of organizational productivity. According to Mosley (2015), the employer branding enables the existing employees to act as brand advocates. In the new world of social transparency, the employers cannot only rely on recruitment advertisement to develop a positive employer brand image, while employee brand advocacy is seem more appropriate to build positive employer brand reputation in employment market (Mosley, 2015). According to the study of Kimpakorn and Tocquer (2009) stated that, employer branding enables the current employees to considered their employer brand as employer of choice, can transform their existing employees in to brand advocates and true believers. Further, Kimpakorn and Tocquer (2009) argued that the passionate brand advocates can communicate the true meaning of organization brand while delivering the brand promise to external stakeholders. There is paucity of research in the relationship of employer branding with employee brand advocacy (Tanwar & Prasad, 2016). The study of Tanwar and Prasad (2016), firstly discussed the direct relationship between employer branding and brand advocacy, this study also discussed the mediation effect of organizational commitment between employer branding and brand advocacy. According to Tanwar and Prasad (2016), the research is still required to

study the relationship between employer branding and brand advocacy. Research needs to conceptualise that whether engaged, loyal and committed employees further transform into brand advocates or employer branding directly enables to develop brand advocates (Tanwar & Prasad, 2016). The employee brand advocacy cannot study as focal point; it still needs more research (Men, 2014).

Conclusion

In the new social media era, the extra ordinary enhancement in communication power of employee aroused the challenge for organizations how to effectively manage the benefits and risks which associated with employees thoughts sharing about their employer with external stakeholders, thus the employee's communication power about their brand has made employee brand advocacy a buzzword in internal marketing literature (Dreher, 2014; Men, 2014). Now time changed the people more trust on the organization based on the existing employees word of mouth in recruitment which means talent attraction also dependent on employee brand advocacy (Mosley, 2015; Men, 2014; Tanwar & Prasad, 2016). Therefore, current study conceptualized the employer branding relationship with employee brand advocacy.

Limitations and Future Research

The aim of this study is to review the employee brand advocacy as outcome of employer branding, and comprehensive view of developing brand advocacy through employer branding. Moreover, the paucity of research in relationship between employees brand advocacy and employer branding. The present study just provides the conceptual relationship between employer branding and employee brand advocacy. But it has still few limitations of this study which provide further research opportunities. It needs empirical evidence; future study can expand the scope of this paper by providing empirical evidence on relationship of employer branding with employee brand advocacy. Secondly, the previous literature on brand advocacy extensively focused in the context of consumer brand advocacy. There is limited literature available on employees brand advocacy. So the employee brand advocacy concept need to more explore.

References

Ahmad, N. A., & Daud, S. (2016). Engaging People with Employer Branding. Procedia Economics and Finance, 35, 690-698.

Ahmed, P. K., & Rafiq, M. (2003). Internal marketing issues and challenges. European Journal of marketing, 37(9), 1177-1186.

Ambler, T., & Barrow, S. (1996). The employer brand. Journal of brand management, 4(3), 185-206.

Babin, B. J., & Boles, J. S. (1998). Employee behavior in a service environment: A model and test of potential differences between men and women. The Journal of Marketing, 77-91.

Backhaus, K., & Tikoo, S. (2004). Conceptualizing and researching employer branding. Career development international, 9(5), 501-517.

Berthon, P., Ewing, M., & Hah, L. L. (2005). Captivating company: dimensions of attractiveness in employer branding. International journal of advertising, 24(2), 151-172.

Brown, S. P., & Peterson, R. A. (1993). Antecedents and consequences of salesperson job satisfaction: Meta-analysis and assessment of causal effects. Journal of marketing research, 30(1), 63.

Commander, C. (2007). Transforming employees into brand advocates. Tailand: CMO Group.

Dreher, S. (2014). Social media and the world of work: A strategic approach to employees' participation in social media. Corporate Communications: An International Journal, 19(4), 344-356.

Du Preez, R., & Bendixen, M. T. (2015). The impact of internal brand management on employee job satisfaction, brand commitment and intention to stay. International Journal of Bank Marketing, 33(1), 78-91.

Eberl, M., & Schwaiger, M. (2005). Corporate reputation: disentangling the effects on financial performance. European Journal of Marketing, 39(7/8), 838-854.

Gözükara, İ., & Hatipoğlu, Z. (2016). The effect of employer branding on employees' organizational citizenship behaviors. International Journal of Business Management & Economic Research, 7(1).

Hollis, N., & Farr, A. (1997). What do you want your brand to be when it grows up: Big and strong. Journal of Advertising research, 36(6), 23-36.

Howard, D., & Kerin, R. (2013). A surname brand effect explanation for consumer brand preference and advocacy. Journal of Product & Brand Management, 22(5/6), 362-370.

Jain, N., & Bhatt, P. (2015). Employment preferences of job applicants: unfolding employer branding determinants. Journal of Management Development, 34(6), 634-652.

Kelloway, E. K., Francis, L., Prosser, M., & Cameron, J. E. (2010). Counterproductive work behavior as protest. Human Resource Management Review, 20(1), 18-25.

Kemp, E., Childers, C. Y., & Williams, K. H. (2012). Place branding: creating self-brand connections and brand advocacy. Journal of Product & Brand Management, 21(7), 508-515.

Kim, S. Y., & Park, H. (2011). Corporate social responsibility as an organizational attractiveness for prospective public relations practitioners. Journal of business ethics, 103(4), 639-653.

Kirnan, J. P., Farley, J. A., & Geisinger, K. F. (1989). The relationship between recruiting source, applicant quality, and hire performance: An analysis by sex, ethnicity, and age. Personnel psychology, 42(2), 293-308.

Kucherov, D., & Samokish, V. (2016). Employer brand equity measurement. Strategic HR Review, 15(1), 29-33.

Kucherov, D., & Samokish, V. (2016). Employer brand equity measurement. Strategic HR Review, 15(1), 29-33.

Leck, J. D., & Saunders, D. M. (1992). Hirschman's loyalty: attitude or behavior?. Employee Responsibilities and Rights Journal, 5(3), 219-230.

Lee, Y. K., Kim, S., & Kim, S. Y. (2014). The impact of internal branding on employee engagement and outcome variables in the hotel industry. Asia Pacific Journal of Tourism Research, 19(12), 1359-1380.

Leekha Chhabra, N., & Sharma, S. (2014). Employer branding: strategy for improving employer attractiveness. International Journal of Organizational Analysis, 22(1), 48-60.

Malai, V., & Speece, M. (2005). Cultural impact on the relationship among perceived service quality, brand name value, and customer loyalty. Journal of International Consumer Marketing, 17(4), 7-39.

Mathieu, J. E., & Zajac, D. M. (1990). A review and meta-analysis of the antecedents, correlates, and consequences of organizational commitment. Psychological bulletin, 108(2), 171.

Matzler, K., Sauerwein, E., & Heischmidt, K. (2003). Importance-performance analysis revisited: the role of the factor structure of customer satisfaction. The Service Industries Journal, 23(2), 112-129.

Maxwell, R., & Knox, S. (2009). Motivating employees to" live the brand": a comparative case study of employer brand attractiveness within the firm. Journal of marketing management, 25(9-10), 893-907.

Men, L. R. (2014). Strategic internal communication: Transformational leadership, communication channels, and employee satisfaction. Management Communication Quarterly, 28(2), 264-284.

Morehart, K. K. (2001). How to create an employee referral program that really works. HR Focus, 1, 3-5.

Moroko, L., & Uncles, M. (2005). Employer Branding–the case for a multidisciplinary process related empirical investigation. In ANZMAC 2005 Conference: Branding (pp. 52-57).

Moroko, L., & Uncles, M. D. (2008). Characteristics of successful employer brands. Journal of Brand Management, 16(3), 160-175.

Moroko, L., & Uncles, M. D. (2009). Employer branding and market segmentation. Journal of Brand Management, 17(3), 181-196.

Mosley, R. (2015). CEOs need to pay attention to employer branding. Harvard Business Review.

Schweitzer, L., & Lyons, S. (2008). The market within: A marketing approach to creating and developing high-value employment relationships. Business Horizons, 51(6), 555-565.

Shaker, F., & Ahmed, A. N. (2014). Influence of Employer Brand Image on Employee Identity. Global Disclosure of Economics and Business, 3(2), 157-166.

Sharma, N., & Kamalanabhan, T. J. (2012). Internal corporate communication and its impact on internal branding: Perception of Indian public sector employees. Corporate Communications: An International Journal, 17(3), 300-322.

Sivertzen, A. M., Nilsen, E. R., & Olafsen, A. H. (2013). Employer branding: employer attractiveness and the use of social media. Journal of Product & Brand Management, 22(7), 473-483.

Tanwar, K., & Prasad, A. (2016). Exploring the relationship between employer branding and employee retention. Global Business Review, 17(3_suppl), 186S-206S.

Tanwar, K., & Prasad, A. (2017). Employer brand scale development and validation: a second-order factor approach. Personnel Review, 46(2), 389-409.

Terglav, K., Ruzzier, M. K., & Kaše, R. (2016). Internal branding process: Exploring the role of mediators in top management's leadership–commitment relationship. International Journal of Hospitality Management, 54, 1-11.

Tseng, L. M., & Wu, J. Y. (2017). How can financial organizations improve employee loyalty? The effects of ethical leadership, psychological contract fulfillment and organizational identification. Leadership & Organization Development Journal, 38(5).

Viktoria Rampl, L., & Kenning, P. (2014). Employer brand trust and affect: linking brand personality to employer brand attractiveness. European Journal of Marketing, 48(1/2), 218-236

Walz, A. M., & Celuch, K. G. (2010). The effect of retailer communication on customer advocacy: The moderating role of trust. Journal of Consumer Satisfaction, Dissatisfaction and Complaining Behavior, 23, 95.

Whitely, W. T., & Coetsier, P. (1993). The relationship of career mentoring to early career outcomes. Organization Studies, 14(3), 419-441.

Wu, L., & Norman, I. J. (2006). An investigation of job satisfaction, organizational commitment and role conflict and ambiguity in a sample of Chinese undergraduate nursing students. Nurse Education Today, 26(4), 304-314.

Yoo, B., & Donthu, N. (2001). Developing and validating a multidimensional consumer-based brand equity scale. Journal of business research, 52(1), 1-14.