

Employee Advocacy and Social Media Engagement of Local Government Councils in Bayelsa State

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ABSTRACT: This study investigated the relationship between employee advocacy and social media engagement in local government councils in Bayelsa State. Specifically, it examined two dimensions of employee advocacy: content sharing advocacy and brand representation advocacy, and their influence on public awareness, engagement, and perception of council activities. A quantitative research design was adopted, with a structured questionnaire administered to a sample of 105 employees selected from the target population using the Krejcie and Morgan sampling method. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and Pearson Product-Moment Correlation (PPMC) to test the hypotheses. The findings revealed that both content sharing advocacy and brand representation advocacy have significant positive relationships with public awareness, engagement, and trust. Employees who actively disseminate council-related content enhance citizen participation, while those who represent the council positively on social media strengthen public perception and credibility. The study concludes that employee advocacy is a strategic tool for improving communication, transparency, and participatory governance in local councils. Recommendations include enhancing digital literacy, developing clear social media policies, incentivizing employee engagement, and leveraging analytics to optimize advocacy efforts.

KEYWORDS: Employee advocacy, social media, content sharing, brand representation, local government, public engagement, Bayelsa State

INTRODUCTION

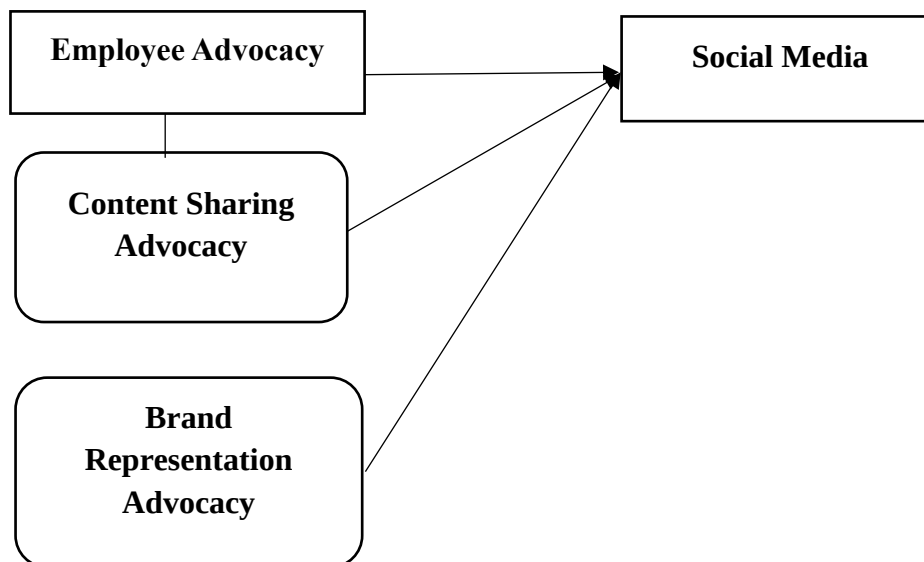
In recent years, the role of social media in public sector communication has expanded significantly, making employee advocacy an essential strategic tool for local government councils seeking to enhance public engagement and service delivery. Employee advocacy refers to the voluntary promotion of an organization's values, initiatives, and messages by its employees through personal social media networks (Smith & Taylor, 2018). Within the context of local governance, this form of advocacy not only amplifies official communications but also humanizes government activities, fostering greater trust and transparency between the council and community members (Bertot, Jaeger & Hansen, 2012). These councils are increasingly adopting digital platforms to disseminate information about public services, grassroots policies, community development projects, and emergency responses (Adeyemi & Folarin, 2020). However, the success of social media strategies in achieving meaningful public participation often depends on the proactive engagement of employees as communicators and brand ambassadors (Kietzmann et al., 2011). Employees with active and credible social media presence can extend the reach of official messages beyond formal channels, helping to bridge the gap between local government communication efforts and diverse citizen audiences (Nguyen, 2019).

Despite the potential benefits, research suggests that many local government councils face challenges in effectively integrating employee advocacy into their social media strategies. These challenges include limited digital literacy among staff, absence of clear social media policies, and concerns about message consistency and professional boundaries (Mergel, 2013; Welch et al., 2019). In the context of Bayelsa State, where infrastructural and capacity constraints may further complicate digital adoption, understanding how employee advocacy can be harnessed responsibly and effectively is especially critical. This study therefore investigates the dynamics of employee advocacy on social media within local government councils in Bayelsa State. It explores how employees' social media activities influence public engagement, information dissemination, and the overall perception of local governance, thereby contributing to the broader discourse on digital governance and participatory communication in sub-national public institutions. The purpose of the paper is therefore to;

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- i. Examine the extent to which employees' content sharing advocacy on social media influences public awareness and engagement with local government council activities in Bayelsa State.
- ii. Assess how employees' brand representation advocacy on social media affects public perception and trust in the initiatives of local government councils in Bayelsa State.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK



LITERATURE REVIEW

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The Social Exchange Theory (SET), developed by Blau (1964), provides a useful framework for understanding employee advocacy in the context of social media. The theory posits that social behavior is the result of an exchange process in which individuals weigh the benefits and costs of their actions to maximize personal and social gains. Applied to local government councils, employees are more likely to engage in advocacy behaviors, such as sharing organizational content or representing the council positively on social media when they perceive that doing so will yield reciprocal benefits, including recognition, professional credibility, or a strengthened sense of belonging within the organization (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Furthermore, SET explains how trust and mutual respect between employees and the council can encourage voluntary participation in social media initiatives, thereby enhancing public engagement, awareness, and perception of local government activities. By framing employee advocacy as an exchange relationship, the theory underscores the importance of organizational support, positive work culture, and recognition mechanisms in motivating staff to act as credible brand ambassadors online.

CONCEPTUAL REVIEW

Employee Advocacy

Employee advocacy refers to the voluntary promotion and support of an organization by its employees through personal networks, often using social media platforms to extend the organization's reach and credibility (Smith & Taylor, 2018). It encompasses actions where employees act as brand ambassadors, sharing organizational content and positively representing the organization's values to external audiences (Kietzmann et al., 2011). In the context of local government councils, employee advocacy involves staff members actively engaging with the public online to communicate policies, programs, and community initiatives, thereby fostering transparency, trust, and citizen participation (Bertot, Jaeger & Hansen, 2012). The behavior is often discretionary and motivated by a combination of personal commitment, organizational culture, and perceived benefits, making it a strategic tool for enhancing institutional visibility and public engagement (Nguyen, 2019).

Content Sharing Advocacy

Content sharing advocacy refers to employees' voluntary efforts to disseminate organizational messages, news, or updates through their personal social media accounts (Kietzmann et al., 2011). This dimension emphasizes the proactive distribution of official content to extend the organization's reach and engage broader audiences. In the context of local government councils, content shared by employees can include announcements about community development projects, public service updates, or policy information. Employees who actively share such content help ensure that information reaches citizens quickly, enhancing transparency and public participation (Nguyen, 2019). Moreover, content sharing advocacy can influence perceptions of government responsiveness, as the

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public tends to trust information coming from identifiable employees rather than impersonal official channels (Bertot, Jaeger & Hansen, 2012). The effectiveness of this dimension often depends on employees' social media literacy, willingness to participate, and alignment with organizational objectives, making training and organizational support crucial for maximizing impact (Smith & Taylor, 2018).

Brand Representation Advocacy

Brand representation advocacy involves employees acting as authentic ambassadors of the organization, promoting its values, mission, and image through personal online interactions (Smith & Taylor, 2018). Unlike content sharing, which focuses on the dissemination of official messages, brand representation emphasizes personal endorsement and credibility, where employees actively embody and communicate organizational principles. For local government councils in Bayelsa State, this could involve staff portraying council initiatives positively, responding to citizen inquiries, or addressing misconceptions about council activities. Brand representation advocacy fosters trust and strengthens public perception of the council's integrity and commitment to service delivery (Mergel, 2013). This dimension is particularly important in digital engagement, as citizens are more likely to respond positively to personalized and credible communication from employees who demonstrate alignment with organizational values (Welch et al., 2019).

Social Media

On the other hand, is a digital communication platform that allows users to create, share, and interact with content in real time (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). For organizations, it provides an interactive channel for disseminating information, engaging stakeholders, and building brand reputation (Mergel, 2013). In the setting of local government councils in Bayelsa State, social media serves as a cost-effective and immediate means of informing citizens about council activities, programs, and developmental projects (Adeyemi & Folarin, 2020). The effectiveness of social media in achieving organizational objectives largely depends on how employees utilize it to advocate for the council, highlighting the interdependence between employee advocacy and social media as mechanisms for enhancing public trust, awareness, and engagement. Together, **employee advocacy and social media** form a synergistic relationship where employees amplify official communications, humanize government actions, and foster participatory governance, emphasizing the critical role of staff-driven digital engagement in modern local government administration (Welch et al., 2019).

EMPIRICAL REVIEW

Empirical studies have increasingly highlighted the strategic importance of employee advocacy in enhancing organizational communication and stakeholder engagement, particularly through social media platforms. Nguyen (2019) examined employee advocacy behaviors in public and private organizations and found that employees who actively shared organizational content on personal social media platforms significantly increased audience reach and stakeholder interaction. The study revealed a positive correlation between content sharing and public engagement, emphasizing that employees function as credible intermediaries between organizations and the public.

Similarly, Welch, Hinnant, and Moon (2019) investigated social media engagement in local governments and reported that interactive communication practices, including employee-driven digital engagement, significantly influenced citizen satisfaction and trust in government institutions. Their findings suggest that when employees personally endorse and communicate organizational initiatives, public perception improves due to increased transparency and authenticity.

In another study, Mergel (2013) explored social media adoption in public sector institutions and found that internal participation of employees in online communication strengthened organizational reputation and enhanced responsiveness to citizens. The study concluded that employee involvement in digital advocacy contributes to improved public image and service delivery outcomes.

Furthermore, Bertot, Jaeger, and Hansen (2012) found that government use of social media, when supported by employee engagement, fosters transparency, accountability, and public trust. Their empirical analysis demonstrated that employee participation in disseminating information positively affects citizens' perception of government effectiveness.

Collectively, these empirical findings support the argument that both content sharing advocacy and brand representation advocacy significantly influence public awareness, engagement, and trust. However, limited studies have focused specifically on local government councils in Bayelsa State, thereby creating a contextual gap that this study seeks to address.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a quantitative research design to examine the relationship between employee advocacy and social media engagement in local government councils in Bayelsa State. The research targets employees of selected local government councils who are active on social media and engage in organizational communication. Using the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) sampling table, a population of 200 employees yields a sample size of 132 respondents to ensure statistical representativeness. Data was collected using a structured questionnaire designed to capture the two dimensions of employee advocacy, content sharing and brand

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representation as well as their impact on social media engagement and public perception. inferential statistics, specifically Pearson Product-Moment Correlation (PPMC) was used to test the hypothesized relationships between employee advocacy dimensions and social media outcomes.

RESULT

Correlations Table

Variables	Content Sharing Advocacy	Brand Representation Advocacy	Public Awareness & Engagement	Public Perception & Trust
Content Sharing Advocacy	1	0.62**	0.58**	0.41**
Brand Representation Advocacy	0.62**	1	0.45**	0.63**
Public Awareness & Engagement	0.58**	0.45**	1	0.52**
Public Perception & Trust	0.41**	0.63**	0.52**	1

The correlation coefficient $r = 0.58$, $p < 0.01$ indicates a moderate positive relationship. This means employees who actively share organizational content on social media tend to increase public awareness and engagement. Thus, H_{01} is rejected in favor of H_{11} . The correlation coefficient $r = 0.63$, $p < 0.01$ shows a strong positive relationship. Employees who represent the council positively on social media significantly enhance public perception and trust. Therefore, H_{02} is rejected in favor of H_{12} . Both dimensions of employee advocacy—content sharing and brand representation have a significant positive influence on public engagement, awareness, and trust in local government councils in Bayelsa State.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study indicate that both dimensions of employee advocacy—content sharing advocacy and brand representation advocacy—have a significant positive relationship with public engagement, awareness, and perception of local government councils in Bayelsa State. The Pearson correlation results showed that content sharing advocacy is moderately associated with increased public awareness and engagement ($r = 0.58$, $p < 0.01$), suggesting that employees who actively disseminate organizational content on social media play a pivotal role in informing citizens about council activities. This aligns with prior studies which emphasize that employee-driven content amplifies the reach of official communications, making government information more accessible and relatable to the public (Nguyen, 2019; Bertot, Jaeger & Hansen, 2012).

Similarly, brand representation advocacy demonstrated a strong positive relationship with public perception and trust ($r = 0.63$, $p < 0.01$). This indicates that when employees personally endorse and positively reflect council values on social media, citizens tend to perceive the council as more transparent, credible, and responsive. These findings support the argument by Smith and Taylor (2018) that employees act as authentic brand ambassadors, and their personal online engagement can strengthen organizational reputation and public confidence.

The results also suggest that employee advocacy is not merely a communication tool but a strategic mechanism for enhancing participatory governance. Local government councils in Bayelsa State can leverage employees' social media presence to foster citizen engagement, bridge information gaps, and improve public trust in council initiatives. However, the study underscores the importance of adequate training, clear social media policies, and organizational support to optimize employees' advocacy behaviors, consistent with recommendations by Mergel (2013) and Welch et al. (2019). In essence, the findings confirm that employee advocacy on social media serves as an effective pathway for local governments to enhance transparency, public awareness, and trust, thereby reinforcing the critical role of staff in digital governance strategies.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the relationship between employee advocacy and social media engagement in local government councils in Bayelsa State. The findings indicate that both content sharing advocacy and brand representation advocacy significantly influence public awareness, engagement, and perception of council activities. Employees who actively share council-related content help disseminate critical information, increase citizen participation, and enhance transparency. Likewise, employees who positively represent the council's values online strengthen public trust and confidence in local governance. These results underscore the pivotal role of employees as digital ambassadors, highlighting that effective employee advocacy can serve as a strategic tool for improving public service delivery and fostering participatory governance in local government councils.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- i. Local government councils should provide regular training programs for employees on effective social media use and digital communication strategies to maximize content sharing and brand representation advocacy.
- ii. Councils should establish comprehensive social media guidelines to ensure consistency, professionalism, and alignment with organizational objectives, reducing the risk of misinformation or reputational damage.
- iii. Recognition programs or incentives for employees who actively engage in advocacy can motivate staff to participate voluntarily in promoting council initiatives.
- iv. Councils should monitor the reach and impact of employees' social media activities using analytics tools to identify best practices and adjust communication strategies accordingly.

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