The Role of Internal Communication in Cultivating Employee Brand Ambassadors in South African Service Organisations

N O T Ntshona*
University of Pretoria

thatontshona@gmail.com

*Corresponding author

Dr H van Wyk
IMM Grduate School

Helenavw@immgsm.ac.za

https://orcid.org/000-6164-2099

ABSTRACT

This qualitative study examines the pivotal role of internal communication in cultivating employee brand ambassadors within South African service organisations. While the relationship between internal communication and employee engagement has been extensively studied, its influence in nurturing employee brand ambassadors within agile organisational settings remains underexplored. Grounded in stakeholder theory and diffusion of innovation theory, this research positions employees as key organisational stakeholders whose attitudes and behaviours substantially impact corporate reputation and competitive advantage.

Twelve senior managers from diverse service sectors (legal, consulting, accounting, finance, and marketing) in Gauteng, South Africa, participated in semi-structured interviews. The findings reveal three key strategic dimensions: (1) strategic selection criteria emphasising energy, personality fit, and brand passion; (2) the critical role of authentic, transparent leadership communication in building trust; and (3) the power of employee advocacy in humanising brands and extending organisational reach. The study contributes to theory by demonstrating how engaged employees transform into proactive ambassadors who embody brand values and drive organisational competitiveness.

Keywords: internal communication, employee brand ambassadors, agile organisations, service industry, South Africa.

1. INTRODUCTION

Internal communication practices are essential for achieving competitive advantage in service organisations (Natarajan, Balasubramaniam & Srinivasan, 2017). While the relationship between internal communication and employee engagement has been widely explored, its role in cultivating employee brand ambassadors in agile organisational environments remains understudied (Kristal, Baumgarth & Henseler, 2020). McSweeney (2024) reports that 65% of companies implementing formal employee ambassador strategies experienced increased brand recognition. As Verghese (2017) notes, employees are key stakeholders who influence corporate reputation and serve as brand ambassadors.

Over the past two decades, companies have transitioned from traditional hierarchical structures to more flexible and agile decision-making models. The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated this transition, highlighting the need for adaptability, speed, and efficiency (Biçer, 2021). This shift emphasised the importance of clear, transparent, and frequent internal communication in agile organisations (Dühring, Zerfaß & Berger, 2020).

Internal communication manages strategic connections and exchanges between an organisation and its internal stakeholders (Verghese, 2017). It fulfils two main roles: providing organisational information that establishes a sense of community through two-way symmetrical relationships, and, when practised effectively, increasing employee belonging, commitment to organisational goals, awareness of the changing environment, and understanding of evolving aims (Ruck, Welch & Menara, 2017).

Employees acting as brand ambassadors is a relatively new concept among strategic and internal communication practitioners (Mishra, Boynton & Mishra, 2014). Despite limited research, this approach has been increasingly implemented in organisational communication strategies. Engagement occurs when employees harness themselves to their work roles (Kahn, 2010; Mbhele & De Beer, 2021). It has become a global concern for leaders as it affects organisational effectiveness, innovation, and competitiveness. Engaged employees typically speak positively about the organisation, plan to stay, and strive to perform at their best (Balakrishnan & Masthan, 2013).

Agile organisations deliver faster results, increase stakeholder returns, improve employee morale and efficiency, and respond effectively to change (Holbeche, 2023). This approach allows for flatter organisational structures, more employee development opportunities, and clear business objectives (Dühring et al., 2020), helping to attract new talent with in-demand skills.

The purpose of this qualitative study is to examine how internal communication fosters brand advocacy and cultivates employee brand ambassadors who add value to the organisation. The following research questions guided the study:

- What strategies should internal communication drive to achieve successful employee brand ambassadorship?

- What role does internal communication play in driving internal brand ambassadorship?

- What roles do employee brand ambassadors play in contributing to organisational brand success?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This section reviews the key theoretical concepts underpinning this study, organised into four subsections: internal communication in organisations, internal communication in agile contexts, brand ambassadors, and the theoretical framework.

2.1 INTERNAL COMMUNICATION IN ORGANISATIONS

Internal communication is a complex construct rooted in corporate communication and public relations management (Arif, Johnston, Lane & Beatson, 2023; Mbhele & De Beer, 2021; Mishra et al., 2014). It functions as an intangible resource and strategic management asset that enhances business value through effective communicative interactions between employees and employers (Arif et al., 2023). For internal communication to be effective, it must be symmetrical in nature, employing a two-way communication model that fulfils employees' needs to be heard and appreciated (Vokić, Bilušić & Najjar, 2021).

Al-Shuaibi, Said, Shamsudin and Aziz (2016) point out that the primary objective of effective internal communication is to foster positive employee attitudes and behaviours toward the organisation's brands. It creates an environment that encourages employees to live the brand, acting in ways that reflect and embody the company's values and culture.

The benefits of internal communication are well-documented in the literature. First, effective internal communication significantly improves trust between employees and management (Zainab, Akbar & Siddiqui, 2022). Trust emerges through open, clear, and timely communication demonstrating organisational concern for stakeholders (Mishra et al., 2014). Second, employee engagement represents a multidimensional motivational phenomenon where employees invest themselves physically, emotionally, and cognitively in their work roles (Kahn, 2010). Third, internal communication functions as an instrument for increasing employee motivation (Dhone & Sarwoko, 2022), with motivated employees demonstrating greater creativity and innovation (Stacho et al., 2019).

2.2 INTERNAL COMMUNICATION IN AGILE ORGANISATIONS

In an increasingly complex environment, organisations face intense global competition and digital transformation, which calls for an acceleration of innovative change (Atkinson, Hizaji, Nazarian & Abasi, 2022). Organisational agility has emerged as a best practice for surviving and thriving amid such disruptions (Dühring et al., 2020).

According to Alvarado and Leal (2022), agility represents a fundamental skill and competitive edge that demands strategic thinking, creativity, adaptability, and proactivity. Agile organisations operate through interconnected teams within people-centred cultures, characterised by rapid learning and decision-making processes supported by technology (Atkinson et al., 2022).

Dühring et al. (2020) propose that agility comprises three main elements: drivers (external factors beyond management control presenting opportunities or threats), capabilities (the ability to detect and quickly respond to changes, achieve goals efficiently, demonstrate flexibility, and complete activities with speed), and providers (organisational factors that enable agility, including human resource practices, supplier/customer relationships, internal coordination, process management, and technology).

Internal communication fulfils a critical monitoring function by observing the organisational operational environment to stay informed about environmental changes. Van Ruler (2021) emphasises that communication professionals play a pivotal role in helping organisations adapt to their environments through planning models open to adaptation, enabling organisational communication to respond faster and become more flexible.

2.3 EMPLOYEE BRAND AMBASSADORS

From a theoretical perspective, brands are intrinsically defined as human partners, attributing human characteristics to organisational entities (Sakka & Ahammad, 2020). Brand ambassadors may include customers within brand communities, celebrity endorsers providing testimonial communication, and employees such as salespeople (Schmidt & Baumgarth, 2018). These individuals embody the organisational brand and are perceived as the closest and most trustworthy representatives in the eyes of external stakeholders.

Employee brand ambassadors function as company representatives who 'live the brand' by embodying the organisation's identity and values as extensions of their own personas during external interactions (Boyd & Sutherland, 2006). Through these interactions, employee brand ambassadors possess the power to either build or diminish organisational value (Andersson, 2019). Their mission involves conveying brand information honestly and reliably, disseminating best practices and brand knowledge, relaying employee feedback to management, and formulating suggestions to enhance the brand (Schmidt & Baumgarth, 2018).

Saleem and Hawkins (2021) elaborate that individuals who possess and declare alignment with brand characteristics are viewed by external stakeholders as embodiments of the brand itself. As organisational brands and reputations grow increasingly important as assets, employees play a critical role in enhancing these intangible resources. Andersson (2019) suggests that as brand management becomes more challenging, managers should delegate brand responsibility to employees.

According to Ahmed and Hashim (2022), a brand's value and promise are transmitted from a top-down hierarchical model within an organisation through internal communication. Brand ambassador programmes involve selecting and managing employees across different organisational levels to anchor the internal brand (Schmidt & Baumgarth, 2018). Boyd and Sutherland (2006) postulate that these programmes aim to enhance employees' commitment to 'living the brand' and create emotional connections that align employee values with organisational values. Bhasin, Mushtaq and Gupta (2019) argue that incentives and rewards serve as key anchors for successful employee brand ambassador programmes.

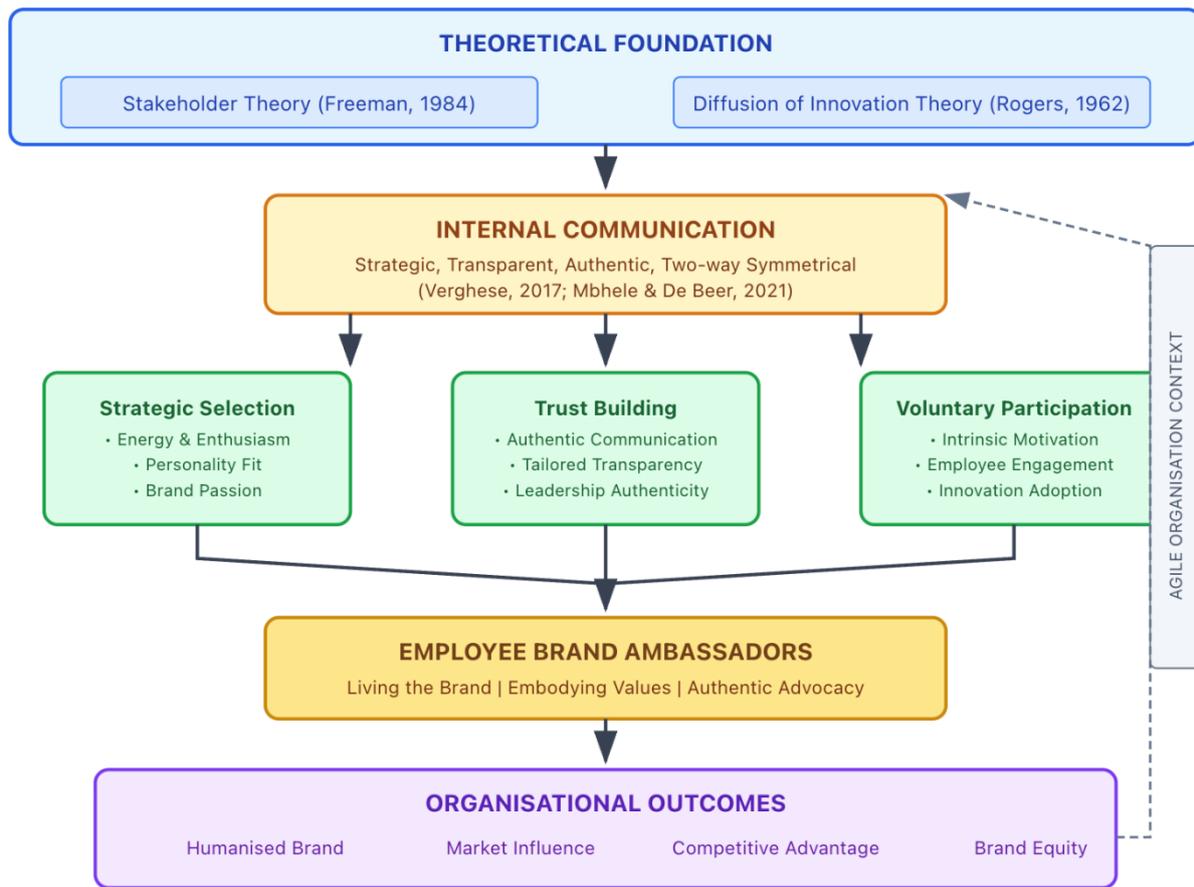## 2.4 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is grounded in two complementary theories: stakeholder theory and diffusion of innovation theory.

Stakeholder theory, based on Freeman's (1984) work, advocates for organisational management that responds to evolving social demands by strategically managing relationships with both internal stakeholders (employees, owners) and external stakeholders (customers, suppliers). According to Yasir, Nurjanah, Yohana and Samsir (2022), this theory significantly contributes to corporate image creation by offering a coordinated framework for both internal and external communication. For this study, stakeholder theory highlights the critical role of employees as essential stakeholders whose attitudes and behaviours substantially impact organisational reputation and competitive advantage.

Diffusion of innovation theory, introduced by Rogers (1962, as cited in Wani & Ali, 2015), examines how new ideas, objects, or practices spread through communication channels within social systems over time. According to Ali, Raza,

Puah and Amin (2019), members of a system decide to adopt or reject innovations based on their perceptions. García-Avilés (2020) notes that adoption decisions are heavily influenced by the subjective evaluations of peers who have already adopted the innovation. This theory demonstrates how strategic internal communication can foster employee brand advocacy behaviours, positioning employees as early adopters who subsequently influence both their colleagues and external stakeholders.

Figure 1 below illustrates the conceptual framework guiding this study, showing how stakeholder theory and diffusion of innovation theory intersect with internal communication practices to cultivate employee brand ambassadors.

THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

Stakeholder Theory (Freeman, 1984)   Diffusion of Innovation Theory (Rogers, 1962)

INTERNAL COMMUNICATION
Strategic, Transparent, Authentic, Two-way Symmetrical
(Verghese, 2017; Mbhele & De Beer, 2021)

Strategic Selection
• Energy & Enthusiasm
• Personality Fit
• Brand Passion

Trust Building
• Authentic Communication
• Tailored Transparency
• Leadership Authenticity

Voluntary Participation
• Intrinsic Motivation
• Employee Engagement
• Innovation Adoption

AGILE ORGANISATION CONTEXT

EMPLOYEE BRAND AMBASSADORS
Living the Brand | Embodying Values | Authentic Advocacy

ORGANISATIONAL OUTCOMES
Humanised Brand   Market Influence   Competitive Advantage   Brand Equity

Source: Authors' own construction based on Freeman (1984), Rogers (1962), Dühring et al. (2020)

FIGURE 1: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK: INTERNAL COMMUNICATION AND EMPLOYEE BRAND AMBASSADORSHIP

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 RESEARCH DESIGN AND PARADIGM

The interpretivist worldview guided this study, recognising that the topic could have multiple interpretations rather than one single truth (Babbie & Mouton, 2018). The interpretivist paradigm was appropriate for several reasons. First, it acknowledges that findings cannot be generalised beyond the context in which the study was conducted (Du Plooy-Cilliers, 2024). Second, it favoured a qualitative research approach to data collection and analysis as a methodological assumption (Maree & van der Westhuizen, 2025). Third, from an axiological perspective, it acknowledged the potential influence of the researchers' own beliefs and background knowledge (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

3.2 SAMPLING METHOD AND PARTICIPANTS

A purposive sampling method was adopted to select senior managers for semi-structured interviews, referring to 'sampling done with a specific purpose in mind' (Pascoe, 2024). Twelve senior managers were selected based on two criteria: (1) holding a management position in the service industry, and (2) being responsible for the organisation's internal communication.

TABLE 1: PARTICIPANT CHARACTERISTICS

Participant	Industry Sector	Organisation Size	Years in Role	Position Level
P1	Legal	Large (500+)	5-10	Director
P2	Consulting	Medium (100-499)	3-5	Manager
P3	Accounting	Large (500+)	>10	Director
P4	Finance	Large (500+)	5-10	Manager
P5	Marketing	Small (<100)	3-5	Manager
P6	Legal	Medium (100-499)	>10	Director
P7	Consulting	Large (500+)	5-10	Manager
P8	Accounting	Medium (100-499)	3-5	Director
P9	Finance	Large (500+)	>10	Manager
P10	Marketing	Small (<100)	5-10	Director
P11	Consulting	Large (500+)	3-5	Manager
P12	Finance	Medium (100-499)	>10	Director

Note: Organisation size categories based on employee count. P = Participant.

3.3 DATA COLLECTION

An interview guide steered the interviews conducted via the Microsoft Teams video conferencing platform. Interviews were scheduled at a convenient date and time with each participant. All interviews were recorded with audio after gaining permission and informed consent. Interviews lasted approximately 45 to 60 minutes each. The interviews were immediately transcribed through the Microsoft Teams platform. To ensure accuracy, the authors thoroughly listened to each recording while reading the transcripts and made minor corrections where necessary.

3.4 DATA ANALYSIS

Thematic analysis was employed to identify, analyse, organise, describe, and report themes within the data set (Braun & Clarke, 2022). The analysis followed a systematic six-phase approach. In phase one, the researchers familiarised themselves with the data by reading interview transcripts while simultaneously listening to recordings. Phase two involved generating initial inductive codes from the data, which were then combined with a priori codes derived from the literature to create a master code list (Creswell, 2012).

During phase three, an iterative analysis identified and merged similar codes. Phase four involved recognising patterns through related codes, with these patterns forming themes that provided meaning to the data. Each identified theme was connected to direct quotes from transcripts to emphasise its significance. In phases five and six, themes,

sub-themes, and codes were continuously revised, reviewed, and ultimately aligned with the research questions (Nowell, Norris, White & Moules, 2017).

3.5 DATA SATURATION

Data saturation was assessed continuously throughout data collection. By the tenth interview, no new themes or codes emerged, with subsequent interviews confirming and enriching existing themes rather than generating new ones. This pattern of thematic redundancy indicated that data saturation had been achieved (Guest, Bunce & Johnson, 2006). The final two interviews were conducted to confirm saturation and ensure comprehensive coverage of the phenomenon under study.

3.6 TRUSTWORTHINESS

Several strategies were employed to ensure the trustworthiness of the findings. Credibility was established through prolonged engagement with participants during interviews and member checking, whereby participants were provided with summaries of their responses for verification. Dependability was achieved through maintaining a detailed audit trail documenting all research decisions and through peer debriefing sessions between the researchers.

Confirmability was addressed through reflexive practices, including the maintenance of reflexive journals documenting the researchers' assumptions, preconceptions, and analytical decisions throughout the study. Inter-coder reliability was established through independent coding by both researchers, followed by collaborative sessions to resolve discrepancies and reach consensus on the final coding framework. Transferability was enhanced through thick description of the research context and participants, enabling readers to assess the applicability of findings to other settings.

The potential influence of the researchers' personal views and beliefs was addressed by obtaining ethical clearance approval and through the rigorous trustworthiness procedures outlined above.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Following thematic analysis, three main themes emerged, each aligned with a research question. Table 2 summarises these themes and their corresponding sub-themes.

TABLE 2: SUMMARY OF RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND THEMES

Research Question	Theme	Sub-themes
RQ1: Strategies for employee brand ambassadorship	Strategic selection and cultivation	A: Selecting the right ambassadors B: Cultivating employee participation
RQ2: Role of internal communication	Building trust through authentic communication	A: Amplifying through employee advocacy B: Tailoring transparency C: Leadership as ambassadors
RQ3: Role of employee brand ambassadors	Leveraging employee advocacy for market influence	A: Humanising the brand B: Employees as advertising vehicles C: Aligning behaviours with values

4.1 THEME 1: STRATEGIC SELECTION AND CULTIVATION OF EMPLOYEE BRAND AMBASSADORS

· 4.1.1 Sub-theme A: Selecting the Right Employee Brand Ambassadors

According to Schmidt and Baumgarth (2018), a brand ambassador programme encompasses the selection and management of employee brand ambassadors at different levels of an organisational hierarchy. All participants emphasised that selecting the right ambassadors is a critical goal of internal communication strategies. When asked about selection criteria, participants identified three overarching attributes: energy and enthusiasm, personality fit and soft skills, and love for the brand. This aligns with Saleem and Hawkins' (2021) finding that employee brand ambassadors should possess characteristics closely associated with a particular brand.

> *"These people usually have lots of energy or are proactive, always putting up their hand for things. They're energetic, people know who they are."* (Participant 3)

> *"It's always important to have a good personality fit to the other people you're working with within that campaign. Personality fit is also important – soft skills."* (Participant 4)

Participants also recognised that employees usually participate in ambassadorship programmes because they have a genuine passion for the company and its values:

> *"There already has to be an innate love of the company and the people... these people are invariably those who've had really good experiences in the company."* (Participant 3)

In agile organisation contexts, these selection criteria function as agility providers—the organisational factors that enable agility capability (Dühring et al., 2020). Specifically, personality fit reflects internal coordination capabilities, while love for the brand demonstrates alignment with organisational values, a critical human resource practice that ensures ambassadors authentically embody organisational identity during periods of change.

· 4.1.2 Sub-theme B: Cultivating Employee Participation

According to Stacho et al. (2019), internal communication can be viewed as an instrument that increases employee motivation. Participants indicated that employees are intrinsically motivated, displayed by their initiative to volunteer in campaigns:

> *"Our people ambassadors are passionate because it's on a volunteer basis. We'll usually put out a comms and say we are looking for people who are passionate about the business."* (Participant 4)

Furthermore, participants indicated they equip ambassadors with pertinent information about ongoing campaigns or strategic initiatives, enabling effective communication:

> *"We equip them with information about a running campaign or initiative. People do believe in and want to be a voice."* (Participant 11)

The findings demonstrate that ambassadors volunteer and 'put up their hands', indicating movement through the Diffusion of Innovation theory's adoption stages: awareness (knowledge stage), forming favourable attitudes through peer influence (persuasion stage), choosing to adopt the role voluntarily (decision stage), and participating in campaigns (implementation stage).

Summary: Theme 1 directly addresses Research Question 1 by revealing that successful employee brand ambassadorship requires strategic selection based on energy, personality fit, and brand passion, combined with voluntary participation mechanisms. These findings extend stakeholder theory by demonstrating how employees become activated as strategic assets through careful selection and authentic engagement.

4.2 THEME 2: BUILDING TRUST THROUGH AUTHENTIC COMMUNICATION

· 4.2.1 Sub-theme A: Amplifying Market Positioning Through Employee Advocacy

According to Mbhele and De Beer (2021), organisations should act authentically by being trustworthy, transparent, and consistent to foster employees' information-seeking and sharing behaviour. Participants indicated the goal of being transparent and authentic in promoting trust with employees and external stakeholders:

> *"You have to be in order to garner people's trust, in order to have a proper working relationship with your audiences. You have to be transparent or be seen to be transparent. It starts with leadership."* (Participant 7)

Authentic communication reduces the perceived risk associated with innovation adoption. When leadership communicates transparently about organisational changes, employees perceive the change as more trustworthy, accelerating their movement through the Diffusion of Innovation's adoption stages. This finding aligns with international research by Vokić et al. (2021) on trust-building communication.

· 4.2.2 Sub-theme B: Tailoring Transparency Based on Audience

Although transparency is vital for building trust, some participants believed that transparency depends on the audience. They noted that leadership communication needs to be viewed strategically and adjusted for various organisational segments:

> *"What we share with the partners may not be what we share with the whole firm. Often, I will write a communication from our CEO and we'll have 3 versions of it. Transparency is critical."* (Participant 12)

> *"Transparency is very important, although transparency doesn't mean outright full-on honesty. You have to be very choosy in your wording, especially when you have such a diverse workforce."* (Participant 4)

This tailored approach represents an agility capability in action—specifically, flexibility: the ability to use the same core message for different stakeholder groups. This finding resonates with international scholarship on strategic communication adaptation (van Ruler, 2021).

· 4.2.3 Sub-theme C: Leadership as Authentic Brand Ambassadors

Five participants disagreed that leadership transparency should be conditional, noting that leaders are also employee brand ambassadors with a responsibility to be transparent:

> *"Leadership's openness in communications is vital. Inauthenticity can't be hidden, leadership is critical – they too are brand ambassadors."* (Participant 5)

> *"Our main internal ambassadors are our leadership – CEO and specifically our service line leaders. People want leaders to be transparent and people buy in if you are transparent."* (Participant 8)

This finding supports Zainab et al.'s (2022) assertion that leadership and transparent communication are the main resources of an organisation.

Summary: Theme 2 addresses Research Question 2 by demonstrating that internal communication practitioners play a critical role in building trust through authentic communication, while navigating the tension between strategic message tailoring and unconditional leadership authenticity. These findings extend diffusion of innovation theory by showing how transparent leadership communication accelerates adoption of brand ambassador behaviours.

4.3 THEME 3: LEVERAGING EMPLOYEE ADVOCACY FOR MARKET INFLUENCE

· 4.3.1 Sub-theme A: Humanising the Brand Through Employee Advocacy

According to Mishra et al. (2014), effective strategic internal communication fosters sustained trust and commitment among employees, leading to increased engagement and competitive advantage. Participants emphasised the significant influence of employee brand ambassadors on market positioning through the concept of 'people buy from people':

> *"People buy from people they know, like and trust. When you see people posting about their company, you will think it's a great company and you'll want to work there."* (Participant 1)

> *"People don't buy from companies. People buy from people. Authenticity, people. Authenticity and relatability."* (Participant 3)

This principle reflects the Diffusion of Innovation Theory's understanding that adoption decisions are influenced by subjective evaluations of peers who serve as social models (García-Avilés, 2020). These findings align with international research on employee advocacy (Andersson, 2019; Saleem & Hawkins, 2021).

· 4.3.2 Sub-theme B: Employees as Organic Advertising Vehicles

Participants identified employee brand ambassadors as cost-effective advertising vehicles. By harnessing authentic employee enthusiasm and pride, organisations can expand brand reach without heavily depending on traditional advertising:

> *"When employees believe in the brand, when employees pride themselves in working for your brand, they can be your marketing, your billboard out there."* (Participant 6)

> *"When you have your employees as ambassadors, there's no need for you to spend money on advertising."* (Participant 7)

· 4.3.3 Sub-theme C: Aligning Employee Behaviours with Brand Values

According to Boyd and Sutherland (2006), organisations initiate employee brand ambassador programmes to strengthen employees' commitment to embodying the brand. Participants emphasised that ambassador behaviours are crucial in shaping both internal culture and external brand perception:

> *"An employee brand ambassador can make or break a brand based on their behaviours. Are they living by the company values? Everybody that works for your company, unfortunately, is a brand ambassador."* (Participant 9)

"Culture is values times behaviour. Now that's what makes a culture. So, if we want to change our culture, what can we change? We can only change behaviour." (Participant 12)

This finding reflects a critical insight that sustained diffusion requires early adopters to continue embodying and demonstrating the innovation's value over time.

Summary: Theme 3 addresses Research Question 3 by demonstrating that employee brand ambassadors contribute to organisational success by humanising the brand, serving as organic advertising vehicles, and aligning their behaviours with brand values. These findings validate stakeholder theory by showing how employees as stakeholders create value for organisations through authentic advocacy.

5. CONCLUSION

This study examined how internal communication cultivates employee brand ambassadors as a strategic driver of organisational success in South African service organisations. Grounded in Kahn's (2010) concept of employee engagement and informed by stakeholder theory and diffusion of innovation theory, the research revealed that ambassador cultivation directly underpins competitive advantage and organisational innovation.

The study makes three key theoretical contributions. First, it expands Kahn's (1990) engagement concept by demonstrating how engaged employees transform into proactive ambassadors who embody brand values and drive organisational competitiveness (Eldor & Vigoda-Gadot, 2017). Second, it reinforces Saleem and Hawkins' (2021) assertion that internal communication is essential to employee engagement, revealing that trust fundamentally depends on authentic communication. Third, it validates Balakrishnan and Masthan's (2013) perspective that employees represent organisational intellectual capital, with ambassadors amplifying external stakeholder trust by humanising brand values.

A critical insight emerges regarding the productive tension between strategic transparency tailoring and unconditional leadership authenticity. This reflects the complexity of balancing organisational discretion with authentic engagement; a challenge internal communication practitioners must navigate thoughtfully.

6. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the sample was limited to senior managers in Gauteng, South Africa, which restricts the geographical generalisability of findings. The perspectives of employees who are not in management positions were not captured, potentially limiting understanding of how ambassadorship programmes are experienced at different organisational levels. Future research should include employee perspectives to provide a more comprehensive understanding.

Second, the sample represented only the service industry, and findings may not be directly transferable to manufacturing, retail, or other sectors. Third, while the qualitative approach provided rich insights into participants' experiences, it does not allow for quantification of the relationship between internal communication and brand ambassadorship outcomes.

Future research could adopt mixed-methods approaches to quantify the impact of specific internal communication strategies on brand ambassadorship outcomes. Comparative studies across different countries, particularly in other

African contexts, would enhance understanding of cultural factors influencing employee brand ambassadorship. Longitudinal studies tracking the development of ambassador programmes over time would provide valuable insights into sustainability and long-term effectiveness.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are offered for practitioners:

First, organisations should establish structured selection processes for employee brand ambassadors, focusing on employees who demonstrate passion for the brand, enthusiasm, and personality fit. Practically, this could involve creating assessment criteria, conducting informal interviews with potential ambassadors, and observing employees' natural advocacy behaviours before formal selection.

Second, employee brand ambassadorship programmes should become a strategic objective in organisations. Organisations can leverage employees as brand advocates through training on messaging and social media use. For example, organisations could develop brief monthly training sessions covering current campaigns, key messages, and platform-specific best practices. Although some organisations select ambassadors, voluntary participation should be encouraged as it leads to greater authenticity.

Third, fostering authentic engagement begins with leadership. Prioritising transparent, authentic communication builds trust and increases employee engagement. Practically, this can be achieved through regular town halls, weekly email updates from leadership, and creating feedback channels where employees can ask questions and receive honest responses. Transparency should be tailored to specific audience segments while maintaining consistency in core messages.

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