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### What triggers digital employee advocacy behavior?

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# What triggers digital employee advocacy behavior?

Complete Research Paper

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## Abstract

*As companies increasingly move towards remote/hybrid workplace settings for both sustenance and growth motives, they face people-centric problems such as quiet quitting and organizational (dis)identification. As a way to mitigate these situations, empower employees, and improve well-being, they heavily invest in people-centric digital workplace platforms such as the employee advocacy (EA) platforms that promise both instrumental and humanistic outcomes, including encouraging digital employee advocacy behavior (DEA). However, no prior empirical research has conceptualized DEA nor have they shown the efficacy of the EA platform in encouraging DEA. Using a bricolage approach, we explore digital trace data (user reviews) to firstly conceptualize and then validate a grounded well-being led digital employee advocacy model. We contribute to EA and digital workplace literature by conceptualizing and providing measures to study DEA as well as identifying platform enabled social and psychological well-being as the key triggers to DEA. Practical implications are also discussed.*

**Keywords:** Digital workplace, digital employee advocacy behavior, platform enabled well-being, employee engagement, employee advocacy platforms, remote work, bricolage approach

## Introduction

Since the onset of Covid-19, organizations have been increasingly shifting from the physical workplace to a hybrid/remote workplace (Forbes 2022). This is because remote/hybrid work settings are believed to improve employees' work-life balance, resulting in overall productivity (Arneson 2021). However, with this switch, companies have had to deal with the challenge of maintaining employee-wellbeing, especially since the pandemic led many employees to feel isolated, overwhelmed and disconnected (Poswolsky 2022; Qin and Men 2022). Organizations therefore had to change and seek new ways to lead, organize, communicate and collaborate with their employees (Ruck and Men 2021); accelerating their adoption of digital workplace platforms in order to enable internal communication (Mancl and Fraser 2020) and increase employee's affective commitment and wellbeing at work (Dudézert et al. 2023). Employee happiness and engagement is key for improved performance at work, and to ensure this, companies need to focus on communicating their vision and providing employees with a sense of purpose, as well as strengthening relationships between employees (McKee 2014).

One such digital workplace platform that companies have increasingly turned to adopt is Employee Advocacy (EA) platform, as a means of connecting with their remote and non-remote workforce and maintaining engagement (Thelen et al. 2022). EA platforms allow companies to easily distribute important updates and company news to employees, as well as make relevant content available to employees that they

can in turn promote on their own social media accounts, i.e. encourage the act of employee advocacy. This not only helps keep employees informed, but also helps to amplify the company's message across social media platforms, increasing visibility and potentially attracting new customers (G2 2022). EA platforms are mostly used by for-profit organizations such as business entities, as most of these platforms are cost intensive and may need extensive change management efforts for enabling adoption (Dudézert et al. 2023). Since the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been a significant drop in trust regarding many institutions such as NGOs, government and media, except for businesses (Edelman 2021). This is because many businesses engaged in employee advocacy programs are sharing trustworthy information with their employees, which are then being shared or advocated through their personal social media channels (Thomas 2020). Therefore, we have anecdotal evidence suggesting that since employees are considered as credible sources of information providers (Kim and Rhee 2011), this helps negate the high levels of mistrust organizations may have to tackle, both during and beyond crisis situations. Therefore, understanding the phenomenon of employee advocacy platform use and behavior has important implications to all types of organizations

Additionally, with many people feeling isolated due to remote working arrangements, EA platforms provide a way for employees to stay connected and engaged with their coworkers and the company's culture. Through these platforms, employees can share their own experiences and perspectives, creating a sense of community and strengthening their affective connection to the company (Men and Yue 2019; Sociable 2021). Due to the enhanced communication from the company's side on the EA platforms, employees can better understand the organization's vision and develop a sense of purpose, which recently has been discovered as the key for company growth and above industry profits (Blount and Leinwand 2019).

Although many researchers have defined the concept and purpose of employee advocacy, only recently have researchers considered employee advocacy facilitated via digital platforms (Korzynski et al. 2020; Lee 2021a; Lee and Kim 2020). So far, literature has not delved deep into how enabling platforms such as EA platforms can contribute to digital employee advocacy behavior, offering this option for contextual theorization and advancing the IS literature (Hong et al. 2014). In this study, which is part of a boarder enquiry into the phenomenon of employee advocacy platform use, we seek to answer the following two research questions:

*RQ1: Are EA platforms successful in encouraging employees to advocate for their organization?*

*RQ2: What factors are perceived to contribute to EA behavior in the context of EA platform use?*

In our study, we use publicly available digital trace data (reviews) provided by actual users of EA platforms associated with a wide variety of organizations to extend the limited literature on the digital workplace tools that are specifically designed to enable employee advocacy and answer our two research questions. We are inspired by the Gioia method (Gioia et al. 2013) and use the Sphinx software for data exploration, which allows us to perform both qualitative and quantitative content analysis on textual data (Maaref and Djeflat 2021; Moscarola 2002). Through a bricolage approach (Pratt et al. 2022) we uncover overarching dimensions within the dataset, and through the application of literature, construct a grounded model. We then test this model on the dataset to establish its validity, and present our results.

This study contributes to theory and practice in many ways. Firstly, we conceptualize the variable Digital Employee Advocacy (DEA), which refers to the use of digital platforms by an employee enabling them to advocate for their company to their personal networks digitally via their social networking sites. Additionally, we extend employee advocacy and digital workplace literature. Finally, our study also makes practical contributions as it proposes possible solutions to increase employee-organization connectivity within the digital workplace. In the following sections, we present the background literature on the concept of EA and EA platforms, followed by methods, findings, discussions and implications.

## **Literature Review**

### ***Employee Advocacy***

In an age where there is an overstimulation of information on digital platforms, consumers are increasingly turning towards the advice and opinions from people they know, recognize and trust. Employee advocacy acts on this understanding, whereby the employees voluntarily engage in brand ambassadorship, and share

positive word-of-mouth, promote, or defend their organization internally as well as to their external networks. Nowadays, the action of employee advocacy is predominantly conducted on social networking sites (Lee and Kim 2020; Thelen 2020; Tsarenko et al. 2018). Thelen (2020) demonstrates that employee advocacy also contributes to the success of an organization in three ways: increased growth and sales, human capital and productivity and reputation and issues management.

It is imperative that employees have a good relationship with the organization, and experience sentiments such as self-enhancement, altruism and enjoyment, along with trust and commitment, in order to voluntarily advocate for the organization (Lee and Kim 2020). Organizational identification is another motivator for employee advocacy as employees are more likely to share organization related information on personal social media to help boost organizational success (van Zoonen and Treem 2019). Moreover, studies show specifically that symmetrical internal communication between the company and its employees, which allow employees to feel involved in organizational decisions, is important for employee advocacy (Kang and Sung 2017; Kim and Rhee 2011; Lee and Kim 2020; Men 2014; Men and Yue 2019). A good system of internal communication makes the employee's voice heard, in turn increasing their level of satisfaction and engagement with the organization, as well as improving employee-organization relationships (Kang and Sung 2017). The most significant motivator of EA is employee engagement, as it increases the feeling of connectedness between the employee and the organization (Thelen 2020). Therefore, to stimulate engagement and brand ambassadorship i.e. EA, organizations should ensure positive work environments for employees to increase their 'well-being' and happiness (Sakka and Ahammad 2020). Both internal communication and employee well-being have also grown to become priorities for organizations during and post-COVID in order to increase connectivity within the digital workplace (Qin and Men 2022).

While, research on employee advocacy span over a decade, only recently have researchers considered employee advocacy facilitated via social networking sites (Korzynski et al. 2020; Lee 2021b; Lee and Kim 2020). To our knowledge, there is no research that explores the antecedents and outcomes of the use of EA platforms. So far digital workplace literature has not delved deep into how enabling platforms such as EA platforms are used and appropriated by employees, leaving behind a knowledge void in IS literature. Since investments in these tools are exponentially growing post pandemic (FMI 2022), due to the promise of better employee engagement and well-being, it is important to examine user perceptions of such tools to tie these promises back to reality.

### ***Employee Advocacy Platforms***

In this day and age, organizations are forced to adapt to the digital workplace as they refocus their attention to the implementation of novel collaborative digital work place tools (integrating social, cloud, mobile, analytics, etc.), changing their cultural assets, and even physical spaces to adapt to the distributed and changing nature of digital work. (Köffer 2015; Sundermeier 2022). The digital workplace is essentially, *a collection of all the digital tools in an organization that allow employees to do their jobs, anytime and from anywhere* (Attaran et al. 2019; Köffer 2015). A well-implemented digital workplace platform can potentially transform work and collaborative practices and how employees process information, which are crucial assets in driving other performance and innovative outcomes (Attaran 2019). In spite of the many advantages, practitioners must also take into consideration the disadvantages in order to ensure smoother adoption of the digital workplace tool. These disadvantages include negative impact on employee well-being, emotions, engagement levels and high attrition rates (Dudézert et al. 2023). Therefore, practitioners are advised to look into people-centric IT platforms that are "personal, real-time, mobile-enabled, collaborative, and exploits consumer-oriented styles and technologies" in order to cater to the employee experience and increase engagement (Attaran 2019).

Employee advocacy platforms are 'people-centric' software tools that enable organizations to manage and measure employee advocacy efforts, among other objectives (Kumar et al. 2023). These platforms provide employees with a 'centralized hub' where they can access and share company created content, user generated content as well as third party content- such as company updates, industry news, and product information (G2 2022). Most EA platforms also provide analytics and metrics to help organizations track the success of their advocacy efforts, and may include features such as social media integration, content curation, and employee training (P2P 2022; Sociabble 2021). EA platforms are designed to aid organizations with smoother implementation of advocacy programs, resulting in improved sales,

recruitment, brand reputation, and customer relationships (Forbes 2021). However, EA platforms are also designed to motivate employees to want to advocate for their organization. Thus, these platforms aim to increase employee engagement and instill a sense of community within the organization, by providing employees with a platform to express and present themselves through content sharing as well as connect with colleagues and members of the organization (G2 2022; Levinson 2018; Sociabble 2021). Some EA platforms that promise to enhance people centric outcomes, namely digital employee engagement, are Smarp, Sociabble, Ambassify, DSMN8, EveryoneSocial, and Post Beyond. As indicated earlier, no prior research has examined the extent to which these tools foster employee advocacy and what factors may be conducive to such behavior. In this study, we tackle these two issues through an exploratory lens.

## Methods

We use a bricolage approach and effectively combine various analytical moves within the discovery and construction phase as well as the refining and validating phase. In the first phase, we use various automatic and manual coding moves to identify key concepts and dimensions, which we then operationalize to develop a grounded model. In the second phase, we refine and validate the grounded model by leveraging past literature to identify theoretical explanations linking the variables in the model and offering empirical validity to the same.

For this study, we used textual data or the ‘digital expressions’ of users of EA platforms extracted in the form of reviews, as it enables us to work with a rich variety of information. The data were collected from G2 - a reliable third party website, also known as the “world’s largest tech solutions review site” (Business Wire, 2022). It is a marketplace that enables people to evaluate software solutions through authentic peer reviews and is considered as a reasonably trusted source of information for users as well as companies. G2 provided authenticated reviews of maximum number of EA platforms that are available in the market as of October 2021. By collecting the digital expressions of users, we aimed to capture whether user interactions with the EA platforms are generally successful, and understand the antecedents that effectuate this success.

The website had 56 platforms listed in their ‘Best Employee Advocacy Software’ page. Each of these platforms were recorded in an Excel sheet, and categorized in terms of whether or not they fit the technical format of an employee advocacy platform (i.e. in terms of main features and the degree of employee engagement attributes they featured). The reviews were derived from responses by social actors of various organizations to four questions pertaining to likes, dislikes, recommendations, and utility of the EA platform. Out of the 56 platforms, 18 were determined as exclusive EA software providers<sup>1</sup> and the reviews for each of these platforms were scraped off the review website using the google extension- data miner and collected in an Excel file. A total of 1636 reviews were used for further analysis.

### First Phase: Discovery and Construction

The characteristics of the users and reviews are presented in table 1 below.

Review characteristics		Statistics
Overall reviews	Number of reviews collected	1636
Reviewer characteristics	Partner	34
	Consultant	127
	Manager	230
	Director	204
	Tech	110
	Not disclosed	931
Size of organizations and number of reviews collected in each category	Enterprise (>1000 employees)	760
	Mid-Market (500-100 employees)	640
	Small business (<50 employees)	234
Sentiment analysis indicating the tone of the remarks	Positive	1409
	Negative	61

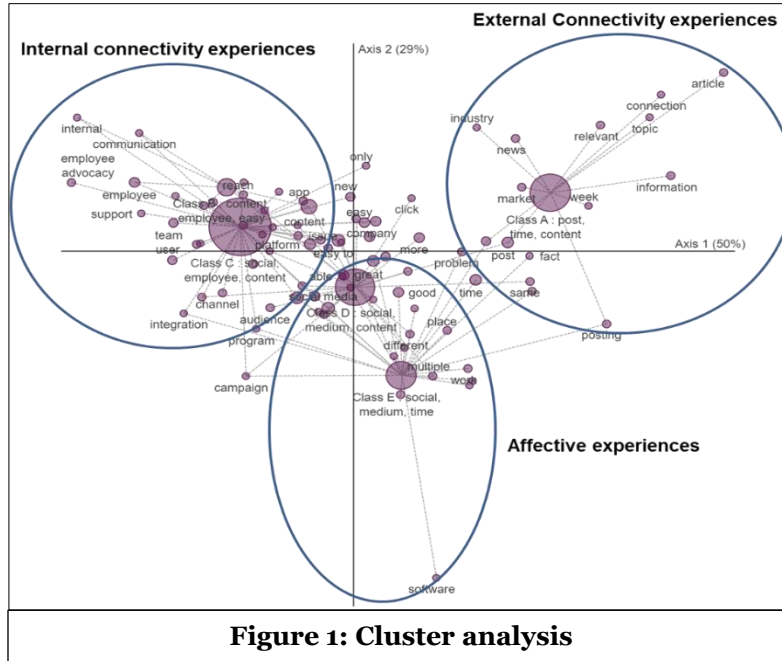
<sup>1</sup> Smarp, Sociabble, PostBeyond, DSMN8, GagglesAMP, EveryoneSocial, Hootsuite Amplify, Social HorsePower, Market Beam, ClearView Social, Socxo, Oktopost, Bambu, WeLikeIt, Sociuu, Ambassify, Social Seeder, DrumUp

	Neutral	90
	No opinion	62
Type of pronouns mostly used	Individual (I-ME-MY)	1115
	Collective (WE-OUR)	841
	Interactive (YOU-YOUR)	734
	Diffuse (THEY-THEIR)	521
<b>Table 1: Characteristics of the reviews collected</b>		

In the first phase, we adopted the Gioia methodology to analyze the data, along with content analysis of the textual data using a software tool called Sphinx. The Gioia methodology is a qualitative research method that involves the analysis of textual data using a systematic, rigorous, and iterative approach (Gioia et al. 2013). Data analysis using the Gioia methodology is conducted in the following manner (Gioia et al. 2013; Magnani and Gioia 2023): the first step is coding the data, which involves identifying themes, concepts, or patterns that are relevant to the research question (we used the Sphinx software to help with this process). Once the data is coded into multiple 1<sup>st</sup> order categories, we begin the analysis process, which involves identifying larger 2<sup>nd</sup> order themes from the data, followed by identifying patterns and relationships between the themes and interpreting their meaning in relation to the research question. A systematic and iterative approach is used, which means, revising the coding and interpretation as we go along. This then helps us create a grounded theoretical model, which is either inspired by or situated with existing literature.

The Le Sphinx software allows us to perform both qualitative and quantitative content analysis on textual data (Moscarola, 2002). The first step was to establish the quality of the data; we explain the source and volume of the data to show its suitability and authenticity. In this stage, we gain a basic understanding of the position of the corpus and the type of expressions used, which allowed us to get closer to the large sample of data. From our corpus, we discovered that most of the reviews were from users who are stakeholders or managerial level change agents championing digital workplace transformations, supposedly including the use of EA platforms. They are probably the primary investors of the platforms and even the controllers of the tools in some cases. This is corroborated through other latest industry reports that also show that the primary users of EA platforms are mostly decision makers or managers. We also observed that the most prominent pronoun used in the reviews were individual in nature (I, my, me), which means that most of the reviews explain the user's first-hand experience with the platform. The second most prominent pronoun used in the reviews were collective in nature (We-Our), which corresponds with primary users of the platforms. Together, these observations allow us to capture the first-hand impressions of knowledgeable informants who can also offer us team and organizational level insights with verified credentials. Furthermore, according to the sentiment analysis, 86% of the opinions expressed had a positive tone- indicating the suitability to study positive user experience and behavioral outcomes from the data set.

This is followed by the exploratory analysis stage, where we explore and interpret the data to get a quick understanding of the significance of the content in addressing the specific research question. This includes the description of the lexical and semantic overview. The use of lexical analysis offers an overview of the contents and enables us to draft our initial concept ideas through the interpretation of the most frequent words and the configurations resulting from their associations. We first analyzed the word cloud, which summarizes the corpus by the most frequent words through a method known as lemmatization. We gathered that the most frequently used words were *content*, *social media*, *post*, *platform*, *employee* and *easy to*, which confirms that most of the reviews are about the EA platform and its essential role i.e. providing employees the ability to easily post content on social media. The next step was to identify the main themes that emerge from the corpus. We used textual data analysis (TDA) which produced a cluster analysis of the responses in order to identify the thematic classes (displayed in Figure 1 below). Here the Sphinx software automatically divided the lexicon into five classes, ranging from A to E, based on their semantic similarity, and frequency of appearance.



**Figure 1: Cluster analysis**

At first, we were not able to distinguish the classes from each other, as there were many words repeated in more than one class, such as *content*, *social media*, *social*, *platform* and *post*. This is because these are also the most frequently used words in the overall review corpus. Therefore, in order to understand the themes emerging in each class, we conducted a manual exploration within each class, by analyzing the top 150 words and expressions produced by Sphinx in combination with narrowed classes. The manual exploration, in conjunction with software-generated statistics about the corpus, enabled us to identify three prominent categories and five sub-themes. These categories are presented in table 2 below. We elaborate our reasoning process here.

Through proximity, we observed that classes B and C could be combined, and together they accounted for 624 review responses. Manual exploration, along with statistical counts made available by the software, allowed us to identify that this class portrayed the employees’ use of the EA platform and the increased connectivity within the organization. Class A primarily dealt with the use of the tool by employees to stay in touch with the wider community by posting and sharing content. Classes D and E were also combined due to their proximity, as these clusters mostly exhibited words that are linked to positive user experience (~448). At this stage, we take recourse in the Gioia method which enabled us to generate a list of 1<sup>st</sup> order concepts, which were then abstracted into 2<sup>nd</sup> order themes and finally enabled us to generate three aggregate dimensions. The first order concepts are also made up of unique words that best describe the chosen concepts- this also enables us to use them as thesaurus terms (in the second phase of our research enquiry). Using these bags of words, we can empirically conduct quantitative content analysis on the same corpus for confirmatory purposes.

1 <sup>st</sup> order codes and adjectives*	1 <sup>st</sup> Order Concepts	2 <sup>nd</sup> Order Themes	Aggregate Dimensions
post, LinkedIn, reach...content, posting, outreach, social media, campaign, program, sharing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Post content on LinkedIn</li> <li>• Increase outreach using the advocacy program</li> <li>• Share posts on social media</li> </ul>	Content Sharing	Digital Employee Advocacy
employee advocacy, advocacy program, thought leaders, brand ambassadors, media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Higher levels of employee advocacy</li> </ul>	Self-presentation	

presence, network, professional...profile	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Employees are converted into thought leaders and brand ambassadors</li> <li>• Increase personal online presence as well as their professional networks</li> </ul>		
company...news, channel, company post, company page, articles, information, internal-communication, updates	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Better information flow through internal communications feature</li> <li>• Enhanced industry knowledge through the platform</li> <li>• Users are more aware of company developments through the company news posts</li> </ul>	Information empowerment	Platform enabled Social Well-being
engagement, connect, leaderboard, communication, messaging, collaborate, competition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase employee engagement</li> <li>• Interaction with colleagues via the leaderboard feature</li> <li>• Users feel connected with and within the organization via messaging, competition and collaboration features</li> </ul>	Social empowerment	
User experience, great, user friendly, happy, ease, useful, benefit, favorite, awesome, fun, amaze, incredible, time saver	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Users find the platform user-friendly</li> <li>• Users are amazed that the platform is beneficial, useful and time saving</li> <li>• Users enjoy the platform and find it's features fun</li> </ul>	Positive user experience	Platform enabled Psychological Well-being
<p>*Notes: These terms were also used as the thesaurus during the confirmatory phase</p> <p><b>Table 2: Categories and themes observed through data analysis</b></p>			

EA literature discusses various types of motivations or stimulants that encourage employees to advocate for their organization. Since EA platforms are tailored to increase the act of advocacy among employees, it would be logical to assume that these platforms enable features that motivate advocacy. Hence, we chose to combine the five categories into three overarching themes, which encapsulate the purpose of the EA platform, as well as the enablers of said purpose. These themes are *Digital employee advocacy*, *Platform enabled social well-being* and *Platform enabled psychological well-being*. Representative quotes for the 2<sup>nd</sup> order themes and the aggregate dimensions can be found in table 3 below. We explain each of these dimensions in the following section.

Themes	Representative quotes
Content sharing	<i>"I really like that I am now able to share content with my community and am even more connected with my business colleagues than before"</i>
Self-presentation	<i>"It's connecting me to people and building a network I didn't know I could have. I've increased my network by 100 in just a couple of weeks. I've gained a lot of traction and have started a lot of meaningful conversations that are driving business forward"</i>
Information empowerment	<i>"It allows me to ready myself every day in different topics and expand my knowledge and exposure to different areas, which might trigger actions or ideas that I might use in my area of expertise"</i>
Social empowerment	<i>"[EA platform] keeps me engaged with my peers and colleagues"</i>
Positive user experience	<i>"[EA platform] is an easy to use tool, which makes people happy", "Gamification and ranking makes it a fun, engaging and rewarding experience!"</i>
Dimensions	Representative quotes



Digital Employee Advocacy	<i>"I like that I can log on in the morning...quickly review and decide what content I would like to share to my social networks. It helps me stay engaged on social media and position myself as a though leader in the industry..."</i>
Social well-being	<i>"[EA platform] allows our employees to stay connected with one another and informed on all the latest company and industry news"</i>
Psychological well-being	<i>"We are calm and happy since we used this program, never has managing social networks been so easy."</i>
<b>Table 3: Representative quotes for the themes and aggregate dimensions</b>	

## Analysis of Reviews and Results

Through this qualitative study, we identify two overarching themes divided into three aggregate dimensions consisting of five sub-themes in total. We provide further explanations for our findings below.

### ***Overarching Theme and Aggregate Dimension: Digital Employee Advocacy (DEA)***

The first most prominent dimension observed in the dataset is digital employee advocacy, which represents the content sharing and self-presentation sub-themes. DEA is the use of a digital workplace platform by an employee to advocate for their company, as an organizational representative, to their personal networks (an audience external to the organization), digitally, via their social networking sites (e.g. LinkedIn, Twitter, Facebook etc.). In prior literature, employee advocacy behavior is described as "contributing" or "producing" content rather than consuming or sharing (Lee and Kim 2020), however, since DEA is conducted through digital platforms that already produce company content, employees are only required to 'consume' the content and 'share' it in most cases. Although most EA platforms would allow the employees to produce their own content. DEA could therefore be enacted when an employee shares positive company content to their personal social networks. According to prior literature, employee advocacy is also a form of self-presentation that is often self-enhancing in nature (Kim et al. 2022; Lee and Kim 2020), and when employees have a high level of identification with their organization, they are motivated to present themselves positively as representatives of the organization (Lee and Kim 2020). A representative quote of DEA is: *"I like that I can log on in the morning...quickly review and decide what content I would like to share to my social networks. It helps me stay engaged on social media and position myself as a though leader in the industry..."*

The emergence of this dimension within the dataset enables us to answer the first research question: EA platforms are successful in encouraging platform users/employees to advocate for their organization.

### ***Overarching Theme: Employee Well-being***

Employee well-being can be psychological, physical or social. Psychological well-being is related to one's satisfaction with work and life, physical refers to one's health and social refers to one's interpersonal relationships, community and acceptance (Grant et al. 2007). Employee well-being refers to the subjective and internal experience of an employee's mental and emotional state in relation to their work environment. It encompasses aspects such as job satisfaction, sense of purpose, positive emotions, self-esteem, and a sense of control over one's work (Sakka and Ahammad 2020). In the context of this study, employee well-being that we identified include two aggregate dimensions, social and psychological well-being. We expand on these dimensions and their sub-themes in the following sub sections.

### ***Aggregate Dimension: Platform enabled Social Well-being (PSW)***

The first aggregate dimension within the overarching theme of employee well-being is platform enabled social well-being (PSW). Social well-being occurs when there is a perception of employee interactions, collaborations, trust and integration (Sakka and Ahammad 2020). The PSW dimension is composed of two of the 2<sup>nd</sup> order themes: information empowerment and social empowerment. From the review dataset, we observed that the *content curation* and *internal communication* features of the EA platform enable information empowerment. When employees receive updates about their organization's purpose, missions

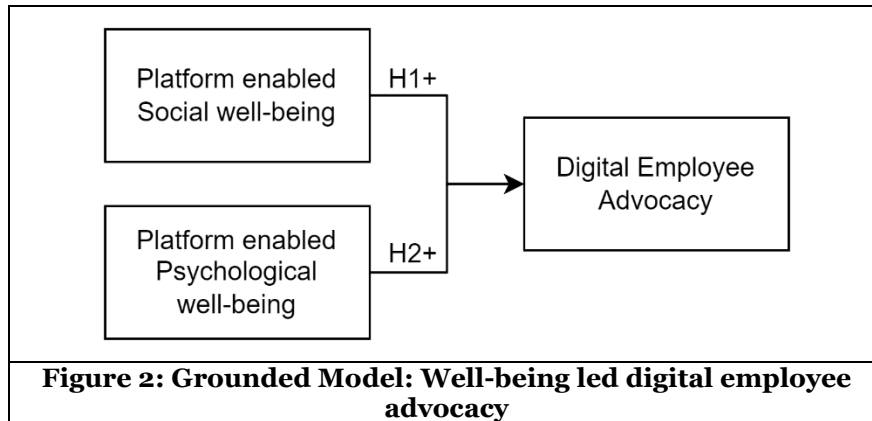
and practices they view their organization as open and transparent and feel like they are a part of a community, resulting in increased connectedness and overall social well-being (Men 2021; Qin and Men 2022). Reviewers discussed their appreciation of *'relevant content'* provided by the EA platform. When EA platforms provide employees with content that is relevant and interesting to them, they are more likely to share it on social media. The positive experience that users have with the content provided by the platform, not only makes employees feel excited to share it, but also empowers them as they gain valuable insights about their organization and the industry in which they work. Social empowerment is also a form of social well-being, as when employees actively use the EA platform features to engage in communication, collaboration and competition activities, and have positive interactions that develop their relationships with their fellow colleagues and supervisors (Kang and Sung 2017; Robertson and Cooper 2010). This leads them to experience a sense of involvement and connection with their organization i.e. experiencing PSW. For example, a review states: *"The platform simplifies the internal communication process and helps to increase employee engagement"*

### **Aggregate Dimension: Platform enabled Psychological Well-being (PPW)**

Our analysis of the textual data revealed another significant dimension, which is platform enabled psychological well-being (PPW). Psychological well-being refers to the subjective experiences of employees such as their perceptions, evaluations, and emotions on an individual basis (Grant et al. 2007; Wesarat et al. 2014). Prior research has described psychological well-being as either eudemonic or hedonic (Grant et al. 2007). In this study, we take the hedonic approach, which describes the positive emotions experienced by an individual (Fisher 2010). The PPW dimension represents the positive user experience sub-theme. This suggests that EA platforms create a positive work environment for the employees, which contributes towards their psychological well-being (Fisher 2010). One of the main factors for employees' positive experience is 'ease of use'. We observed several reviews mentioning the platform being 'user-friendly' and its 'ease of use'. The lack of mental effort required to navigate and use the platform can lead an employee to experience positive emotions such as increased competence, as well as contentment since the platform saved them the extra effort that is needed to digitally advocate. Another feature that many reviews discussed in the dataset is *gamification*. Gamification includes features such as leaderboards, rewards, and badges (G2 2022). Many EA platform users experienced enjoyment with the gamified elements of advocacy platforms and therefore felt more engaged with the platform and organization (Bitrián et al. 2021). Users also expressed how the platform is a great *"time saver"*, as they do not have to waste time searching for content and crafting interesting posts- instead all the information is presented in front of them, and they have the ability to schedule posts ahead of time. This feature enables time management for employees, which according to literature, leads to enhanced employee well-being as well as increased job performance (Aeon and Aguinis 2017). Therefore, EA platforms create positive and enjoyable user experiences for employees, which helps enhance their psychological well-being. An example of a user describing their platform experience is: *"The platform is extremely user friendly and easy to navigate...just shows how many people enjoy the program!"*

## **Hypothesis Development and Model Construction**

Using the aggregated dimensions identified from our first phase (inspired from prior literature on social media engagement and employee advocacy Sakka and Ahammad (2020)), in this phase, we develop a *wellbeing led digital employee advocacy model* that can be tested empirically. The below model allows us to explain the motivators triggered by the EA platform that influence DEA. From the exploratory study, we gather that there are two motivators, employee's PSW and PPW leading employees to want to digitally advocate for their organization on social media. We now refine our theorization on how these user level motivators can give rise to digital employee advocacy user behavior. The model is represented in figure 2 below. We further develop and present our hypotheses in the subsequent sub-sections:



### ***Hypothesis 1: Links PSW to DEA via social attachment***

Social well-being refers to the sense of social connectedness and engagement that employees feel with their company and colleagues. According to recent conceptual work by Sakka and Ahammad (2020), social well-being due to internal communication and effective relationships can lead to social attachment, which encourages employees to become brand ambassadors for their organization and engage in eWOM, endorsement and sharing behaviors. As employees develop healthy workplace relationships through the collaboration, competition and communication platform features, they also begin to find their work ‘meaningful’, which makes them feel appreciated and valued, and in turn makes them want to voluntarily promote their organization (Thelen et al. 2022). When employees feel that they are part of a supportive and inclusive community, they in turn feel more comfortable in their roles, which enhances their affective commitment to their organization as well as stronger identification with the organization (Fullerton 2011; Lages 2012). The increased organizational identification and loyalty, means that the employees are more likely to engage in activities that promote the company's goals and values, such as advocating for the company on social media (Thelen and Men 2020; van Zoonen and Treem 2019). Furthermore, as employees receive socioemotional resources from their organization, via the EA platform, such as authentic communication, support and empowerment, they feel almost obligated to reciprocate, and do so by engaging in supportive communicative behaviors such as advocacy (Men and Yue 2019; Tsarenko et al. 2018; Walden and Kingsley Westerman 2018). For example, one user mentions: “*It (the EA platform) has helped improve our uptake and usage of social media among key personnel, and it has improved collaboration and sharing of content around the country (company locations)*”. This brings us to our first hypothesis:

*H1: In the context of EA platform use, platform enabled social well-being will lead to increased digital employee advocacy.*

### ***Hypothesis 2: Links PPW to DEA via emotional attachment***

The recent conceptual work by Sakka and Ahammad (2020) also theorizes that an employee’s psychological well-being generated through positive emotions, while using social media tools, increases their emotional attachment, which in turn encourages them to become brand ambassadors. One way to foster an employee’s psychological well-being, within the digital workplace, is by fulfilling their psychological needs through IT use; these are autonomy, competence and relatedness (Reis et al. 2000). We posit that EA platforms can fulfill psychological needs by giving employees control over what they choose to share with their networks (autonomy), empowering them with knowledge and information through relevant and up-to-date company/industry news (competence) and enabling them to collaborate and engage with their colleagues (relatedness). According to the self-determination theory, when autonomy, competence and relatedness are fulfilled, a user has increased motivation to use the technology (Deci and Ryan 2000; Karahanna et al. 2018), and in this case, the more the employee uses the EA platform, the more they will partake in DEA behavior. Moreover, a positive emotional culture within a workplace increases not only job satisfaction but also supportive communication behaviors (Men and Yue 2019). In the digital workplace however, a positive

emotional culture would only be experienced through the digital tools e.g. EA platforms. EA platforms increase the positive emotional culture within the digital workplace, as it is a user-friendly platform that spreads positive news about the organization and the industry, which makes employees experience psychological well-being through emotions such as joy, pride, and gratitude- leading to increased DEA (Men and Yue 2019). Furthermore, positive emotions experienced with an IT, in this case, the EA platform, leads to enhanced IT use (Deng et al. 2017; Dudézert et al. 2023; Stein et al. 2015). Thus, employees that experience positive emotions with the EA platform will be more motivated to use the tool and its features, which will consequently increase their level of DEA behavior. For example, one user mentions: “*The design of the sharing section is so clean and clear- It’s so easy to use! We love the features like the rankings section to see how yours posts are ranking compared to other employees at your company – puts a fun spin on sharing content*”. This leads us to our second hypothesis:

*H2: In the context of EA platform use, platform enabled psychological well-being will lead to increased digital employee advocacy*

## Analysis of Hypotheses and Model

In order to test our model, we used lexical intensity analysis (Dudézert 2023; Ganassali 2008; Maaref and Djeflat 2021; Moscarola et al. 2002) followed by multiple regression, using the Sphinx software. The lexical analysis is done through the calculation of word frequencies. We used the grounded theoretical model as the basis and extracted the first order concepts to construct a thesaurus. In this method, the thesaurus categories are already defined based on the literature or the researcher’s vision. The words are assigned directly from the lexicon to the thesaurus categories for the automatic generation of variable values that can be used for further statistical testing purposes (Moscarola, 2022). For each review, the lexical intensity of model dimensions are calculated as the ratio between the number of words belonging to the thesaurus, divided by the total number of words in the review. This ratio is an indicator of the weight of the dimension for each review, and is computed as a percentage. The model description is based on these lexical measures. Lexical intensity analysis is conducted on the entire corpus and this allows us to obtain numerical values for the variables in the model. However, only those reviews that contain all the research variables within the sample are then used for the regression analysis to further validate the model.

To test our hypotheses, we had to build a thesaurus. For each aggregate dimension variable, we used the nouns, verbs, adjectives and expressions from their respective 1<sup>st</sup> order concepts (displayed in table 2). Our regression results are presented below in table 4. The descriptive statistics and correlation matrix of the variables used in the research model can be found in the appendix.

	Coefficient $\beta$	Tstat	Standard deviation	p-value	Standardized coefficient	Contribution
Constant	3.73	15.11	0.25	0.00		
Platform enabled Social well-being	0.40	8.08	0.05	0.00	0.27	73.75
Platform enabled Psychological well-being	0.08	2.88	0.03	0.00	0.10	26.25
N= 896 reviews						

**Table 4: Regression analysis**

From the regression analysis we can see that both hypotheses are proven. H1 is proven as  $\beta = 0.4$ , and  $p < 0.01$ , which indicates that PSW has an impact on DEA. H2 is proven as well since  $\beta = 0.08$  and  $p < 0.01$ , confirming that PPW also impacts DEA. The influence of PSW is stronger than PPW, which complements most literature that discusses the key motivator for advocacy being connectivity with and within the organization (Kang and Sung 2017; Lages 2012; Lee 2021a). The feeling of being a part of a community make employees not only satisfied with their job, but also proud of their work and their employer- this makes them want to share this appreciation with their personal networks on social media (Pitt et al. 2018).

## **Discussion and Implications**

### ***Theoretical Implications***

This study has several theoretical implications. Although existing EA literature has established the importance of advocacy, its contribution to an organization and the motivators that influence it, researchers have yet to look at this topic from an IS lens i.e. investigate the digital platforms that have been designed to facilitate EA (Fullerton 2011; Lee and Kim 2020; Thelen and Men 2020). In our study, we examine user reviews of 18 EA platforms to identify predominant themes and connections to discern the objective and effectiveness of such platforms, as well as the user behavior that elicits digital employee advocacy behavior. Using a bricolage approach that uses automatic data exploration techniques, lexical content analysis and the Gioia methodology (Gioia et al. 2013; Moscarola 2002; Pratt et al. 2022), we identify 5 key sub-themes that allow us to identify, for the first time, motivators and key outcomes of EA platform use. We further conceptualize and offer measurements for two significant motivators triggered through EA platforms, namely platform enabled social well-being and platform enabled psychological well-being. These encourage employees to advocate for their organization on social media via two key process of social and emotional attachment. This extends the literature on employee advocacy as it demonstrates how the previously established motivators of EA are broadly incorporated into the design of the platforms in order to stimulate DEA behavior (Kumar et al. 2022). Furthermore, our work also extends Sakka and Ahammad's (2020) conceptual model on digital brand advocacy, as we partially validate the model in the context of EA platforms, using a vast dataset of user experiences depicted through reviews.

Moreover, this study contributes towards general digital workplace literature. Digital workplace literature predominantly discusses designs and governance of the digital workplace using case studies. A significant theme among these studies is the importance of people-focused digital workplace designs that enable connectivity, social interaction and well-being (Dery et al. 2017; Selimović et al. 2021; Williams and Schubert 2018). In our research we use a wide sample from various companies and offer evidence that such digital workplace tools can foster humanistic outcomes, such as employee well-being, and also lead to the instrumental outcome of employee advocacy. We also contribute to the recent discussion in IS on the need to examine the importance of ICT enabled happiness and well-being within a workplace setting (Chatterjee et al. 2021; Dudézert et al. 2023; Tarafdar and Saunders 2022).

Our study also contributes towards literature on gamification and user engagement. It extends prior research that demonstrates how the platform features satisfy the user's psychological needs to increase user engagement, affective experience, as well as eWOM behaviors in an organizational setting (Bitrián et al. 2021; Pei-shan 2020; Wang et al. 2020). More generally, our work also contributes to IS research focusing on positive emotions and its key role in impacting IS user engagement and acceptance (Koch et al. 2017; Stein et al. 2015).

Finally, the study operationalized all the concepts that can enable the testing of this theoretical model using other methods for further robustness such as structural equation modelling or other linear regression methods. These measures can also be adopted by practitioners.

### ***Practical Implications***

Our study also contributes to practice. Currently, there is an increase in the number of organizations that are shifting towards the hybrid/remote workplace, thus increasing the implementation of the digital workplace. However, because of this shift, many employees feel disconnected from their organization and demotivated, giving rise to 'quiet quitting' and 'employee disconnection' leading to employee attrition (Poswolsky 2022; Telford 2022). Since hybrid/remote workplaces are normally at home, many employees also feel isolated, giving rise to mental health issues such as depression, burnout, and technostress (Zaza et al. 2023). We recommend practitioners and corporate leaders to support digital workplaces with platforms that can help employees develop social and emotional attachment through better connectivity, and develop a sense of belonging towards their organization.

We recommend practitioners to use EA platforms in particular that aim to enable employees to not only advocate for their organization, but also increase their well-being, which in turn helps them feel more connected, satisfied, and enthusiastic about their organization. Our study provides validity that can enable practitioners to understand humanistic and instrumental outcomes of EA platforms through reviews provided by their own user base. This will enable them to address adoption, implementation, design and development related questions with confidence. Furthermore, concerning EA platform selection, corporate decision makers should look into investing in platforms that not only provide features that enable EA programs, but also contain internal communication features to translate the corporate culture within the digital workplace setting and enhance PSW.

EA platform designers and sellers can also consider adding more features that foster social and emotional attachment, leading to both PSW and PPW. This is important as PSW and PPW can also offer many organizational benefits, apart from employee advocacy, such as improving employee satisfaction and increased work motivation and performance (Fernando et al. 2021; Meske and Junglas 2021). This way, companies can market these platforms as not only a marketing tool, but instead a holistic tool that can support organizations and their employees and overcome the potential problems caused by the changing nature of work from face to face to remote settings.

### ***Limits and Future Research Directions***

The primary limitation of the study was the availability of contextual data. The data source from which we collected the reviews was trusted and provided a rich variety of information that could not have been gathered by independent researchers using surveys or other methods. However, many reviewer characteristics and other contextual elements that can enable us to refine our theory were not accessible to us. Therefore, we are only able to argue for correlations, and cannot identify the causation mechanism that influences the independent and the dependent variables. Moreover, based on the review characteristics we noticed that although most of the reviews were by managerial level change agents, during further inspection we noticed that in their reviews they not only discussed their personal experience with the tool, but also other employees' experiences with the tool. However, the limitation is that, since most of the reviews were written by managerial change agents we cannot preclude the possibility of ulterior motives when contributing to reviews to the trusted third party, who commissioned the data collection. Therefore, future studies should test this model using data from various categories of employees, including those who may not hold managerial positions and compare and contrast the results to check the robustness of the model. This can enable us to investigate the factors that hinder employees from advocating despite using an EA platform and also look at dark side of EA platform use. Possible future research could explore employee empowerment as a core concept to study employee advocacy (Kane et al. 2021; Myers and Klein 2011; Young et al. 2021).

### **Conclusion**

In this paper, we aim to evaluate whether EA platforms could be presented as a solution for organizations to overcome challenges of disconnection and demotivation, and instill affective commitment and well-being among employees. We explored user reviews from various EA platforms to understand whether organizations are successful in encouraging employee advocacy through the implementation of such tools. We use a bricolage approach and effectively combine various analytical moves within the discovery and construction phase as well as the refining and validating phase. In the first phase we use various automatic and manual coding moves to identify key concepts and dimensions, and operationalize key variables to develop a grounded model. In the second phase we refine and validate the grounded model by leveraging past literature to identify theoretical explanations linking the variables in the model and offering empirical validity to the same. Using this approach, we were able to unearth the motivating factors and mechanisms that contribute to digital advocacy behavior in the context of EA platform use.

The first phase enabled us to identify 5 major themes within the realm of EA platforms: content sharing, self-presentation, information empowerment, social empowerment and positive user experience. Through engagement with employee advocacy literature, we were able to narrow these concepts to 3 aggregate dimensions: digital employee advocacy, platform enabled social well-being (PSW) and platform enabled psychological well-being (PPW). In the second phase we further refine and test a grounded model

explaining the influence of PSW and PPW on DEA using two attachment mechanisms, thereby contributing to a novel theory linking well-being and DEA behavior.

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## Appendix A

Aggregate dimensions	Mean	Minimum	Maximum	Standard deviation
Digital employee advocacy	5.73	0.67	22.22	3.31
Platform enabled social well-being	3.53	0.61	14.29	2.22
Platform enabled psychological well-being	7.00	0.94	25.00	3.83
<b>Table A1: Descriptive statistics</b>				

Aggregate dimensions	DEA	PSW	PPW
Digital employee advocacy (DEA)	1.00		
Platform enabled social well-being (PSW)	0.18	1.00	
Platform enabled psychological well-being (PPW)	0.30	0.31	1.00
<b>Table A2: Correlation matrix</b>			