

# **Employee Brand Advocacy in Social Media: Employers' Absent Role**

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## **Abstract**

This paper examines whether employers in SMEs within the food and drinks sector motivates their employees to adopt and use eWOM to promote their businesses. Another consideration is whether employees adopt and use eWOM because they are provided with incentives from their employer. Finally does the adoption and use of eWOM result in brand advocacy for the business. The research avails of quantitative methods and applied elements from the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT2) model to a random sample of SMEs with the food and drinks sector. Data from 150 online questionnaires were analysed using partial least squares structural equations modelling (PLS-SEM) software Smart-PLS. This paper examines three constructs: employer motivation, eWOM adoption and use, and employee brand advocacy. The findings confirm employers motivate their employees to adopt and use eWOM. The adoption and usage of eWOM results in brand advocacy. However, employee are not incentivised by their employers to adopt and use eWOM.

## **1.0 Introduction/Purpose**

Public perceptions of organisations and their reputations are increasingly shaped by the eWOM (electronic word of mouth) on social media (Kietzmann et al., 2011). Company employees are in direct contact with external stakeholders. As a result, they can be the best advocates of a company and an important factor in using social media for promoting public relations (HRMID, 2017). In Ireland, the use of social media by Irish enterprises was the second highest in the European Union in 2017; 68% of Irish enterprises with 10 or more employees, used some type of social media.

This study focuses on artisan food businesses because their products are hand-made, use traditional methods, focus on providing farm to fork type foods with locally sourced products that benefit the consumer, small scale growers and producers, and the local economy.

## **Irelands Food and Drink Industry**

According to the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM), the agri-food and drink sector had a total value of €12.6bn in 2017, this figure increase to €13.5 billion when non-edible products such as forestry are included. The agri food also accounted for 10.7% of Ireland's exports and 8.4% of total employment. The agri-food sector has a rich heritage and is Ireland's largest indigenous industry. In 2017, Irish agri-food and drink exports increased by an estimated 2% to approximately €11.15 billion, according to Bord Bia, the Irish Food Board (IFP, 2016).

In 2018, the value of food and drink exports from Ireland is €12.11bn, an increase of over €4.7bn since 2010 (CSO, 2017; Bordbia, 2019). (Bordbia, 2018) reported that last year's export performance was driven by a surge in dairy exports to over €4bn (+19 percent), now one third of all food and drink exports, as well as continued buoyant sales of Irish beef, up 5 percent, which represents a fifth of all exports at almost €2.5bn. Notable growth was also recorded for prepared foods (+17 percent to €2.2bn) and beverages (+8 percent to €1.5bn).

Food companies should also focus on areas that grow their businesses, such as increasing competitiveness and innovation, and expanding their reach (Reddan, 2017). Businesses can maximise their businesses brands by using social media to tell their stories. However, most Irish food and beverage businesses spend less than 3% on research and development and many spend less than 1% (Deloitte, 2018). The online presence for food businesses may be found across numerous social media platforms, with Facebook being the most vital to-date. The main reason for food businesses to build an online presence is to nurture a dialogue between employees and customers, as well as to build customer relationships on a deeper, more emotional level (Rokka et al., 2014).

| Sector                       | Number of Businesses |
|------------------------------|----------------------|
| Bakery                       | 149                  |
| Beef                         | 50                   |
| Beverages                    | 191                  |
| Confectionary                | 58                   |
| Dairy                        | 121                  |
| Eggs                         | 29                   |
| Food Ingredients (non-dairy) | 29                   |
| Horticulture                 | 48                   |
| Lamb                         | 1                    |
| Meat Offal's                 | 1                    |
| Pigment                      | 64                   |
| Poultry meat                 | 11                   |
| Prepared Foods               | 398                  |
| Sea Foods                    | 224                  |
| Speciality meats             | 21                   |

**Table 1: Number of Food and Drink Businesses by Sector**

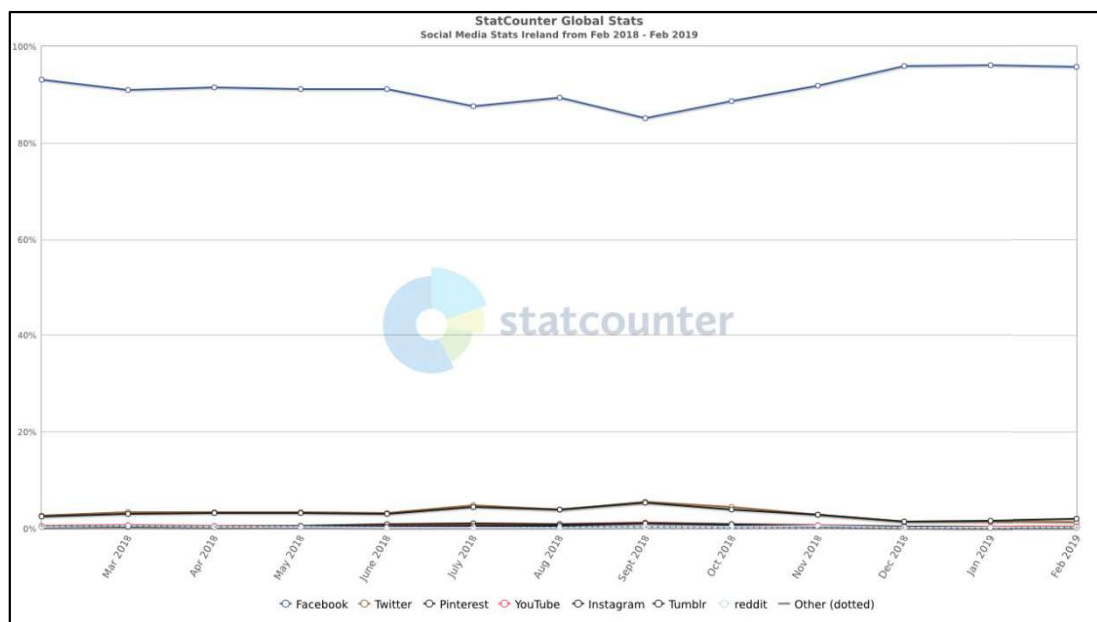
Table 1 displays the number of businesses in Ireland food and drink industry, broken down by sector.

## eWOM and Technology Acceptance

For SMEs, social media (SM) has changed the shape and nature of their businesses (Dahnil et al., 2014, DJEI, 2014). SMEs avail of SM because of the market opportunities it promises; although, adopting SM is not without its challenges.

Social media offer valuable opportunities for eWOM conversations, as these messages from friends and colleagues are perceived as more credible and trustworthy than messages emanating from businesses' social media pages. Further, content message shared by employees achieves eight times more engagement than content shared by brand channels and is re-shared twenty five times more frequently (Holmes, 2015). When employees talk privately about their firm's brands, their comments often have more credibility with their network of acquaintances than when they speak about them in professional contexts (Keeling et al., 2013). This paper examines whether the adoption and use of eWOM initiatives encourages employees to become brand advocates.

In Ireland, the adoption of technologies like social media has been well noted in the literature. Statistics from a recent survey show that the following key tools adopted and used. In 2018 96% of social media activity took place on Facebook, making it the dominant the social media platform in Ireland see Figure 1(Statcounter, 2017).



**Figure 1: Social Media Statistics Ireland 2018 (Statcounter, 2018)**

There is a research gap on social media use in organisational contents to address questions regarding the factors that facilitate or hinder their adoption (Ngai et al., 2015). Although, social

media has changed the way people conduct business, SMEs experience barriers in adopting new technology (Dahnil et al., 2014; Durkin et al., 2013). The Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT2) (Venkatesh et al., 2003) model is an extension of UTAUT and has been developed for an organisational context and tested in longitudinal field studies of employee technology acceptance (Arnaboldi & Coget, 2016; Rapp et al., 2013).

The UTAUT2 embraces the same four main concepts as UTAUT (i.e., *Performance Expectancy*, *Effort Expectancy*, *Social Influence*, and *Facilitating Conditions*), which are direct factors of usage intention and behaviour. UTAUT2 adds new constructs, hedonic motivation, price value, and habit, in order to apply the UTAUT in a consumer context. For this paper the constructs of interest include: *Performance Expectancy*, *Effort Expectancy*, and *Hedonic Motivation* (Venkatesh et al., 2012, Venkatesh et al., 2011).

### **Employer Responsibility**

Employers invest in their employees' training with the expectation that upgrading workers' skills contribute to the firm's productivity, quality of its products, and competitiveness (Pyatt, 1966). However, if there is no social media strategy or policy employed in a business, then the expectation for employees to use social media is challenging (Guinan et al., 2014). The onus is on the employer to support/train their employees to maintain and update an active social media presence. The organisational theories pertinent to this study are: strategic management (Hackler & Saxton, 2007), and social and institutional pressures (Zorn et al., 2011).

### **Employee Brand Advocacy**

Employees' social media behaviour represents an opportunity for businesses. With the increased personal use of social networking sites, every employee on social media has the potent to develop relationships with key stakeholders. It is desirable for employees to interact in positive and productive ways with their employer's brand (Cervellon & Lirio, 2017). Employee branding is where employees internalise the company brand image and project that image to customers, job candidates, and other stakeholders (Miles & Mangold, 2004). If social media content is perceived as valid, the message receivers will develop a positive approach towards the products/services related to these reviews. By understanding the effectiveness and impact of persuasive eWOM messages, employees can create more effective marketing campaigns (Fulgoni & Lipsman, 2017). When employees share messages, firms not only expand their social media reach, they also achieve measurably better results (Holmes, 2015).

The nature of these businesses is where employees are expected to stand behind the products and their quality and to recommend these products to consumers. Employees possess robust social media skills and expertise, it seems normal to inspire them to act as brand advocates online (Rokka et al., 2014). The businesses are encouraged to prepare well-crafted marketing messages and post only high quality content on social networking sites. The power has been taken from those in business by the individuals and communities that create, share and consumer blogs, tweets, Facebook entries, movies, and pictures. Communication about brands occurs with or without permission of the business in question. It is now up to businesses to decide if they want to get serious about social media adoption and usage and help their employees to participate in this communication or continue to ignore it (Barreda et al., 2015, Kietzmann et al., 2011).

### **Research Questions**

This paper examines whether there is a commitment from employers to motivate social media use amongst their workforce. Another consideration is whether the adoption and usage of eWOM encourages employee brand advocacy. The research questions are:

- Do employers in SMEs in the food and drinks sector motivate and encourage employee brand advocacy?
- Do employers in SMEs in the food and drinks sector provide incentives to employees for being creative on SM?
- Is there a correlation between eWOM adoption and usage and employee brand advocacy?

### **Design, Methodology, and Approach**

The research avails of qualitative and quantitative methods and applied elements from the UTAUT2 model to a random sample of SMEs with the food and drinks sector. The study examined the following constructs: Employer Motivation, eWOM intention and usage, and Brand Advocacy. Data from online questionnaires were analysed using partial least squares structural equations modelling (PLS-SEM) software SMART-PLS. Over 310 companies were contacted, 150 companies answered the survey, resulting in a 48% response rate. Of the 150 participating companies, 131 used social media for business, and 19 did not.

## Findings

The survey, distributed to a random sample of 187 SMEs within Ireland's food and drinks industry examines the constructs: Employer Motivation (ErM), eWOM Adoption and Usage, and Employee Brand Advocacy. The constructs and hypotheses are listed in Table 2.

| Constructs                          | Hypothesis   | Assessed  |
|-------------------------------------|--|-----------|
| Employer Incentives                 | H1a: Employer Incentives significantly affect employees' intention to adopt and use SM | Survey    |
| Employer Motivations                | H1b: Employer Motivation significantly affect employees' intention to adopt and use SM | Smart PLS |
| Employee Adoption and Usage of eWOM | H2: Employee Adoption and Usage of eWOM initiatives leads to brand advocacy            | Smart PLS |

*Table 2: Constructs and Hypothesis*

## Survey response analysis

A total of 510 companies were contacted; 187 companies completed the survey, resulting in a response rate of 36%. Out of the 187 companies, 171 companies used social media, and 16 did not use social media. The survey considered employees, employers and marketing professionals, who may be tasked with social media duties. Of those surveyed, 88% were employees, 12% were SME owners and none were marketing professionals. To avoid bias, one survey per business was completed by the person with the responsibility for social media.

Businesses were contacted by phone to identify the main person who is tasked with managing the business social media efforts and permission was sought to email the survey to this individual. The participants' responses were measured on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (i.e., strongly disagree) to 5 (i.e., strongly agree), except for their behaviour with respect to using social media, which was measured on a five-point scale range from 1 (i.e., never) to 5 (i.e., many times).

## Respondents and demographic profiles

As this research concentrated on farm to fork businesses, the sectors of interest for this study represented bakery, beverages, confectionery, dairy, horticulture and prepared foods. Table 3 outlines the number of businesses within each sector, the sample required for this study and the sample that was achieved. The sample was over represented by the prepared foods businesses, as there are a large number of businesses within this sector.

| Sector         | Number of Companies | Sample Required | Sample Achieved |
|----------------|---------------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Bakery         | 147                 | 22              | 24              |
| Beverages      | 178                 | 30              | 37              |
| Confectionery  | 56                  | 9               | 20              |
| Dairy          | 111                 | 19              | 24              |
| Horticulture   | 47                  | 7               | 14              |
| Prepared Foods | 348                 | 62              | 68              |
| <b>Total</b>   | <b>887</b>          | <b>149</b>      | <b>187</b>      |

**Table 3: Number of SMEs within the Irish Food and Drink Sectors, Survey Sample Required and Survey Sample Achieved**

The breakdown of the respondents' profiles is displayed in Table 4. More males than females completed the survey than females. The employees tasked with using social media for their organisation range between the ages of 36-50 years old and have worked with the organisation between 10-20 years. This age profile conflicts with the literature, as some organisations implement social media for their business from a bottom up approach, concentrating their efforts on newer, younger members of the staff especially recent college graduates (Guinan et al., 2014). The majority of the businesses had between 11-30 employees, which confirm that small businesses are at the forefront of this sector.

| Respondents' Profiles    |                        |                    |                    |                         |
|--------------------------|------------------------|--------------------|--------------------|-------------------------|
| <b>Gender</b>            | 55% male               |                    | 45% female         |                         |
| <b>Age</b>               | <i>18-25 years</i>     | <i>26-35 years</i> | <i>36-50 years</i> | <i>51 years</i>         |
|                          | 10%                    | 25%                | 52%                | 13%                     |
| <b>Employees</b>         | <i>0-10</i>            | <i>11-30</i>       | <i>31-60</i>       | <i>60-100+</i>          |
|                          | 30%                    | 32%                | 29%                | 9%                      |
| <b>Length of Service</b> | <i>&lt; than 5 yrs</i> | <i>5-10 yrs</i>    | <i>10-20 yrs</i>   | <i>&gt; than 20 yrs</i> |
|                          | 20%                    | 35%                | 36%                | 9%                      |

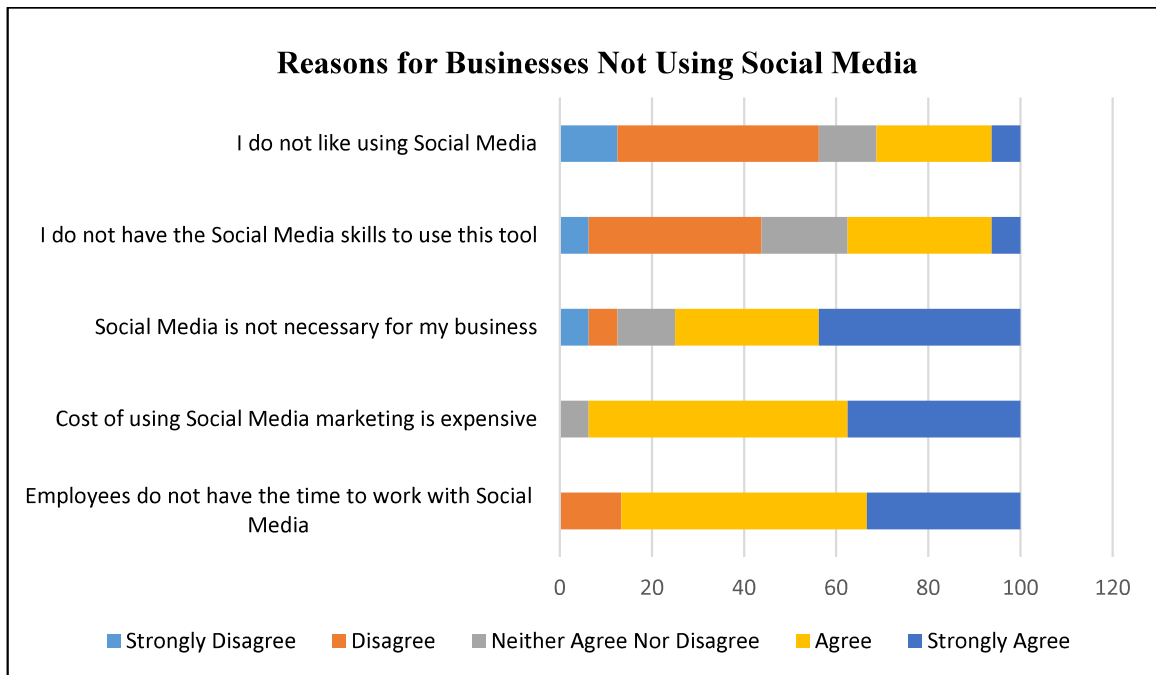
**Table 4: Respondents' Profiles**

Figure 2 identifies the reasons businesses did not use social media. Of the 187 businesses participating in the research, 16 did not use social media, primarily because:

- *“Employees do not have the time to work with social media”*

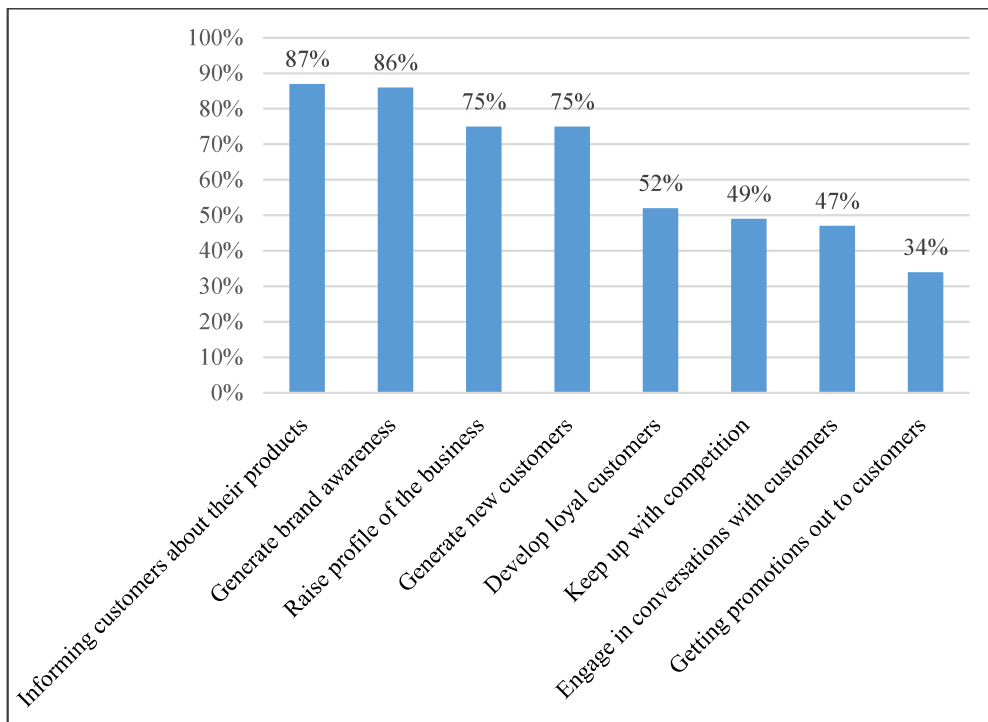


- “Cost of using social media marketing initiatives like paid advertising is expensive”
- “Social media is not necessary for my business”.

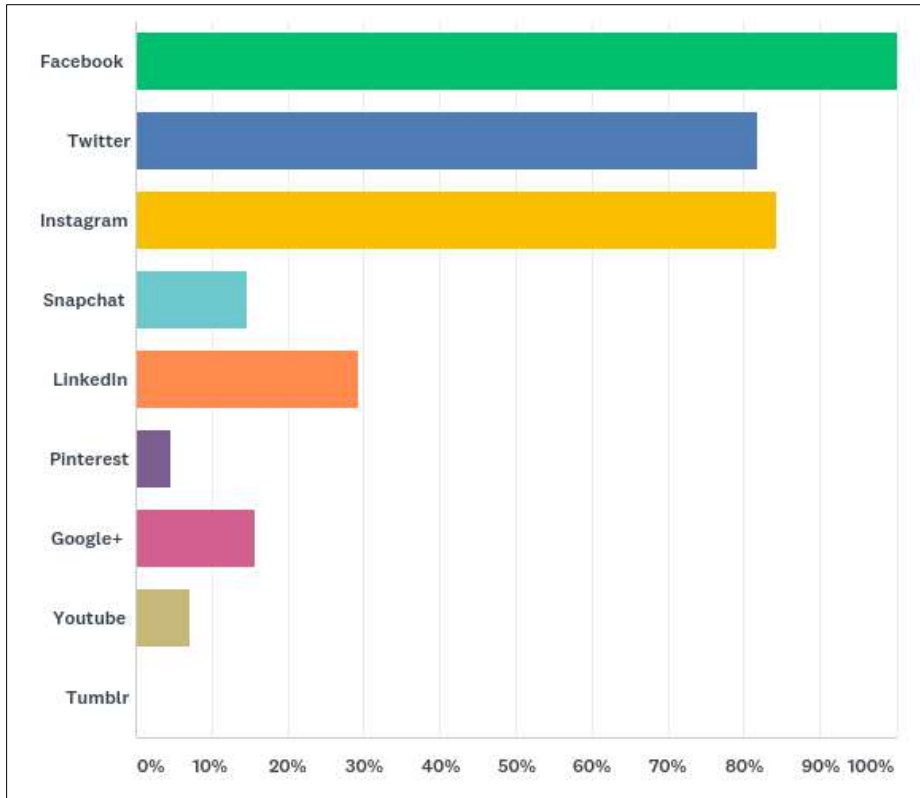


**Figure 2: Reasons for Businesses Not Using Social Media**

Many business are investing in their social media presence because they appreciate the need to engage in existing social media conversations in order to protect their brand reputation (Lee and Youn, 2009). Hence, the reasons businesses use social media are shown in Figure 3.

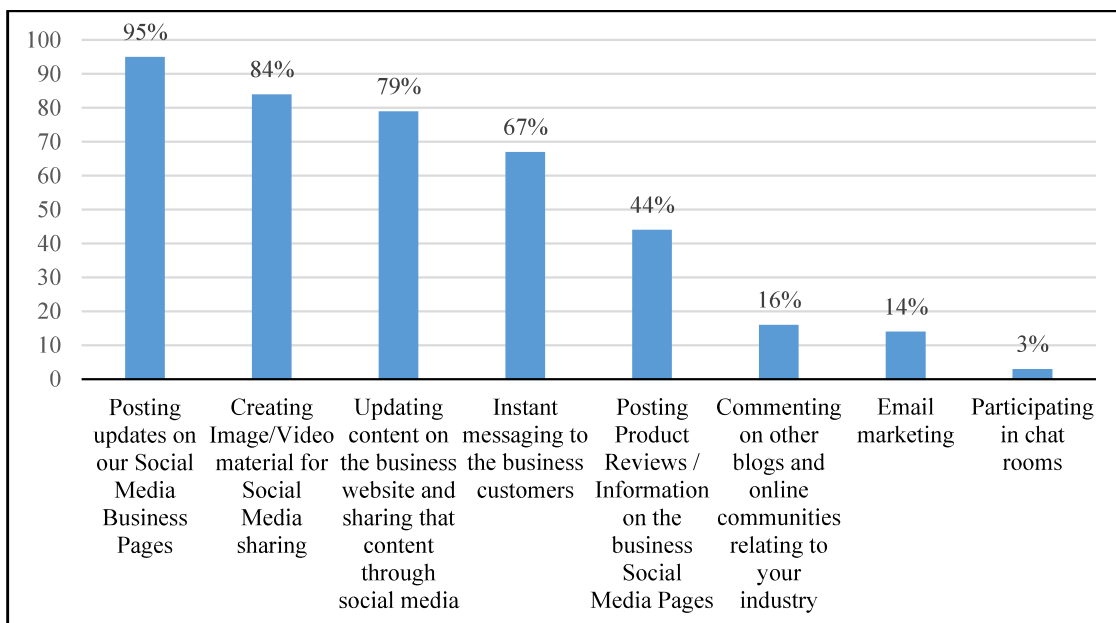


**Figure 3: Reasons Businesses Use Social Media**



**Figure 4: Type of Social Media Application Used**

Regarding the applications, businesses use (see Figure 4), Facebook is the dominant application, followed closely by Instagram and Twitter. It is interesting to note that 16% of employees still recognised Google+ as an important application, even though this application is no longer available due to the 2018 data breach (Gudergan et al., 2008).



**Figure 5: Types of eWOM Messages**

Figure 5 displays the main types of eWOM messages employees send, which largely focus on posting updates on SM business pages (95%); creating video and image material (84%); updating content on the business website and sharing that content through social media (79%); and instant messaging to the business customers (67%).

Regarding, the long-term use of social media amongst employees, the majority of the respondents (96%) agree/strongly agree with the statement: *“I intend to continually use Social Media”*. This finding confirms the employees’ trust and satisfaction with the technology. Further, the majority of respondents (71%) view social media positively.

When asked, *“My employer has a business SM strategy”*, the majority of participants (67%) strongly disagree/disagree with the statement. If there is no social media strategy or policy employed in a business, then the expectation for employees to use social media is challenging. A successful brand strategy in social media provides ways for users to be invited into everyday lives of businesses (Fournier and Avery, 2011, Guinan et al., 2014).

#### **H1a: Employer Incentives Significantly Affect Employees’ Intention to Adopt and Use SM**

When asked *“My employer provides me with incentives for achievements made on SM”*, 63% of the respondents strongly disagree/disagree with this statement. Which proves that this hypothesis is partially accepted.

Another finding is that 48% of participants strongly disagree/disagree with the statement: *“I am allocated enough time in my job to work with SM”*. Concerning the cost of using social media, time is the biggest factor that businesses incur. A high percentage of employees (71%) believe their businesses should increase their time on social media. This finding is also relevant in the literature, as having an employee with the relevant skills and time is significantly important to realising the firm’s online strategies. There are many issues with assigning social media activities to employees; these include lack of understanding, lack of knowledge of SM, lack of top management support, lack of internal guiding policy (Poba-Nzaou et al., 2016). Within SMEs, employees are balancing different job tasks, meaning that social media may not be given the time it needs (Manto and M., 2001). Employee engagement with social media occurs when employees feel trusted and supported by the management (Liu et al., 2018). Social media integration means it is difficult to quantify the return from such activity (Rapp et al., 2013).

Finally, 66% of employees strongly agree/agree with the statement *“I often feel disappointed with our business SM pages because the community does not respond to my eWOM messages”*. This finding highlights the growing pressures employees are under to engage with communities and how competitive posts are.

### **SMART-PLS Results**

Data from online questionnaires was analysed using partial least squares structural equations modelling (PLS-SEM) software SMART-PLS 3.5. Partial least squares (PLS) was used to test these constructs because there is quite a number of interaction terms and PLS is capable of testing these effects (Chin et al., 2003).

The constructs assessed included Employer Motivation (EM), eWOM Adoption and Usage, and Employee Brand Advocacy. For this study, survey questions were adapted from Ali, Nair, & Hussain (2016), (Venkatesh et al., 2003). Table 5 displays the constructs of interest aligned to the survey question and Smart-PLS indicator. The online survey was composed of close-ended questions. Although PLS-SEM is not sensitive to data normality, it is still recommended to examine the data to detect outliers and assess its distribution (J. F. Hair et al., 2013). Partial least squares (PLS) was used to test this model because there are a number of interaction terms and PLS is capable of testing these effects (Chin et al., 2003).

Constructs assessed using SMARTPLS, address the following research hypotheses:

- H1a: Employer Motivation significantly affect employees’ intention to adopt and use SM
- H1b: Employer Incentives significantly affect employees’ intention to adopt and use SM
- H2: Employee Adoption and Usage of eWOM initiatives leads to brand advocacy

### **Missing Data and Outliers**

The survey data went through 10 stages of extraction and cleaning, as summarised in Table 5. Sixteen responses did not use social media, which meant this data was discarded for PLS testing. As the focus of this study is on employees, the twenty employers who completed the survey were discarded for PLS testing. One respondent did not complete the survey and because an insufficient number of questions were answered, it was removed from the dataset. According to Tabachnick and Fidell (2001), any variable having less than five percent of missing values can be ignored. None of the variables in this dataset have missing values of more than five percent.

| <b>Stages of Extracting and Cleaning Data</b> |  |
|---|--|
| <b>Stage 1</b>                                | Ensure survey questions are weighted correctly, and reverse code any negative survey questions. Extract data from survey monkey to .csv file selecting numerical values output |
| <b>Stage 2</b>                                | Remove questions that will not be assessed with Smart PLS  |
| <b>Stage 3</b>                                | Grouping of survey question by construct of interest   |
| <b>Stage 4</b>                                | Removal of businesses who don't use SM, employer and marketing professional responses leaving just employees responses   |
| <b>Stage 5</b>                                | Condense the columns from the 4 Likert scale to one column reflecting the value each response had selected   |
| <b>Stage 6</b>                                | Label the survey questions with an indicator name that is linked to its construct  |
| <b>Stage 7</b>                                | Remove questions headings, leaving just the indicator name at the top and the numerical value underneath   |
| <b>Stage 8</b>                                | Enter 0 for any empty fields not completed by respondent   |
| <b>Stage 9</b>                                | Save the file as a .CSV  |
| <b>Stage 10</b>                               | PLS Ready  |

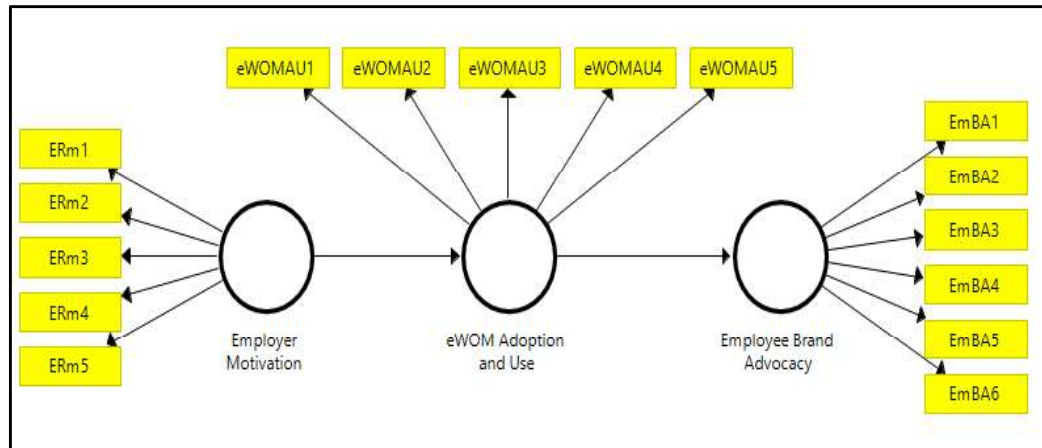
***Table 5: Stages of Extracting and Cleaning Data***

To have the data ready for PLS, each survey question was aligned to a construct and an indicator. Table 6 outlines the questions posed to employees and assessed using SmartPLS.

| <b>Construct</b>               | <b>Indicator</b> | <b>Survey Question</b>  |
|--------------------------------|------------------|---|
| <b>eWOM Adoption &amp; Use</b> | eWOMAU1          | I view Social Media positively  |
|                                | eWOMAU2          | I intend to use Social Media in the next few years  |
|                                | eWOMAU3          | I try to be creative when crafting eWOM posts for my employer to encourage a response from the community        |
|                                | eWOMAU4          | I believe eWOM messages can influence our business customers intention to purchase                              |
|                                | eWOMAU5          | I would respond(constructively) if my contacts criticise my employer brand products or services on social media |
| <b>Employer Motivation</b>     | ErM1             | My employer encourages me to be creative with electronic word of mouth (eWOM) posts on SM                       |
|                                | ErM2             | I am allocated enough time in my job to work with SM  |
|                                | ERm3             | My employer provides me with incentives for achievements made on SM   |
|                                | ERm4             | My employer frequently discusses with staff their goals and objectives for SM                                   |
|                                | ERm5             | My employer has encouraged staff to undertake SM training/ courses?   |
| <b>Employee Brand Advocacy</b> | EmBA1            | With my personal SM account I follow my business SM pages   |
|                                | EmBA2            | I speak positively about my business on my personal SM accounts   |
|                                | EmBA3            | I praise the achievements of my employer on my personal SM accounts   |
|                                | EmBA4            | I recommend my employer brand products and services to my contacts on my personal SM accounts                   |
|                                | EmBA5            | On my personal SM pages I like content posted by my employer  |
|                                | EmBA6            | I share links from my personal SM pages to my employer SM pages   |

***Table 6: Alignment of Constructs and Indicators with Survey Questions***

The proposed model is shown in Figure 6. The latent variables were created in Smart-PLS. The indicators were assigned to each relevant latent variable using the reflective measurement approach. Finally, the relationships between each variable was created.



**Figure 6: Proposed Model**

The assessment of PLS-SEM involves a two-step approach:

1. The evaluation of the measurement models; and
2. The assessment of the structural model (Chin, 2010; Hair et al., 2017b).

### **Reflective Measurement Model**

The measurement model assessment involves the evaluation of constructs measures reliability and validity. This assessment draws on different measures, and for this study this model is measured reflectively (Hair et al., 2018c). The assessment of reflective measurement model involves evaluation the measures reliability (i.e., indicator reliability and internal consistency reliability) and the validity (i.e., convergent and discriminant validity). After the model had been properly built in the SmartPLS software, essential statistics were estimated by running a PLS algorithm (i.e., 300 maximum iteration, standardized values and centroid weighting scheme). This process is commonly called measurement (outer) model. The algorithm resulted in loadings larger than 0.70 to ensure indicator reliability, which is confirmed in Table 6 (Hair et al., 2018c).

Having reviewed the outer loadings of the indicators in Table 6 and Figure 7, indicators that have an outer loading of greater than 0.40 and less than 0.70 were reviewed for impact on AVE and Composite Reliability (Hair, et al., 2017). Based on this process, four indicators (i.e., EMBA1, eWOMAU2, eWOMAU4, eWOMAU5) were retained as they are close to the 0.70

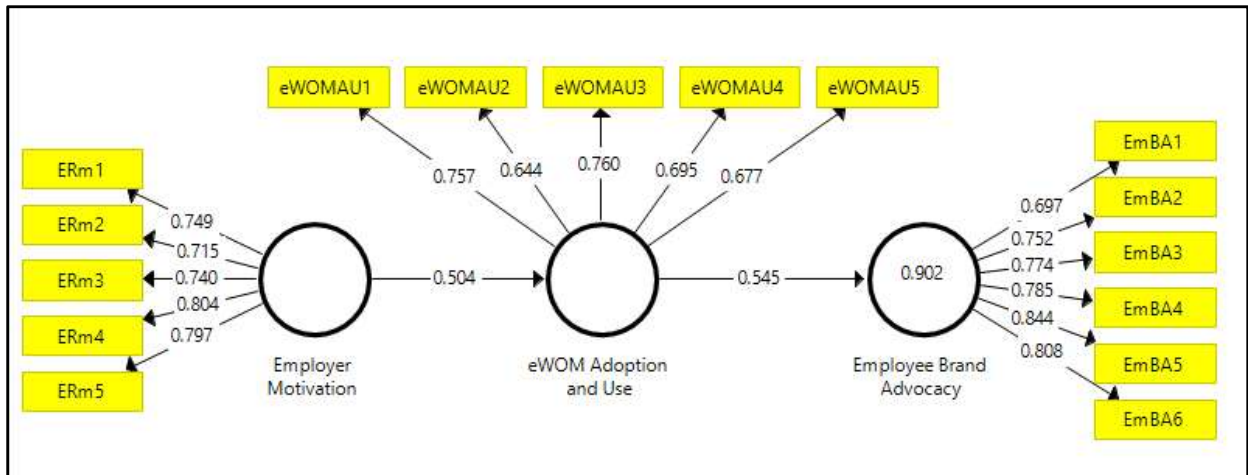
threshold and add an important variation to the data. The indicators and their associated survey question are:

- EMBA1(0.697) – “With my personal SM account I follow my business SM pages”.
- eWOMAU2(0.644) – “I speak positively about my business on my personal SM accounts”.
- eWOMAU4(0.695) – “I recommend my employer brand products and services to my contacts on my personal SM accounts”.
- eWOMAU5 (0.677) - “On my personal SM pages I like content posted by my employer”.

Under the construct reliability and validity test in Table 7, the AVE values for these indicators succeed the 0.50 requirement. Hence, retaining these four indicators proved to be valuable.

|         | Employee Brand Advocacy | Employer Motivation | eWOM Adoption and Use |
|---------|-------------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|
| ERm1    |                         | 0.749               |                       |
| ERm2    |                         | 0.715               |                       |
| ERm3    |                         | 0.740               |                       |
| ERm4    |                         | 0.804               |                       |
| ERm5    |                         | 0.797               |                       |
| EmBA1   | 0.697                   |                     |                       |
| EmBA2   | 0.752                   |                     |                       |
| EmBA3   | 0.774                   |                     |                       |
| EmBA4   | 0.785                   |                     |                       |
| EmBA5   | 0.844                   |                     |                       |
| EmBA6   | 0.808                   |                     |                       |
| eWOMAU1 |                         |                     | 0.757                 |
| eWOMAU2 |                         |                     | 0.644                 |
| eWOMAU3 |                         |                     | 0.760                 |
| eWOMAU4 |                         |                     | 0.695                 |
| eWOMAU5 |                         |                     | 0.677                 |

**Table 6: Outer Loadings**



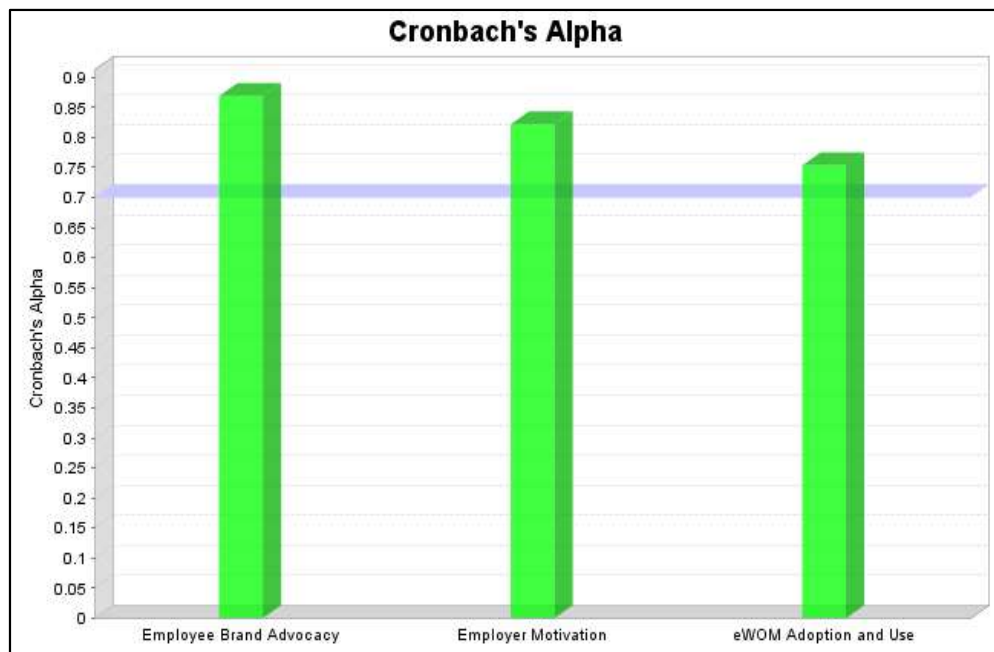
**Figure 7: Proposed Model-Path Coefficients Outer Weights-Loadings**

### Internal Consistency Reliability

#### Step 1: Cronbach Alpha

Cronbach alpha can be considered the lower bound and composite reliability the upper bound of the true internal consistency reliability. After reviewing the initial PLS algorithm testing of the variables in SMART-PLS 3.5, the following results (see Table 8 and Figure 8) are observed:

- Employer Motivation (0.822)
- eWOM Adoption and Usage (0.753)
- Employee Brand Advocacy (0.869).



**Figure 8: Cronbach's Alpha Results**



### Step 2: Composite Reliability Test

To establish internal consistency reliability, composite reliability (CR) should be higher than the threshold of 0.70 (Hair et al., 2018c).

- Values greater than 0.60 (>0.40 – very liberal) for early research
- Values of at least 0.70 required to establish constructs

All the latent variables have achieved composite reliability requirements (see Table 7 and Figure 9). The internal consistency reliability's with reflective indicators was 0.75 and higher, suggesting the scales were reliable (Venkatesh et al., 2012).

|                         | Cronbach's Alpha | rho_A | Composite Reliability | Average Variance Extracted (AVE) |
|-------------------------|------------------|-------|-----------------------|----------------------------------|
| Employee Brand Advocacy | 0.869            | 0.871 | 0.902                 | 0.606                            |
| Employer Motivation     | 0.822            | 0.837 | 0.873                 | 0.580                            |
| eWOM Adoption and Use   | 0.753            | 0.768 | 0.833                 | 0.501                            |

Table 7: Construct Reliability and Validity

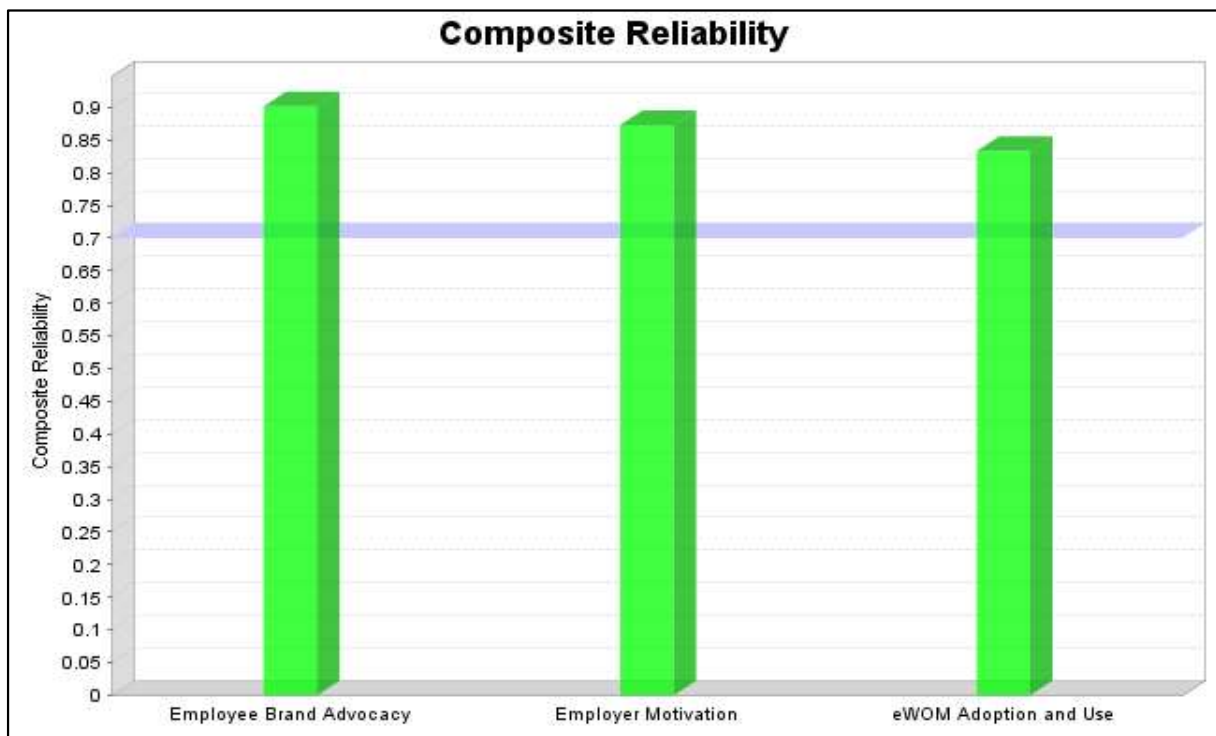


Figure 9: Composite Reliability

### ***Step 3: Average Variance Extracted (AVE)***

To establish AVE, the variance should be larger than 0.5, which allows for assessing convergent validity (Hair et al., 2018c). AVE scores above 0.50 indicate strong convergent validity, meaning that more than 50 percent variation in a particular construct is explained by the stipulated indicators (Chin & Newsted 1999). The data in Table 7 show that AVE has been accomplished.

### ***Discriminate Validity***

Discriminant validity is reached if the square root of the AVE of each construct is greater than its bi-variate correlations with other constructs, and if the indicators load higher on their respective constructs when compared to other indicators (Chin 1998; Compeau, Higgins & Huff 1999).

Instead of using traditional methods for discriminant validity assessment, such as cross loadings and the Fornell-Larcker criterion (Fornell and Larcker, 1981), researchers should apply the Heterotrait monotrait (HTMT) criterion when using PLS (Henseler et al., 2015; (Hair et al., 2018c).

### **Step 2: Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT)**

Henseler et al. (2015) recommend using cut-off values of 0.85 and 0.90 or testing whether HTMT is significantly different from 1. Using cut-off values is problematic because sampling variability introduces uncertainty to the HTMT computation. For example, regardless of the number of indicators, the loadings patterns (equal Vs unequal) and 3 the sample size, about 50% of all HTMT values will be higher/lower than 0.85 when the true construct correlation is 0.85. Table 9 displays the Heterotrait- Monotrait Ratio, all of the the values are lower than the threshold value for conceptually similar constructs which is 0.90 (Hair et al., 2017).

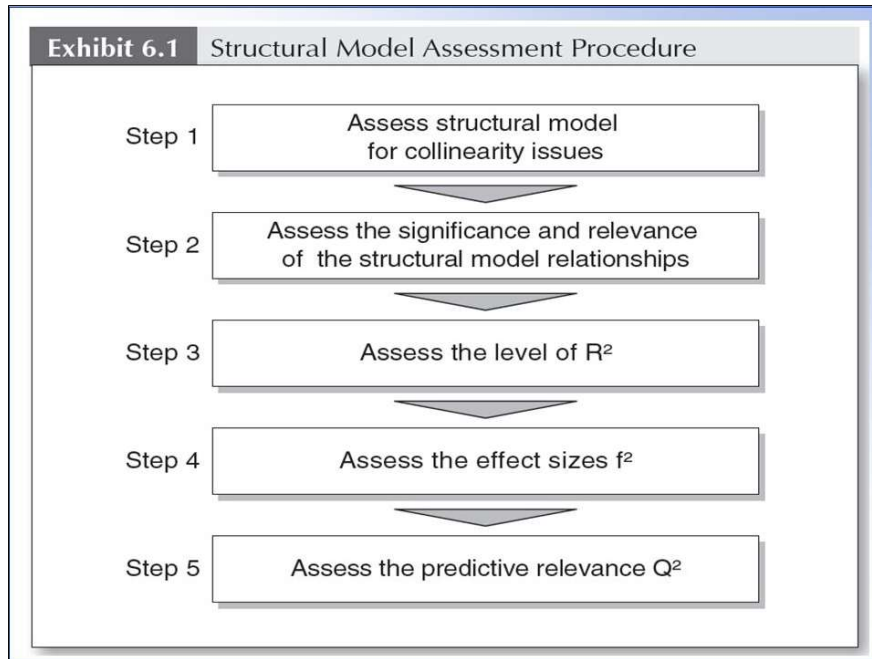
|                                | <b>Employee Brand Advocacy</b> | <b>Employer Motivation</b> | <b>eWOM Adoption and Use</b> |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|----------------------------|------------------------------|
| <b>Employee Brand Advocacy</b> |                                |                            |                              |
| <b>Employer Motivation</b>     | <b>0.622</b>                   |                            |                              |
| <b>eWOM Adoption and Use</b>   | <b>0.637</b>                   | <b>0.595</b>               |                              |

***Table 9: Discriminate Validity - Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT)***

### **Structural Model Assessment**

Once it is confirmed the construct measures are reliable and valid, the next step addresses the assessment of the structural model results. This process involves examining the model's

predictive capabilities and the relationships between the constructs. Figure 10 outlines a systematic approach to assessment of structural model results (Hair, 2013), which this study follows to validate the proposed model (Hair et al., 2018c).



**Figure 10: Structural Model Assessment Procedure (Hair et al., 2013)**

**Step 1: Assess Structural Model for Collinearity Issues**

Analogous to the assessment of formative measurement models, it is necessary to consider tolerance values below 0.20 (VIF value above 5) in the predictor constructs as critical levels of collinearity. If a critical level of collinearity is indicated by the tolerance of VIF guidelines, one should consider eliminating constructs, merging predictors into a single construct, or creating higher-order constructs to treat collinearity problems (Hair, 2013, p.194). Reviewing the inner VIF values in Table 10 and the outer VIF values in Table 11 all of the values are below five. To conclude, therefore that collinearity does not reach critical levels in any of the reflective constructs and is not an issue for the estimation of this PLS path model.

|                         | Employee Brand Advocacy | Employer Motivation | eWOM Adoption and Use |
|-------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|
| Employee Brand Advocacy |                         |                     |                       |
| Employer Motivation     |                         |                     | 1.000                 |
| eWOM Adoption and Use   | 1.000                   |                     |                       |

**Table 8: Inner VIF Values**

|         | VIF   |
|---------|-------|
| ERm1    | 1.412 |
| ERm2    | 1.626 |
| ERm3    | 1.849 |
| ERm4    | 2.074 |
| ERm5    | 2.043 |
| EmBA1   | 1.738 |
| EmBA2   | 2.337 |
| EmBA3   | 2.441 |
| EmBA4   | 2.235 |
| EmBA5   | 3.324 |
| EmBA6   | 2.836 |
| eWOMAU1 | 1.670 |
| eWOMAU2 | 1.536 |
| eWOMAU3 | 1.610 |
| eWOMAU4 | 1.567 |
| eWOMAU5 | 1.300 |

**Table 9: Outer VIF Values**

|                         | Employee Brand Advocacy | Employer Motivation | eWOM Adoption and Use |
|-------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|
| Employee Brand Advocacy |                         |                     |                       |
| Employer Motivation     | 0.275                   |                     |                       |
| eWOM Adoption and Use   |                         |                     |                       |

**Table 10: Total Indirect Effects**

|   | Specific Indirect Effects |
|---|---------------------------|
| Employer Motivation -> eWOM Adoption and Use -> Employee Brand Advocacy | 0.275                     |

**Table 11: Specific Indirect Effects**

|                                |                                |                            |                              |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|----------------------------|------------------------------|
|                                | <b>Employee Brand Advocacy</b> | <b>Employer Motivation</b> | <b>eWOM Adoption and Use</b> |
| <b>Employee Brand Advocacy</b> |                                |                            |                              |
| <b>Employer Motivation</b>     | 0.275                          |                            | 0.504                        |
| <b>eWOM Adoption and Use</b>   | 0.545                          |                            |                              |

**Table 12: Total Effects**

Tables 10 and 11 summaries the Total Indirect Effects, Special Indirect Effects. Table 12 Total Effects evaluates how strongly each of the reflective constructs ultimately influences the key target variable employee brand advocacy.

### **Step 2: The significance and Relevance of the Structural Model Relationships**

In SmartPLS 3.5, it is possible to apply a bootstrapping procedure for the significance of the path coefficient with two-tails significant level of 5 per cent. If t-values are greater than the critical value (1.96) and p-values smaller than 0.05, the statistically significance of the hypothesis is accepted (Hair et al., 2018b).

|  | <b>Original Sample (O)</b> | <b>Sample Mean (M)</b> | <b>Standard Deviation (STDEV)</b> | <b>T Statistics ((O/STDEV))</b> | <b>P Values</b> |
|--|----------------------------|------------------------|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------|-----------------|
| <b>Employer Motivation -&gt; eWOM Adoption and Use</b>     | 0.504                      | 0.521                  | 0.055                             | 9.111                           | <b>0.000</b>    |
| <b>eWOM Adoption and Use -&gt; Employee Brand Advocacy</b> | 0.545                      | 0.562                  | 0.070                             | 7.834                           | <b>0.000</b>    |

**Table 13: Path Coefficients, Mean, STDEV, T-Values, P-Values**

Reviewing the path coefficients in Table 13, the t-values for Employer Motivation, and eWOM Adoption and Use is greater than the critical value of (1.96) and all have smaller p-values than 0.05. This finding confirms the significance for these constructs; hence, these hypotheses are accepted.

### **Step 3: Bootstrapping and blindfolding coefficient of determination R square**

|                                | <b>R Square</b> | <b>R Square Adjusted</b> |
|--------------------------------|-----------------|--------------------------|
| <b>Employee Brand Advocacy</b> | 0.297           | 0.292                    |
| <b>eWOM Adoption and Use</b>   | 0.254           | 0.249                    |

**Table 14: R Square and R Square Adjusted**

Researchers using PLS-SEM often interpret the R<sup>2</sup> as to their models predictive power. The R<sup>2</sup> statistics is appropriate for assessing a models in-sample explanatory power, but is not an indication of the model's out-of-sample predictive power (Becker et al., 2018, Hair et al., 2018c,

Hair et al., 2019). Table 14 displays the R<sup>2</sup> and the R<sup>2</sup> Adjusted for the two constructs Employee Brand Advocacy and eWOM Adoption and Usage.

**Step 4: F Square Effect Size**

|                         | Employee Brand Advocacy | Employer Motivation | eWOM Adoption and Use |
|-------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|
| Employee Brand Advocacy |                         |                     |                       |
| Employer Motivation     |                         |                     | 0.341                 |
| eWOM Adoption and Use   | 0.422                   |                     |                       |

**Table 15: F Squared Effect Size**

Considering the F effect sizes values of 0.02, 0.15 and 0.35 indicate weak, moderate and strong effects (Chin, 2010). Reviewing the data in Table 15, the following constructs are moderator: Employer Motivation (0.341). However, eWOM Adoption and Usage has a strong effect at 0.422.

**Step 5: Accept the predicative relevance Q<sup>2</sup>**

Q<sup>2</sup> looks at the out-of-sample predictive power. Using blindfolding, Q<sup>2</sup> >0 is indicative of predictive relevance; the values of 0.02,0.15,0.35 correspond to a weak, moderate and strong degree of predictive relevance (Chin, 2010, Hair et al., 2017).

Reviewing the data in Table 16, eWOM Adoption and Usage Q<sup>2</sup> is 0.111 and Employee Brand Advocacy Q<sup>2</sup> of 0.160, which indicate a moderate degree of predictive relevance.

|                         | SSO     | SSE     | Q <sup>2</sup> (=1-SSE/SSO) |
|-------------------------|---------|---------|-----------------------------|
| Employee Brand Advocacy | 900.000 | 756.082 | 0.160                       |
| Employer Motivation     | 750.000 | 750.000 |                             |
| eWOM Adoption and Use   | 750.000 | 666.983 | 0.111                       |

**Table 16: Construct Crossvalidated Redundancy**

**Reflective Measurement Model Hypothesis Evaluated**

This following section will revise the two hypothesis and the above tests that were conducted under the reflective measurement model to assess if there is a significant difference between the constructs.

**H1b: Employer Motivation Significantly Affect Employees' Intention to Adopt and Use SM**

All of the indicators (0.749, 0.715, 0.741, 0.804, and 0.797) that were aligned to the construct Employer Motivation has surpassed the 0.70 threshold required. Reviewing internal

consistency reliability in particular Cronbach alpha (0.822) and composite reality (0.873), this threshold has been achieved and in particular the AVE exceeds the 0.50 required at (0.580).

HTMT values were not close to 1 and doesn't indicate a lack of discriminant validity (Henseler et al., 2009). Looking at the structural model and at collinearity, the inner VIF values for Employer Motivation to eWOM Adoption and use is at 1.000. The outer VIF, indicator values are also consistent with ERm1 1.412, ERm2 1.626, ERm3 1.849, ERm4 2.074, and ERm5 2.043, which are all below the critical level of 5 for VIF values. Finally, the F effect of 0.341 indicates Employer Motivation has a strong effect on eWOM Adoption and Use. Summarising the reflective model, the structural model we can confirm that employer motivation significantly affects, and employee's intention to adopt and use SM.

**H2: eWOM Adoption and Usage Leads to Brand Advocacy**

Having reviewed the indicators for the construct eWOM Adoption and Use, some of the indicators (eWOMAU1 - 0.757, eWOMAU3 - 0.760, eWOMAU4 -0.695,), pass the 0.70 threshold. However, having discussed earlier the importance of the indicators that did not meet this threshold (eWOMAU2 - 0.6744, eWOMAU5 - 0.677) they surpassed the average AVE of 0.50 value, therefore are retained. Studying the internal consistency reliability test, Cronbach alpha is at 0.753, composite reliability is at 0.833, and finally AVE is at 0.502 all validating the constructs.

HTMT values close to 1 indicate a lack of discriminant validity with the results of 0.637, 0.660, 0.625, 0.595, 0.559 and 0.455, confirms that this is not the case. Lastly, the structural model assessment and considering collinearity values, the outer VIF values of 1.670, 1.536, 1.610, 1.567 and 1.300 which are all below the 5 threshold. Finally, when considering the F effect size for eWOM Social Influence, this finding indicates this construct has a strong effect on eWOM Adoption and Usage. Table 19 displays the effect of the constructs and its significance for this study. The F<sup>2</sup> effects assesses how strongly one exogenous construct contributes to explaining a certain endogenous construct in terms of R<sup>2</sup>. (Hair et al., 2018a) rule of thumb for F<sup>2</sup> is:

- $0.02 \leq F^2 < 0.15$  : Weak Effect
- $0.15 \leq F^2 < 0.35$  : Moderate Effect
- $F^2 \geq 0.35$ : Strong Effect

|                         | F Effects | Significance    |
|-------------------------|-----------|-----------------|
| Employer Motivation     | 0.341     | Moderate Effect |
| eWOM Adoption and Usage | 0.422     | Strong Effect   |

**Table 19: Significant of Constructs on Employee Brand Advocacy**

| Constructs                          | Hypothesis   | Accepted/Rejected  |
|-------------------------------------|--|--------------------|
| Employer Incentives                 | H1a: Employer Incentives significantly affect employees' intention to adopt and use SM | Partially Accepted |
| Employer Motivations                | H1b: Employer Motivation significantly affect employees' intention to adopt and use SM | Accepted           |
| Employee Adoption and Usage of eWOM | H2: Employee Adoption and Usage of eWOM initiatives leads to brand advocacy            | Accepted           |

**Table 20: Proposed Model Findings**

The findings in Table 20 confirm that employers encourage their employees to be creative with electronic word of mouth (eWOM) posts on social media. However, employees believe they were not allocated enough time in their job to work with social media. Less than half of the employees were encouraged to upskill via training courses on social media. The majority of employees stated that their employer did not have a social media strategy. Further results confirm that employers do not provide employees incentives for achievements made on social media or discuss their business goals for social media. Despite this lack of support from employer's employees still adopt and use eWOM initiatives resulting in employee brand advocacy.

### **Originality and Value**

The key contribution to literature is the confirmation that employees who are motivated and are encouraged by their employer are more likely to use eWOM. The findings also confirm employees who adopt and use eWOM initiatives, are seen as employee brand ambassadors by their employers. However, there is a lack of guidance from employers on the firm's social media strategy and employees' efforts on SM are not acknowledged.

### **Research Limitations and Implications**

This research explores the employer's efforts in guiding their employees to adopt and use eWOM to achieve brand advocacy. This study is not without its limitations; an online survey does not allow for follow-up questions to the open-ended questions posed.

Recommendations for future research is to explore constructs relating to employee sharing, employee culture, and existing social media communities. Another area to address is the identification of initiatives that can encourage employee brand advocacy. As employee incentives is only partially accepted, future research on to the reasons needs why is needed. Finally, future prediction of employee traits that result in brand advocates for companies could be explored using PLSpredict.



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