

Course: SKOM12
Term: Spring 2023
Supervisor: Mats Heide
Examiner: Cecilia Cassinger

Between Discursive Power, Visibility and Resistance: A Critical Study of Employee Ambassadorship on Social Media

Alessandra Sossini

Lund University
Department of strategic communication
Master's thesis



Abstract

Between Discursive Power, Visibility and Resistance: A Critical Study of Employee Ambassadorship on Social Media

Social media offers employees new opportunities to contribute as communicators and ambassadors to the strategic communication of organizations. However, this study problematizes the prevailing normative and managerial-dominated understanding of self-initiated employee ambassadorship on social media, which neglects power structures in which employees' communication on social media is embedded. Thus, this thesis aims to provide a deeper understanding and a more critical perspective on the dark side of self-initiated employee ambassadorship on social media. This qualitative study used empirical material from semi-structured interviews with employees from 14 organizations and Foucault's concept of power to analyze which and how discourses exert power over employee communication on social media, how visibility influences it, and which aspects fuel resistance. Contrary to previous research, the findings indicate that employee ambassadors' social media communication is hardly influenced by direct managerial control but by three guiding discourses that create complex tensions, where employees must constantly negotiate between normalized professional expectations, self-branding requirements and an authenticity paradox. These tensions intensify through visibility on social media, where employees strategize and situationally silence their communication through self-monitoring and self-surveillance practices. However, since there is no power without resistance, the results also show that employees' resistance towards the phenomenon is based on privacy, the image of social media platforms, and organizational culture. Conclusively, the findings also outline the need for further critical research to offer a more nuanced understanding of power relations that influence the communication practices of organizational members.

Keywords: employee ambassadorship, employee communication, social media, power, Foucault, discourse, visibility, surveillance, resistance

Word count: 19'861

Acknowledgments

I would like to express my great appreciation to all those who have contributed to the completion of this master's thesis.

First, I would like to extend my deep gratitude to my thesis supervisor Professor Mats Heide for his advice, guidance and constructive criticism, which have been crucial to shaping the outcome of this thesis. Second, I would like to thank all the participants of this study for their time, trust and willingness to contribute with their knowledge to this thesis. Finally, I would like to express my gratitude to my family and friends that have supported me throughout this two years journey in Sweden and their special encouragement over the last five months.

Table of contents

1. Introduction	1
1.1. Aim and Research Questions	3
1.2. Delimitations	4
2. Literature Review	5
2.1 Employee Ambassadorship and Employees' Communicative Roles	5
2.2 Employee Engagement and Ambassadorship on Social Media	7
2.2.1 LinkedIn's Role in Employee Communication on Social Media	9
2.3 Identity Tensions, Control and Discipline on Social Media	10
2.4 Synthesis	13
3. Theoretical Framework	14
3.1 Critical Organizational Studies and Disciplinary Power	14
3.2 The Power of Discourse	16
3.3 Disciplinary Power through Surveillance and Visibility	19
3.4 Critical Considerations of Foucault's Concepts	20
3.5 Theoretical Reflections and Empirical Work	21
4. Methodology	23
4.1 Post Traditions & Critical Interpretive Research Approach	23
4.1.1 Critical Interpretive Research Approach	24
4.2 Empirical Material Collection and Analysis	25
4.2.1 Sampling	25
4.2.2 Interview Proceedings and Reflections	27
4.2.3 Analysis of Empirical Material	28
4.3 Reflexivity and Ethical Considerations	29
4.3.1 Ethical Considerations	30
5. Findings and Analysis	31
5.1 Power of Discourse	31
5.1.1 From Social Media-Driven Business Transformation to a Love-Hate-Relationship	31
5.1.2 From Careerism to Self-Branding Strategies	34
5.1.3 From Authenticity to an Authenticity Paradox	36
5.2 Visibility and (Self-)Surveillance	38
5.2.1 Normalization of the Disciplinary Gaze	38

5.2.2	Strategizing through Self-Monitoring.....	39
5.2.3	Situational Silencing through Self-Surveillance.....	41
5.3	Resistance Self-initiated Employee Ambassadorship.....	43
5.3.1	Importance of Privacy.....	43
5.3.2	The Platforms Perceived Image & Inauthenticity.....	45
5.3.3	Organizational Culture.....	47
6.	Discussion and Conclusion.....	49
6.1	Contributions to Research and Practice	51
6.2	Suggestions for Future Research	52
	References	54
	Appendix 1	64
	Requirement Catalogue Sampling	64
	Appendix 2	65
	Interview Guide Disciplinary Power & Ambassadorship	65
	Appendix 3	69
	Interview Guide Resistance & Ambassadorship	69
	Appendix 4	73
	Information Sheet.....	73
	Appendix 5	75
	Informed Consent Form.....	75

1. Introduction

Click, like, comment, share, post – Social media has become an integral part of organizations' communication. However, it is not only brands that use social media to communicate with stakeholders but also employees have gained new opportunities to tap into the role of communicators and brand ambassadors to share their experiences, build their employer identification (Falkheimer & Heide, 2014), make their voices heard by a large audience (Miles & Mangold, 2014) and thus become a significant part of the strategic communication of organizations (cf. Falkheimer & Heide, 2022). Although this can occur within a premeditated and controlled initiative by the organization that trains employees to become brand ambassadors, employees have also started creating supportive messages from their own initiative and publishing them through their personal accounts (Van Zoonen et al., 2014). LinkedIn alone saw an engagement growth of 22 percent year-over-year in 2022, with a further increasing tendency (Shepherd, 2023). This is to the benefit of the companies, as self-initiated employee ambassadorship brings a high degree of brand credibility to the organization's communication (van der Berg & Verhoeven, 2017). However, to keep the risk of reputational damage as low as possible and still benefit from the employees' communicative motivation, the professional environment postulates an incentive-driven and strategic management approach to guide employees' voices while still enhancing the feeling of empowerment (Soens & Clays, 2021). Whereas such a managerial and strategic control of employee communication has been widely acknowledged in strategic communication and management research and become normalized in practice, little attention has been paid to the darker side of this notion, possible risks for employees as well as the more extensive societal control mechanisms, which influence employees' communication (cf. Alvesson & Deetz, 2021) and can be harmful for their well-being (Van Zoonen et al., 2016; Altheide, 2013)

In the present time, where the discourse and the constant visibility on social media are increasing, it can therefore be argued that the current research problem lies in an oversimplified normative view of the phenomenon of employee ambassadorship on social media, neglecting organizational members' embedding in society and "disregarding the way behavior and beliefs [...] are historically and culturally conditioned" (Alvesson, 1996, p. 20). At the same time, organizations also cannot be considered as self-contained entities but as

entities embedded in and in constant exchange with social, cultural, and political systems – the same systems that create norms that tell employees through discourses and practices how they should act on social media. This power construct, which the famous post-structuralist Michael Foucault calls disciplinary power (1972), transcends managerial borders and enacts self-disciplinary behavior among employees, which is deeply rooted in social structures (cf. Duffy & Chan, 2019). However, currently, the assumption dominates that employees take on and off the role of ambassadors freely and voluntarily (e.g., Morrison, 2014) without being influenced or impacted negatively. On one side, through this problem, employees are attributed with illusionary freedom of speech and participation on social media, as well as a pseudo-voluntary position where empowerment and control constantly contradict each other (Müller, 2018). On the other side, this problem makes organizations believe that employees' communication can be solely directed through strategic managerial control such as guidelines and incentives, neglecting the larger context and power dynamics influencing the phenomenon.

The lack of consideration of social context and power relations in this discourse and research can be traced back to two aspects. First, the contemporary discourse around employee communication on social media is still strongly functionalistic. Previous studies and concepts put a management perspective in the foreground and focus on managers' expectations and strategic management approaches to steer employee communication on social media (e.g., Dreher, 2014; Opitz et al., 2018; Soens & Claeys, 2021). This view also assumes that employees' sensemaking and communication processes are entirely controllable by managers, even though it has become evident that strategy and practice do not always overlap (Macnamara & Zerfass, 2012; Alvesson & Blom, 2019) and organizational life is filled with contradictions and is rather messy than homogeneous (Deetz, 1982; Alvesson & Einola, 2018). Secondly, organizational communication research has a strong interpretive research orientation that aims to understand micro practices in everyday life but, as Alvesson and Deetz (2021) put it, overlooks social structures and power relations in which the organizational members' communication is embedded and which are usually normalized or taken for granted.

Therefore, to approach this research problem and to contribute to a more critical understanding of the phenomenon of self-initiated employee ambassadorship on social media, this study derives from a critical interpretive research approach by Alvesson and Deetz (2021), which is based on the postmodernist tradition and perceives power as something not only obtained by one single actor (e.g., Top Management) but something situational and

fluid as well as subtle and unconscious (Alvesson, 1996). Subsequently, this study also adopts an alternative communication-oriented employee-centered perspective that breaks away from the dominant functionalist perspective and recognizes the complexity of organizational life and the sensemaking process of employees through communication (Heide & Simonsson, 2018; Alvesson & Einola, 2018). From this background, this research applies Foucault's concepts of Power (1972) to analyze the power relations that influence employees' communication on social media with a particular focus on Foucault's subconcepts of discursive power (1972, 1977) and disciplinary power through visibility and surveillance (1977). Additionally, since there is no power without resistance (Foucault, 1978), this study will also analyze the resistance of certain employees to the phenomenon. As these aspects cannot be investigated by simply analyzing employees' social media content, qualitative interviews with employees from different organizations in central Europe who regularly engage in self-initiated ambassadorship on their personal social media profiles and employees resisting such communication activities form the empirical basis. However, as social media platforms differ in purpose and usage, this study focuses on LinkedIn due to its increasing popularity and digital architecture, which creates a constantly visible link between employer and employee activities.

1.1. Aim and Research Questions

This study aims to generate new knowledge and deepen the understanding of self-initiated employee ambassadorship on social media by taking a critical perspective of power relations and disciplinary structures that influence this complex phenomenon. From this aim, the following research questions derive:

RQ1: Which and how do discourses exert power over self-initiated employee ambassadors' communication activities on social media?¹

RQ2: How does visibility influence the communication behavior of self-initiated employee ambassadors on social media?

RQ3: What aspects make certain employees resist the notion of self-initiated employee ambassadorship on social media?

¹ As discursive power and its influence on the communication of self-initiated employee ambassadors can only be analyzed by initially developing the leading discourses out of the empirical material, this research question combines which discourses exert power and how they exert power. This unifying research question is inspired by Sandberg & Alvesson's (2011) elaboration on developing research questions.

Additionally, this study aims to contribute to the research field of strategic communication by expanding the understanding of the power mechanisms of employee communication beyond organizational borders. Considering strategic communication as the “purposeful use of communication by an organization or other entity to engage in conversations of strategic significance to its goals.” (Zerfass et al., 2018, p. 493), Falkheimer and Heide (2022) elaborate on this by attributing strategic communication not only to communication practitioner but also to employees who represent a substantial contributor that constitutes the organization through their sensemaking and communication processes and thus influences the overall success of the organization.

1.2. Delimitations

This thesis reveals various limitations that need to be addressed at the outset. To begin with, this study will only cover the employees’ perspectives and perceptions that were given within the frame of the interviews. The perspectives of supervisors or managers are not considered, as this study is not about leadership processes but control mechanisms outside organizations’ boundaries. In addition, this study puts the social media platform LinkedIn in the foreground, as due to its professional nature, LinkedIn can be considered the most engaging platform for employee ambassadorship. Furthermore, since Foucault’s concept of power is extensive and applying the entire concept would go beyond the scope of this thesis, this study exclusively uses Foucault’s subconcepts of discursive power and surveillance, which are the main drivers of disciplinary power and relate the most to social media communication. In addition, although the thesis also considers resistance, due to the relatively limited time frame, the sampling size of the resisting employees is rather limited, and the findings about the employees resisting the phenomenon may not give a fully representative image. Finally, it should be mentioned that the cultural background of the interviewees is not considered, yet the participants originated mainly from Switzerland or countries in Central Europe.

2. Literature Review

The following chapter is thematically structured and looks at past research and development of employee ambassadorship on social media. Firstly, an overview of the basic concepts of employee ambassadorship and the communicative role of employees is outlined with its embedding in the organizing and branding process. The second section presents how these concepts found their way into social media, how they have been strategized over the years, and which role LinkedIn plays in employees' social media usage. Finally, the third section gives an overview of the currently limited research on the critical aspects of employee ambassadorship and the 'darker' side of employee engagement on social media.

2.1 Employee Ambassadorship and Employees' Communicative Roles

The concept of employee ambassadorship derives from the notion of internal branding, where old and new research recognizes the importance of employees as identity and message carriers in the branding process (de Chernatony, 1999; Hatch & Schulz, 2003; Kärreman & Frandsen, 2020) and identify them as valuable contributors to increasing brand equity (Hesse et al., 2022). Harris and de Chernatony (2001) also speak of a process "in which all members of an organization behave in accordance with the desired brand identity" (p.442), whereby employees are also seen as 'bearers' of organization's values (Merrilees, 2016). Initially, this concept was also introduced as a management strategy or practice to guide employees to communicate according to the brand identity (Ind, 2001). The reason for this was also the increased importance of branding, where Ind (1998) states that "employees can make or break a brand" (p. 324). However, a study by Sartain (2005), as well as one by Kärreman and Rylander (2008), showed that including employees in the branding process can create additional meaning and significance for their work. Out of this notion, the concept of employee ambassadorship or internal brand ambassadorship emerged, focusing on employees "who 'embody the brand' and ultimately turn into 'living brands' " (Müller, 2018, p. 42). Through the emergence of post-bureaucratic organizations and the development of new working models, various researchers from the field of organizational communication and

strategic communication identified the benefits of transforming employees into active communicators and co-creators to achieve not only branding and communication goals but also organizational goals (Heide & Simonsson, 2011; Heide et al., 2018), and gain a competitive advantage (Thelen, 2020). With the emergence of the concept of the ‘communicative constitution of organizations’ (CCO), organizational members and their interaction became an important research field as employees’ sensemaking processes not only impact the organization’s performance but constitute the organization itself (Heide et al., 2018). Therefore, studies show that – intentionally or unintentionally – employees take on the role of communicators (e.g., Verhoeven & Madsen, 2022). This is also confirmed by a study by Heide et al. (2018), which shows a high willingness of employees to stand up for their company and see themselves as ambassadors simply through their function as employees. In the same survey, 77 percent of employees said they would immediately correct false rumors about their employer.

However, the communicative role of employees can take on various forms resulting in different specific role characteristics. Madsen and Verhoeven (2019) introduced the Active Employee Communication Role (AECR) Framework that divides the employee communication roles into eight categories: *embodier*, *promoter*, *defender*, *relationship builder*, *scout*, *sensemaker*, *innovator* and *critic*. As such, the first four roles are related to the employee’s role as an ambassador, where employees embody and live the brand or turn into brand advocates. Nevertheless, especially from a communicative perspective, the role of a sensemaker is crucial too because, as previously mentioned, the organization gets constituted through its members’ sensemaking and interaction processes. Finally, for organizations important to consider is also the critic who voices dissent or negative experiences not only to the management but could do so on social media or to the press (Madsen & Verhoeven, 2019). However, it needs to be mentioned that such roles are also connected to challenges. In a later study, Verhoeven and Madsen (2022) derived from this framework and expanded on the role expectations and the difficulties that managers, as well as employees, face when employees take on a communicative responsibility. One main challenge is that employees usually are not well enough prepared to take on a communicative role, where at the same time, such a lack of competence also lowers the motivation of employees to take on these roles. In their conclusion, Verhoeven and Madsen (2022) strongly emphasize the importance of guidance and support by managers to prepare employees for these roles and formulate their expectations clearly. Similarly, Heide and Simonsson (2018) emphasize the importance of trust between coworkers and managers as a prerequisite for accepting the ambassador

role. Following this, leadership communication is also given ample space in the research to promote employee ambassadorship and advocacy. A quantitative study by Thelen et al. (2022) shows that managers' language choices and confidence in their problem-solving abilities impact employee advocacy. Related to this aspect, a qualitative study by Xiong et al. (2013) also highlights that employees must clearly understand the brand's purpose to take on the role of ambassadors. Similarly, Schaarschmidt and Könsgen (2020) also outline that the brand's reputation plays a crucial role in how employees perform as ambassadors. Employees who perceive the external reputation perception as high are more likely to engage in supportive behavior also on social media. A quantitative study by Andersson (2019a) about the necessary factors that need to be covered so that employees take on communicative responsibility supports the aspects above. The findings further indicate that an open communication climate, direct communication with the supervisor and top management, and the employees' awareness of the importance of communication influence the employee's predisposition to take on the responsibility of ambassadors and communicators. This again underlines that employee ambassadorship cannot be simply taken for granted but is influenced by the organizational culture, communication climate, direct manager-employee communication, knowledge transfer, and the perception of this concept of the individual employees.

2.2 Employee Engagement and Ambassadorship on Social Media

Social media has given employees a new opportunity to tap into their role as communicators and voice their opinions. Falkheimer and Heide (2014) emphasize the participatory features of the new form of communication and point to a "power shift from organizations to stakeholders" (p. 343), whereby employees themselves can formulate strategic messages on behalf of the organization and communicate them publicly (cf. Solis & Breakenridge, 2009).

Due to this new communication shift, previous research on employee engagement on social media, as described in the introduction, is strongly driven by a managerial perspective. On one side, managers' expectations towards their employees and their social media activity are highlighted, pointing out the high-value managers put into employees that communicate on their personal platforms about their work (Pekkala et al., 2022). On the other side, previous research focused on establishing strategic practices to enhance employees' identification with the organization and, at the same time, directly or indirectly regulate their communication to prevent damage to corporate reputation, as the communication activities of employees on social media are challenging to monitor (Macnamara & Zerfass, 2012; Soens & Clays,

2021). And this despite the high willingness of employees to use their personal social media accounts to support their employer in reaching its organizational goals (Van Zoonen et al., 2014). For example, Dreher (2014) discusses the benefits and risks of employee engagement on external social media platforms and points to the need for a strategic approach for communication practitioners to manage communicative employees. She identifies eight key strategic management steps that could guide this process, including regulation of internet access, policies and a social media team that should train and monitor employees in their social media activities. A quantitative study by Opitz et al. (2018) supports this argument, arguing that a strategic management approach is needed as negative communication of employees on social media can cause disproportionately bigger damage to the reputation than compared to customers. Nevertheless, Fuduric and Mandelli (2014) examined the main characteristics of social media guidelines from 20 organizations that creates a contrast to management strategies. The findings show that such guidelines could barely direct employees' actions and hinder building trust between employees and the organization. However, such guidelines must always be considered in the context of the communication culture within the organization. In a study by van der Berg and Verhoeven (2017), the motivation of managers behind these guidelines was analyzed, which shows that managers who perform one-way communication tend to restrict communication to prevent reputational damage, whereas managers who postulate two-way communication see social media as an opportunity and thus promote employees' social media communication. The difficulty managers face using two-way communication, however, is the balancing act between openness and trust and yet clear boundaries of what is possible (Van der Berg & Verhoeven, 2017). Macnamara and Zerfass (2012) also point to the tension between actual practice and management strategy, which needs to be balanced constantly.

Despite the notion of regulating employee ambassadorship on social media, it still raises the question of how much an organization can control its employees on their personal social media platforms without compromising employee voice inclusion and freedom of expression. From a communication perspective, Falkheimer and Heide (2014) argue that social media make communication less controllable than top management would like or envisage. Although past research, which considers the employee perspective, is scarce, various studies point out that employees' communication on social media is not only guided by managers but also by other organizational members. For example, Martin et al. (2015) argue that it is not only the communication of managers that influences the activity on social media of employee ambassadors but also that of colleagues and peers, which indicates back to the study

by Andersson (2019a) that emphasizes the internal communication climate and organizational culture as an essential factor in the communicative responsibility of employees. In addition, factors such as personal autonomy as well as participation in a social media community have a positive impact on employees' willingness to communicate. However, a study by Smith et al. (2017) outlines that employees consider organizational culture and relationships with colleagues in their posting on social media also out of fear of damaging the relationship. Likewise, an exploratory study by Cassinger and Thelander (2020) on employee voice shows that the way employees present themselves on social media is also embedded in social conventions that are strongly connected with the hierarchical culture within the organization. At the same time, it also serves as a performative action and self-presentation.

This shows that social media does not follow one specific logic to reach a particular goal but needs to be considered as a versatile platform for employees to “represent their organization, manage personal and professional relationships and engage in personal branding” (Van Zoonen et al., 2014, p. 850).

2.2.1 LinkedIn's Role in Employee Communication on Social Media

Regarding employee engagement and their representative role, the professional social media platform LinkedIn, in particular, has gained significant importance because, unlike more private platforms such as Instagram or Facebook, there is already a visible link between employees and their employers, which also acts as a first identification point (van Zoonen et al., 2018). As a result, two research strands have emerged for the use of this specific platform.

On the one hand, previous research on the usage of LinkedIn can be found to a large extent in HR management studies, which analyze how the platform influences employer brands through employees' voices to attract new talent. Jogeklar and Tan (2022) showed in a survey that employee-generated content on LinkedIn increases interest and authenticity in an employer more than firm-created content. Da Motta et al. (2020) also showed differences in the platforms and that a job-dedicated LinkedIn profile influences the employer brand, whereas Twitter and Facebook profiles do not. This also underlines the importance of LinkedIn for organizations to attract new talent. However, this is also subject to criticism. Marcet Alonso et al. (2022) speak of ‘career washing’, whereby companies rely exclusively on ‘ideal’ employees as brand representatives to avoid damaging their reputation. They say that “employees’ stories are instrumentalized to contribute to the production and

authentication of the employer brand promise” (Marcet Alonso et al., 2022, p. 2817), which points to hypocrisy and falsification of authenticity.

However, the ‘war for talent’ is not only felt by organizations but also by employees who use LinkedIn for self-marketing. A study with interviewed HR managers shows that employees should create a LinkedIn profile early on to strengthen their visibility (Hood et al., 2014) and to give recruiters the opportunity for an initial impression (Marin & Nilă, 2021). However, how employees specifically use the LinkedIn platform and what thoughts guide their activity is rare. A quantitative study by van Zoonen et al. (2018) shows that for employees their activities on LinkedIn are particularly about a self-image, which can be built up through self-presentation and identification with the employer. However, within this notion, employees act rather strategically as they selectively filter out and post only what benefits their self-image (Van Zoonen et al., 2018; Tobback, 2019). The study by Marin and Nilă (2021) also shows that employees use this self-presentation to increase their market value. There the dramaturgy with front- and backstage behavior was analyzed, highlighting employees’ communication as a performative act to enhance their personal image. Considering the performative aspect that goes beyond the organization’s representation makes LinkedIn an interesting platform to use in this study.

2.3 Identity Tensions, Control and Discipline on Social Media

Although the discourse around employee ambassadorship – especially on social media – is still strongly normative and shaped by a management perspective, various scholars have taken up points of criticism. For example, a study by Wæraas and Dahle (2020) outlines the disciplinary effects of internal managerial regulations, which can engender employee dissatisfaction. In this context, the identification process and the alignment of employees’ identity with organizational identity play a significant role in the concept of ambassadorship. According to Sveningsson and Alvesson (2003), organizational discourses, role expectations, and narratives around identity play an essential role in the identity formation of employees, making identity not a fixed construct but an ongoing reflexive process. Due to the emerging expectation that employees act as active communicators and ambassadors (Heide et al., 2018), as well as its rhetorical embedding and the narrative use of phrases such as employees who “embody the brand” or as “living brands” (Müller, 2018, p. 42), employees are in constant negotiation between professional role expectations and their own identity, which creates tension (Andersson, 2019b). This identification process also creates a conflict between

empowerment and control (Müller, 2018). Already 20 years ago, Alvesson and Willmott (2002) published a study that depicts identity regulation as employee control. The focus was on companies enclosing their employees and creating a ‘corporate grip’ over employees’ lives to create an orchestrated unified voice to the outside. This notion of internal control traces back even further as O’Reilly (1989) already combined the organizational culture not only as a form of motivation but also as a tool to control the employees, where certain norms and expectations exert a so-called internal normative control that makes employees act in a certain way.

Nevertheless, Alvesson and Willmott (2002) also warned of an oversimplified and naïve perception, as any influence on identities cannot be carried out without resistance or consequences. Follow-up studies built on this statement and investigated what adverse effects such identity regulation in the form of employee brand ambassadorship can have. For example, a study by Andersson (2019b), which examines the role expectations of employee brand ambassadors, shows that a strong tension between personal and professional identity emerges as they increasingly merge. Müller (2017) calls this phenomenon ‘brand-centred control’, whereby employees internalize the corporate brand to such an extent that they become a brand message themselves, even in their private life. Andersson (2019b) further explains that this creates a so-called ‘undesired self’, as employees always feel obligated to stand up for the company, even in their private lives. Müller (2017) describes this feeling as being “branded all around the clock” (p. 910). Tarafdar et al. (2007) also refer to this phenomenon as ‘role stress’, where employees try to fulfill not only their employer’s expectations but also those of their private environment. This identity or role dilemma also intensifies in times of crisis or uncertainty, where employees must represent the organization to dissatisfied external stakeholders and disconnect from their own values (Andersson, 2019b). Mumby (2016) also speaks of communicative labor as a result of communicative capitalism, where the everyday interaction of employees “is put to work” (p. 889), and employee communication is instrumentalized to generate surplus value.

Even though the tensions mentioned above were not examined in connection with ambassadorship activities on social media, they can also be applied to activities on social media, where they even intensify. In their quantitative study “Social Media’s dark side” Van Zoonen et al. (2016) analyze the impact of social media at work and find that the clear distinction between work and life becomes more challenging, resulting in boundary conflict and emotional exhaustion. The same study also shows that companies’ existing policies are insufficient to protect employees from such a conflict (Van Zoonen et al., 2016). It can be argued

that one reason for this could be that past research has still not shed enough light on the critical perspective of social media in the workplace from an employee perspective. Falkheimer and Heide (2014) and Macnamara and Zerfass (2012) also discuss that the boundaries between the private and professional spheres have entirely dissolved due to social media. Van Dijck (2013) sees one reason for this in the digital architecture of social media platforms like LinkedIn and Facebook, as they build on networking and relationship-building principles whereby, as also Van Zoonen et al. (2016) highlight, professional and private relationships intertwine also resulting in a merge of the identities. Consequently, employees need to cope with stronger visibility from a personal but also professional environment. Due to this increase in visibility, another point of criticism is the increase in social control and social discipline, whereby employees feel that they are constantly being observed. Duffy and Chan (2019) refer to this phenomenon also as ‘imagined surveillance,’ where the audience is only pictured in the user’s head, and their communication is adjusted accordingly. In their study, they use the dictum of ‘you never know who is looking’ and indicate that especially young adults are confronted with the digital surveillance of social institutions such as family, colleagues, and employers. Therefore, this shows that control is not only executed by management but also depends on other work colleagues and the social environment in which the self-presentation takes place (Christensen & Christensen, 2022; Cassinger & Thelander, 2020). Christensen and Christensen (2022) also describe that “when contemplating how to perform the role as organizational voice, members submit to social expectations in order to achieve social recognition and acceptance” (p. 510). In other words, organizational members strategize their communication to conform to social norms and their imagined audience’s expectations. Although recognition can be seen as a tool to direct one’s activities through a social world, Ceilutka (2023) also elaborates in his study on the current competition around the recognition happening on social media. Approaching this from a critical perspective, his study examines conflicting issues such as perfectionism that occur from this competition for recognition and cause higher expectations and a stricter assessment, which actually undermines the feeling of recognition. Through this perfectionism and the fear of going against the norm, Madsen and Verhoeven (2016) also used the concept of self-censorship to analyze internal social media of coworker communication behavior in a Danish bank. Their study outlines how carefully employees draft their communication on internal social media not to damage their self-image or violate unwritten rules that could cause a backlash from their coworkers. Such strategies include reframing an issue, only writing positive comments, or withdrawing entirely from communicating. Even though Madsen and Verhoeven’s (2016)

study only focuses on internal social media, through the interconnectedness and the liquidity between professional and private relationships (Van Zoonen et al., 2016), it could be argued that such self-monitoring of employees is also applied on the external social media platforms such as LinkedIn and is even intensified as their social media activities are visible not only to their professional but also the private environment.

2.4 Synthesis

As shown in the literature review above, the communicative role of employees in organizational and brand communication has taken on a high significance, as the communication of employees can create a high brand and image credibility. Especially on social media, a new potential has been discovered to strengthen brand awareness, as employees can increase the organization's reach and, at the same time, engage in personal self-branding activities. However, since this also involves risks, previous literature has focused strongly on a management perspective to prevent possible image and reputation damage through control mechanisms. Only a few researchers have taken up the negative aspects of self-initiated employee ambassadorship and analyzed topics such as identity tension, emotional exhaustion, self-censorship or the pressure of external expectations in more detail. These studies point to an opposing side of employee ambassadorship communication, which can be intensified by social media. This is where this research paper picks up and examines these control mechanisms, which go beyond the organizational boundaries and still need to be investigated.

3. Theoretical Framework

This chapter first provides insight into the emergence of critical organizational research and the theoretical embedding of the concept of disciplinary power and control in organizational studies. The subsequent two sections elaborate on Foucault's concepts of discourse as well as surveillance and visibility, which are grounds for disciplinary power in modern society. They provide the theoretical framework for this study to analyze how specific discourses and the constant visibility on social media platforms influence the communicative activities of employee ambassadors on their personal channels. Due to the broad scope of Foucault's concepts and their rather theoretical and reflective nature (Alvesson, 1996), interpretations of additional scholars were included to build an application framework and contextualize it for this specific study. The last part of this chapter is dedicated to some limitations and critical aspects of Foucault's concepts, which need to be considered while applying his concepts.

3.1 Critical Organizational Studies and Disciplinary Power

In the past decades, various scholars have placed a critical lens on power and control mechanisms within organizations, enhancing the corpus of critical communication and organizational studies (Deetz, 1982; Deetz & Mumby, 1990; Alvesson, 1996). Rooted in the post-modernist and poststructuralist traditions, these researchers postulated a more critical post-modern research approach in order to analyze organizational life and critically examine power relations that are taken for granted or normalized in everyday life (Deetz & Mumby, 1990). Unlike traditional critical research, which views power and control as a fixed construct attributed to a specific actor (e.g., control from the top management), critical postmodernist and poststructuralist research sees power as fluid and situational, in constant negotiation within the organization and society, where power and meaning are ascribed situationally through communicative practices by organizational members and the larger society (Mumby & Stohl, 1991; Alvesson & Deetz, 2021). At the same time, these communicative processes are influenced and constituted by power relations that shape organizational reality (Deetz & Mumby, 1990). Especially with a main focus on the power of discourses and the communicative sensemaking process, which influences further discourses, the relationships between

power, discourse and the organizational member became a significant object of research to open up also the narrow but dominant managerial perspective of power (Deetz & Mumby, 1990). Within the organization, Mumby and Stohl (1991) categorize power from a postmodernist perspective also as follows:

Power is not simply a question of decision-making and resource control, nor is it structurally imposed upon people; instead, it is more fundamentally both the medium and outcome of the ways in which structures of discourse shape organizational reality. (p. 330)

However, it should also be emphasized that power not only shapes organizational reality and results out of discourses but that power relations and discourses also shape the continuous communication and sensemaking process of organizational members, which also contribute to an ordered organizational reality (Weick et al., 2005). In other words, the meaning of and within an organization emerges not only through the communication process between organizational members but also through its embedding in broader discourses and power relations.

This perspective of power in organizational studies is partly rooted in Michael Foucault's (1972) concept of power. In the seventies, Foucault introduced a new perspective of power that breaks with the traditional perspective of critical research and assigns modern society a dominant *disciplinary power* structure. In other words, contemporary society is not controlled by one specific power body but disciplines itself as a result of discursive formations and surveillance that create social norms and expectations pointing out what is 'normal' or unacceptable. Therefore, from a Foucauldian perspective, the central area of interest lies in uncovering through which techniques, practices, and procedures power relations occur in modern society (Prasad, 2017). Foucault does not assign this disciplinary power to a specific actor but grounds it within impersonal and 'faceless' social institutions (e.g., schools, families, prisons, offices) in compliance with a body of rules, procedures and discourses. That said, from this concept, the combination of institutional power and social control influences individuals and organizations (Prasad, 2017). This is also manifested in Foucault's statement, "Power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere" (1977, p. 93), which also underlines the multiplicity of power and that it cannot be obtained or possessed (Deetz, 1992). Additionally, Foucault does not see power as something completely negative but assigns a productive force to it, as only through power relations and discursive formations a societal and organizational reality (or truth) can

be created within which individuals produce their identity and individual reality (Deetz, 1992; Storey, 2018). However, these disciplinary structures that constitute a social order are commonly invisible to us, which is why even seemingly natural situations can have a variety of power techniques that we take for granted or perceive as ‘normal’ (Alvesson, 1996). Foucault (1977) also refers to it as a process of *normalization* that lies at the core of his power concept and encourages skepticism towards happy or effortless situations (Alvesson, 1996).

With such a critical perspective on organizational life, it is possible to investigate how situations that seem neutral within an organization “contain a number of power techniques which mould or shape individuals through prescribing specific forms of subjectivity” (Alvesson, 1996, p. 11). As an example, through Foucault’s concept of power, Mumby and Stohl (1991) analyzed organizational texts and how the image of the office secretary is constituted through discursive practices and placed within various organizational power relations. Alvesson (1996) also used Foucault’s concepts to investigate the information meeting within an organization – a situation that contains a hierarchical structure between managers and workers but does not have visible social control mechanisms. However, Alvesson’s observation revealed invisible disciplinary structures that influenced and disciplined workers’ responses at the meeting, including silencing or reframing comments.

To conclude this section, a last proposition regarding power that Foucault (1978) makes is that there is no power without resistance and that resistance is the natural ongoing response to any form of power (Deetz, 1992). However, to clarify, although resistance is present, it does not mean that it completely replaces power – but that power and resistance are in a dialectic relationship constituting and influencing each other, which is a result of various conflicts, e.g., conflict of interest or hierarchy (Mumby, 2005). But like power, resistance can be as dispersed and subtle, resulting in ‘normal’ acts like being late to meetings or sarcastic jokes in the workplace (Deetz, 1992). A noteworthy example is also du Gay’s (1996) study of enterprise culture, where he found that employees intentionally interpreted differently and reframed a newly introduced corporate culture they did not comply with to drive their self-realization.

3.2 The Power of Discourse

As previously mentioned from a Foucauldian perspective, discursive practices are the essence of power in modern society as well as in organizations, which influences how organizational members perceive their experience and construct their reality and identity. Deetz

and Mumby (1990) also elaborate that “the social construction of organizational reality is characterized not by the straightforward repression of one group by another, but rather by the complexity of various discursive practices that define what it means to be an organization member” (p. 39). However, the term discourse and its implications are used in various ways. Discourse is usually used to designate conversations, speeches, text, or an association of knowledge (Prasad, 2017). Although discourse is one of the central concepts of Foucault’s contributions, he does not offer a clear definition himself, even admitting that he treats discourses “sometimes as the general domain of all statements, sometimes as an individualizable group of statements, and sometimes as a regulated practice that accounts for a certain number of statements” (Foucault, 1972, p. 80). However, Foucault’s main focus does not lie on the truth or validity of these discourses but on how these discourses generate and influence social processes and practices and thus enable power practices that “systematically form the object of which they speak” (Foucault, 1972, p. 49). Based on Foucault’s theory, Storey (2018) categorizes the working mechanism of discourses in three ways: “They enable, they constrain, and they constitute” (p. 133). He further argues that discourses are “social practices in which we engage; they are like social ‘scripts’ we perform (consciously or unconsciously)” (p. 134). Similarly, Prasad (2017) lays out three key elements of Foucault’s concept of discourse that can be used to analyze the relation between power and discourse within a particular phenomenon.

First, Foucault’s concept of discourse focuses on *internal rules* that regulate and structure discourses. These internal rules define what is normalized, according to which principles and norms individuals have to conform, what can be talked about, and how it can be discussed. In other words, it focuses on which aspects can be praised and which should instead be silenced (Prasad, 2017). Foucault (1977) also explains that these rules are internalized over time via socialization, education or cultural transmission. They can also determine which rhetorical style, person, or argument is legitimized. These internal rules are equivalent to what Storey (2018) defines as the discourse’s enabling and constraining working mechanism.

Second, Foucault draws attention to the *effects* of discourses. This relates to the constitutive nature of the discourse that gives “shape and form to different categories of experience and identity” (Prasad, 2017, p. 280). In other words, individuals experience certain situations and behave according to discursive rules. Foucault also refers to the concept of *governmentality*, whereby individuals actively work on their identity and personality to resonate with broader socio-cultural discourses through the knowledge of the previously

mentioned internal rules. This also follows Foucault's belief that certain practices of activities such as 'motivation' or 'strategy' are not just given by nature but constituted through various discursive formations, becoming a cultural and societal 'product' (Alvesson, 1996; Storey, 2018). Therefore, it is also the practice of discourses that produce and reproduce organizational life and create structures that constitute organizational systems, experiences, and identities of individuals (Mumby & Stohl, 1991).

Third, according to Prasad (2017), an aspect that usually gets neglected and is also not explicitly included in Storey's (2018) interpretation of Foucault's discourse concept is his *materialistic understanding* of discourses and their power. Foucault sees discourses not as a natural and objective representation of reality or abstract ideas and texts but as interrelated with material realities and practices of social life and language, which produce and develop reality constantly (Young, 2001). It can also be said that language and social practices that produce and reproduce discourses are intertwined with material conditions and power relations. To exemplify, the constant visibility and the discourse of surveillance around social media can be grounded in the materialistic practice of a prison, which emphasizes how language and social practices are linked with material conditions and power relations (cf. Prasad, 2017). To further explain, it can also be said that how users engage on social media platforms is not just bare communication but is shaped by a range of materialistic practices such as the engagement with technological advancements or legal regulatory frameworks that enable or constrain communication.

For this research study, the three aspects of *internal rules*, *effects*, and *materialism* can be applied to analyze how discourses influence the activity of employee ambassadors on social media, which is then reflected in assumptions and subliminal beliefs in the interviewees' answers.

To conclude, it is worth mentioning that Foucault's concept of discourse is mainly applied to discourse analysis to analyze the development of a specific discourse. However, scholars increasingly argue for applying critical postmodern theories and concepts to research interviews as well (Alvesson, 1996; Alvesson & Deetz, 2021) in order to not only view interviews from a social constructivist perspective but also to analyze people's perceptions from a critical perspective. Thus, discourses in the context of research interviews can be seen as systems of meanings, ideas, and assumptions that shape how people talk about and understand the topic being discussed.

3.3 Disciplinary Power through Surveillance and Visibility

Although the reciprocal relationship between power and discourse would already provide a broad theoretical basis for analyzing the phenomenon of employee ambassadorship, the concept of *surveillance*, which is usually related to social media communication, must be included. This is because the constant *visibility* that occurs through social media – not just within organizational boundaries – increases the disciplinary power of organizational members. This surveillance and visibility are also essential aspects of Foucault's concept of power, which is often mentioned in the same breath as the Panopticon – a design of a prison building by Jeremy Bentham. Its special design allows guards to constantly monitor the inmates without the inmates knowing if they are being watched or not. Foucault (1977), who used the panopticon metaphorically to explain *self-surveillance* in modern society, explained that the purpose of this building style was to “induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power” (p. 201). In other words, it is not direct punishment that controls the individual but the functional imagined surveillance that creates a feeling of responsibility for the individual's discipline (Prasad, 2017). Therefore, it can also be said that this surveillance does not require actual active observation between people anymore but goes deeper into the individual's mind and imagination (Savage, 1998). This feeling can also be found within organizations where organizational members can survey other members constantly – referred to also as mutual surveillance, which does not necessarily only come from the top management but is also present between colleagues (McKinlay & Taylor, 1998). This gets intensified through modern technology and the visibility on social platforms where organizational surveillance finds its way into the private living room. This imagined surveillance or so-called ‘disciplinary gaze’ makes employees constantly self-monitor themselves and self-correct their behavior to conform with what was normalized through discourse and is perceived as acceptable (Prasad, 2017). Snyder (1974) defines *self-monitoring* practices also as “self-observation and self-control guided by situational cues to social appropriateness” (p. 526), making individuals constantly strive for validation and recognition of their value (Alvesson, 1996). However, this fear that something could be detected that would go against certain norms and values within the organization as well as in society – like a different belief system or some form of disloyalty – even enforce these norms and raise expectations, which increases the disciplinary power even further (Deetz, 1992). Therefore, it can be stated that not the surveillance itself but the imagined surveillance is what creates and reinforces the self-disciplinary

structures within an organization and influences as well as controls the employees' communication about the organization and their own identity. This self-monitoring and its connection to social control can be traced back to Mead's (1934, as cited in Deetz, 1992) conception of the self, where the self is in constant negotiation with the active self (I) and the socialized self (Me). Deetz (1992) also refers to it as when "social control is internalized to become *self-control* when individuals take on the attitudes of others as occupants of roles in organized action settings" (p. 258). In this regard, Alvesson (1996) also outlines the constitutive feature of surveillance as it creates and redefines the subject and so the organization's members' identity constantly.

With the rise of technology such as social media, scholars (e.g., Poster, 2019) assume that society may evolve from a panopticon to a *superpanopticon* society, where surveillance no longer has boundaries. Poster (2019) describes this as follows: "Electronic monitoring of the population occurs silently, continuously, and automatically along with the transactions of everyday life" (p. 123). From this, it can be deduced that through this superpanopticon society, self-monitoring and self-discipline have also continuously and automatically begun. Poster (2019) continues that the socialized individual within the superpanopticon and the active 'real' individual can no longer distinguish and thus become one.

However, as written in the first section, control and power can only be considered with resistance (Foucault, 1978). Even if it is challenging to escape surveillance due to the high level of digitalization in everyday life, there is still the possibility of resistance to social media, whereby individuals in society and organizations do not position themselves through posting activities on social media or do not create accounts at all.

3.4 Critical Considerations of Foucault's Concepts

When applying Foucault's concepts, it is also important to do so with a critical perspective in mind. Alvesson (1996) and Prasad (2017) discuss several points that need to be considered when applying his concepts, which are also criticized by other scholars.

Firstly, the notion of 'power is everywhere' or 'power is always present' could lead to the assumption that everything can be looked at with a Foucauldian power perspective. On the one hand, this runs the risk of the emergence of *hyperskepticism*, where genuinely good or neutral situations are portrayed 'worse' than they are actually perceived or are. On the other hand, when Foucault's concepts are considered to be able to explain everything, there might be the risk of diluting his concepts and that they explain nothing (Alvesson, 1996).

Therefore, for this study, the aim is not to criticize the phenomenon of employee ambassadorship on social media, as it is evident in the literature review, it also poses benefits for organizational members. However, it is about looking closer, analyzing the power relations within this phenomenon, and questioning what is normalized and taken for granted. Secondly, another aspect emphasized by Alvesson (1996) is that discourses do not form themselves but are a product of human interactions. Therefore, Foucault's perspective does not sufficiently consider the active, creative subject and the potential of human agency to actively steer existing and produce new discourses (Prasad, 2017). Mumby (2005) also emphasizes that within organizations, resistance can be seen not only as a reaction to power but also as production for organizational transformation. Thirdly, Alvesson (1996) points out the lack of ideological considerations within Foucault's concepts and perception of power. He refers to the lack of central agencies in Foucault's concepts, such as the government, which lays the framework for disciplinary institutions and surveillance regulation. This can also be found in economic conditions or legislation that are present rather on a macro than a micro level.

Overall, as Foucault postulates a critical perspective where power relations can be found everywhere, it is thus important to also apply such a critical lens to his concept without normalizing it or taking it for granted.

3.5 Theoretical Reflections and Empirical Work

Although Foucault's concept has found its way into organizational studies, his concept of power is still increasingly used for theorization and has rarely been applied to empirical material such as interviews (Alvesson & Deetz, 2021). On the one hand, this may be due to the complexity of the concept, and on the other hand, due to its broad scope, including several subconcepts. And yet, precisely in organizational communication studies, Foucault's concept can inspire a more critical perspective to bring to light power dimensions that we would have taken for granted and normalized without considering their critical and controlling influence. Agreeing that the application of Foucault's entire power concept may surpass the scope of this master thesis, using his subconcepts of discursive power, surveillance and resistance to analyze empirical material, it is thus possible to uncover the disciplinary power structures that unconsciously guide and control employees in their communicative activities on social media. Thereby the aspects of the *internal rules*, *effects* and *materialistic understanding* of discourse as well as the concepts of *normalization*, *self-monitoring*, and

imagined surveillance, enable an analysis that goes deeper than what is just said by the participants and offers a framework that can interpret what has been said in between the lines. Moreover, with an additional focus on resistance, structures can be highlighted which are already consciously perceived by certain employees and from which the reluctance to communicate on social media result and possibly influence other employees in the future.

4. Methodology

This research is based on a qualitative critical interpretive research approach, as the thesis aims to reach a deeper understanding of the power dimensions and control mechanisms that influence the communication of self-initiated employee ambassadors on social media. The Foucauldian poststructuralist tradition was used as an ontological and epistemological standpoint, which assumes that reality and the ‘truth’ are constituted by social structures, discourses, and power relations and that there is no fixed universal reality and knowledge (Prasad, 2017).

The following chapter will outline the research tradition and the research design. The first part focuses on clarifying contemporary disputes within the post traditions and introduces the critical interpretive research approach by Alvesson and Deetz (2021), which forms the methodological framework. The second part elaborates on sampling, the collection and analysis of the empirical material, followed by the third part, which discusses the importance of reflexivity and ethical considerations within critical interpretive studies.

4.1 Post Traditions & Critical Interpretive Research Approach

Before an outline of the research approach can be made, it is necessary to clarify the prescription of Foucault and his concepts in the postmodernist and poststructuralist research traditions, as this is handled differently between researchers. Some scholars categorize Foucault in poststructuralism, also referred to as a Foucauldian poststructuralist tradition (Prasad, 2017; Storey, 2018), whereas other researchers prescribe him under postmodernism (Agger, 1991) or do not clearly distinguish between the two and use postmodernism as an umbrella term (Alvesson, 2002). In doing so, Prasad (2017) criticizes scholars like Alvesson for the lack of a neat division between the two traditions, as although both acknowledge the complexity of human experience and are critical of the influence of discourses and grand narratives, they differ in aspects such as scope, epistemology, or subjectivity and identity (Prasad, 2017). Postmodernism can be seen as a broad cultural movement that focuses on skepticism towards a general truth and universal knowledge, highlights the instability of meaning, and emphasizes a playful, ironic sensibility as well as fragmentation and diversity

(Prasad, 2017). In contrast, poststructuralism is narrower in his scope, focusing on how knowledge and the ‘truth’ are constructed through power relations, language, and history, as well as how meaning is negotiated and influenced through discourse (Prasad, 2017).

For clarification reasons and a more focused interpretation approach, this study derives from the conceptualization of the poststructuralist tradition by Prasad (2017), in which institutions, power relationships, social structures, and discourse shape our understanding of reality. However, this study uses the critical interpretive research approach of Alvesson and Deetz (2021), which accommodates poststructuralism and Foucault in the overarching term of postmodernism.

4.1.1 Critical Interpretive Research Approach

First implemented in Critical Management Research, Alvesson and Deetz (2021) evolved their critical research approach to the whole spectrum of social science, postulating a more critical rather than confirming research practice. Criticizing the critical tradition for not considering empirical work sufficiently and being too radical, and the interpretative studies for focusing on organizational members without questioning the social processes they are embedded in, Alvesson and Deetz’s (2021) framework of critical research aims to combine these two approaches to enable “critical studies that are informed by interpretive thinking and supported by the general thrust of critical theory” (p. ix) or “qualitative research with a critical edge” (p. 3).

Alvesson and Deetz (2021) consider three related and overlapping tasks, offering a methodological framework for this critical interpretive research study. The first task, *insight*, is focused on understanding and investigating the local forms of a phenomenon. It is committed to the goals of interpretive studies that focus on the lives of real people and real situations (Alvesson & Deetz, 2021). Subsequently, the second task *critique* is committed to the analytical lens of the critical traditions, analyzing and evaluating domination and power structures and their formation within the phenomenon in order to counteract the dominance of taken-for-granted mechanisms, such as discourses or ideologies. Finally, the third task of *transformative redefinition* can be seen as the answer or counterpart to insight and critique, creating a counter-narrative and implications for the future. This can also be referred to Alvesson’s (2021) approach of critical performativity, which aims to “develop critical, practically relevant ideas, concepts [...] that can influence people’s understandings and offer frameworks and vocabularies that allow for critical communication and inspire change at the

workplace.” (p. 360). It needs to be mentioned that the three tasks can overlap in practice and be carried out to different depths. The following subsections will outline how these three tasks are implemented in this thesis.

4.2 Empirical Material Collection and Analysis

As the aim of this study is to gain a deeper understanding of a particular phenomenon and to offer a critical perspective of the power dimensions that influence employee ambassadorship on social media, this study used the qualitative interview, which enables the researcher to understand how interviewees perceive and make sense of a particular phenomenon and research it in-depth (Brinkman & Kvale, 2015). Despite criticism from critical scholars to use interviews to critically examine a phenomenon due to their institutionalized nature, Alvesson and Deetz (2021) postulate the inclusion of empirical material to explore participants’ experiences through a critical lens. Morgan and Smircich (1980) underline this by saying that “qualitative research is an approach rather than a particular set of techniques, and its appropriateness derives from the nature of the social phenomena to be explored” (p. 491). Therefore, the author of this thesis argues that interviews are the most suitable process to understand how discursive power is perceived and affects the participants’ social media usage and how visibility and surveillance are experienced and guide their activity.

The empirical material for this study is gathered from 15 qualitative in-depth semi-structured interviews with both self-initiated employee ambassadors and employees resisting ambassadorship on social media from 14 different organizations working in various roles.

4.2.1 Sampling

The sampling for this study consists of two groups. The first and major sampling group includes eleven self-initiated employee ambassadors who regularly post on LinkedIn about their work. The second and minor sampling group includes four employees that resisted employee ambassadorship on social media and do not engage in LinkedIn activities. This division is essential for this study as only when considering resistance, which is always a consequence of power (Foucault, 1978), the phenomenon of self-initiated employee ambassadorship on social media can be analyzed in its entirety.

For the selection of the interview participants, *purposeful sampling* was used to recruit participants who can offer information-rich perceptions and in-depth insights about their role as self-initiated ambassadors on social media (cf. Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). To validate the

suitability of potential candidates, two requirement catalogs were created (See Appendix 1). For the first group, the framework of employee communication roles by Madsen and Verhoeven (2019) was used to find employee ambassadors that correspond with the role characteristics of the embodier, the promoter, the defender or the relationship builder. After reviewing the content posted on LinkedIn, possible participants were directly contacted via LinkedIn’s messaging tool. Additionally, besides the ambassador role characteristics, the catalog made sure that the participants did not receive any monetary incentives for their role of the ambassador, as this could bias the empirical material. The same process was also applied to the second sampling group to find candidates resisting this self-initiated employee ambassadorship on social media. The main requirement for the selection was their opinion and resistance towards employee communication on social media. Additionally, to reach further interview partners, the researcher used *network sampling* by asking the participants of purposeful sampling for other candidates that could be suitable for this study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Nevertheless, it is worth mentioning that a comparably large proportion of the participants comes from the marketing and communications field, as it became apparent in the sampling process that more communication professionals actively and regularly use LinkedIn. This could be due to the fact that they have a stronger connection to social media through their profession, which was also thematized in the interviews. For this reason, it was important to the author that the resisting candidates also came mainly from the communications sector to be able to analyze the contrast.

ID	Role	Gender	Language	Sampling* Group	Length
1	Project Manager Events & Communication	F	German	1	86 min
2	Social Media Manager	F	German	1	80 min
3	Research Manager	M	German	1	78 min
4	Communication Specialist	F	English	1	67 min
5	Sales Manager	M	German	1	68 min
6	Project Manager Transformation	M	German	1	54 min
7	Head of Community Impact	M	German	1	41 min **
8	Project Manager	F	German	1	74 min
9	HR Specialist	F	English	1	63 min
10	IT Consultant	F	German	1	66 min
11	IT Consultant	M	German	1	78 min
12	Community Manager	F	German	2	65 min
13	Trainee Global Marketing	F	German	2	64 min
14	Marketing Associate	F	German	2	65 min
15	Public Affairs Specialist	M	English	2	58 min

Table 4.1: Overview of the participants, including role, gender, language, sampling group, and interview length.

* Sampling group: 1=self-initiated employee ambassadors; 2= employees resisting ambassadorship

** Due to a time collision, the interview had to be cut shorter. Few questions were answered in writing via email.

4.2.2 *Interview Proceedings and Reflections*

To collect the empirical material for this study, the participants were questioned using qualitative semi-structured interviews, which aim to offer an in-depth insight into how the interview participants perceive a particular phenomenon and make sense of it (Brinkman & Kvale, 2015). As the name indicates, semi-structured interviews work with a basic structure but leave enough room for follow-up questions, adjustments and flexibility depending on the interview progress (Brinkman & Kvale, 2015). Therefore, two interview guides were set up that created an overarching thematic structure and supported a logical conversation flow. The first guide was created for self-initiated employee ambassadors (See Appendix 2), and the second for the employees resisting this phenomenon (See Appendix 3). Both guides covered three main themes: the perception and experience of employee ambassadorship on social media, the experience of self-disciplinary behavior, and the experience of visibility and surveillance. Nevertheless, as Alvesson and Deetz (2021) explain, the essence of a good critical interview lies in the researcher's attentiveness and openness to follow up on relevant points and ask creative and situational questions. Thus, the interview guide was only a supporting tool as the researcher adjusted the interview questions depending on the interview's progress. Similarly, it was important to avoid provocative or leading questions, as these could lead the participants to make adjusted statements or affect the trust relationship, where they would no longer answer freely and honestly (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Nevertheless, it was crucial that the researcher still critically followed up on some answers of the participants as the bias of social desirability needed to be considered.

To counteract this bias, build trust, and explore the phenomenon in more depth, a method called *drilling* was used. There the researcher learns more and more about the issues throughout the interviews and uses this knowledge, especially about sensitive or problematic aspects, as examples in subsequent interviews to show the researcher's trustworthiness to other participants (Alvesson & Deetz, 2021). This process was further facilitated by sharing the researcher's own experience as an insider to create a dialogic and trustworthy interview situation and to enable mutual sensemaking. Additionally, in the later reflection process of the interview proceedings, it was noted that in those interviews where the researcher already had a trust advantage with the participants (e.g., through previous contact or University study), the interviewees were more open, uninhibited, and offered more knowledge-rich insights and experiences to this study. In contrast, in the interviews without trust advantage, some interviewees seemed rather skeptical towards critical questions and got defensive at the beginning. However, through the method of *drilling* and sharing the researcher's own

experiences, the interviewees opened up throughout the interviews. This exemplifies how essential trust is in conducting critical research to explore a phenomenon in its entirety. Referring also to the critical interpretive research design (Alvesson & Deetz, 2021), the interview process is the first half of the first task *insight*, where light is shed on something where the researcher does not have an answer to it yet and through questioning and interpreting already in the process receives a deeper insight into the studied phenomenon.

To conclude, the interviews were either held in German or English, depending on the mother tongue of the interviewees or the language they felt most comfortable in, to create a natural conversation flow where they could express themselves freely. During the interviews, the researcher already took various notes of interesting insights and created memos with additional thoughts afterward. All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed within three days after the interview to have the content still present and enough time in case of clarification with the interviewees. The recordings were transcribed word by word without considering repetition, stuttering, or filler words, but with noting reflection pauses as they can indicate in which part of the interview the interviewees were more hesitant or effortless to share their experiences.

4.2.3 Analysis of Empirical Material

The analysis of the interview transcripts went through various steps. Initially, the transcripts were merged with the interview notes and memos and categorized to make the material more manageable. This can also be seen as the more descriptive part of the study in order to create the first thematic clusters and come across reoccurring patterns. This activity can also be considered the second part of the task *insight* of critical interpretive research and consists of a rather inductive open-coding approach.

After organizing the empirical material and getting the first insights into the transcripts, the researcher tapped into the second task *critique*, where the empirical material went through the critical lens of the researcher. There, an abductive research approach was used, where the researcher works iteratively and switches continuously between empirical material and theory to get to the deeper meaning of the interviews (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2007). According to Alvesson and Sköldberg (2018), abduction can also be seen as a combination of inductive and deductive approaches, which, however, brings an additional component: *understanding*. Not only are new patterns derived from empirical material (inductive) or empirical material theorized (deductive), but by combining the two, a deeper understanding

of underlying structures can be discovered, where theory supports the explanation process of the empirical material (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2018). Hence, abduction is interested in problematizations and aims to work towards rethinking dominating ideas and offering alternative perspectives (Weick, 1989; Alvesson & Kärreman, 2007), which makes this approach suitable for this thesis. Alvesson and Kärreman (2007) divide abduction into three steps: “(1) the application of an established interpretive rule (theory), (2) the observation of a surprising—in light of the interpretive rule— empirical phenomenon, and (3) the imaginative articulation of a new interpretive rule (theory) that resolves the surprise.” (p. 1269). Therefore, firstly, a coding frame was created using Foucault’s concepts of power through discourse, surveillance, and resistance. Secondly, the empirical material was iteratively analyzed with the coding frame to critically analyze the categories and clusters from the task *insight* and to interpret the power relations occurring within self-initiated employee ambassadorship. Thirdly, an alternative perspective was offered that highlights the darker and more critical side of self-initiated employee ambassadorship on social media and proposes new insights and considerations into this phenomenon.

After analyzing the empirical material, the researcher tapped into the third task of *transformative redefinition* (Alvesson & Deetz, 2021). Since critique can often leave a rather pessimistic image of a social phenomenon, the goal of transformative redefinition is to show alternative routes and considerations that inspire change at the workplace and are valuable for employees as well as the organization in the long term.

4.3 Reflexivity and Ethical Considerations

One important aspect to discuss within critical research is the researcher’s reflexivity. As critical research focuses on power dimensions, the researcher also needs to be aware of the asymmetrical power relationship between interviewer and interviewee, as the interview and its setting are always controlled by the interviewer/researcher (Brinkman & Kvale, 2015; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Probst and Berenson (2014) describe it as the “awareness of the influence the researcher has on what is being studied and, simultaneously, of how the research process affects the researcher” (p. 814), which also implies the dialogic nature of qualitative research. Therefore, as communication about the personal use of social media platforms is also a very personal topic and influenced by discourses and social norms, the researcher had to be aware of the bias of social desirability caused by the interview situation and needed to keep in mind that certain answers might be flawed.

At the same time, researchers must be aware of their own position within the research, namely understanding their position as an insider or outsider and reflecting on predefined opinions about that topic (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). For this research, the researcher sees herself as an insider as, besides her studies, she is working in the field of communication and social media, which could cause a certain positivistic bias. However, throughout her work and research, she acquired a critical stance towards social media, which establishes a balance between the advantages and disadvantages of the organizational use of social media. This is essential to collect empirical material with a critical lens without drifting off into hyperskepticism towards the studied phenomenon.

4.3.1 Ethical Considerations

To ensure the quality of qualitative research studies, the main ethical considerations had to be taken in the empirical material collection process to ensure the well-being of the interview participants – before, during, and after the interviews.

Before the interviews and to ensure transparency, the interviewees were informed about the scope, the study's aim and the research process with an information sheet (See appendix 4) and received a form of consent (see appendix 5) thematizing recordings, anonymity, data security as well as the participants right to withdraw from the participation in the interview. Furthermore, during the interviews, it was essential to create a comfortable environment so that participants feel safe and do not feel stressed or pressured (Brinkman & Kvale, 2015). Additionally, as the interview content was about their individual perception and experience on social media, it was essential to build a level of trust and try to decrease the above-mentioned power asymmetries through a natural conversation flow. Finally, during the empirical material analysis, it was crucial to ensure that the answers were correctly transcribed and that sensitive data was treated with sufficient confidentiality – especially information concerning internal organizational processes.

5. Findings and Analysis

The following chapter presents the findings and analysis of how power relations influence the communicative behavior of self-initiated employee ambassadors on social media. The analysis is divided into three parts, each of which is dedicated to answering a respective research question. The first part focuses on the power of discourses, the second part addresses the influence of visibility in relation to surveillance on social media, and the third part examines the resistance to this phenomenon. It is worth mentioning that the first section is more extensive as the developed discourses and their power form the basis for the second and third sections.

5.1 Power of Discourse

The first part of the analysis focuses on the influencing and constitutive power of discourses. To understand how discourses exert power over employee ambassadors, the main discourses needed to be first identified and deconstructed. Thus, for a logical structure, this subsection is divided into three guiding discourses that were elaborated from the empirical material and developed in the analysis, which each on their own have different internal rules, effects, and materialistic practices (Prasad, 2017) that influence the communication of employee ambassadors on social media: The discourse *Social Media-Driven Business Transformation*, the discourse *Careerism* and the discourse *Authenticity*. As a reminder, it is important to mention again that in applying Foucault's (1972, 1977) concept of discursive power, it is not about the truth or validity of discourses but their influence on social processes.

5.1.1 From Social Media-Driven Business Transformation to a Love-Hate-Relationship

A very present discourse that was elaborated from the interviews was the overarching discourse of the *social media-driven business transformation*, which can also be seen as a process by which businesses use social media to fundamentally change the way they operate, interact with customers, and manage their employees (Aral et al., 2013). Thereby, the goal is to use the power of social media not only for marketing and communication purposes but

also to cover aspects such as sales or recruitment processes to drive growth and create a more engaged organization. The interviewees expressed their awareness and importance of these new practices, such as social selling or social recruiting to enhance the organization's competitiveness in highly competitive markets. Although this discourse appears to be familiar in the current professional environment and has become a popular field of knowledge, the interviews revealed that disseminating social media practices have already become an embedded norm that is hardly questioned. Thus, the ambassadors expressed its high relevance in the market and that LinkedIn is now simply part of the "good tone". Two participants also referred to this as LinkedIn being the new "newspaper" or that it has "become a source of information or inspiration for quite a lot of people". Through the ongoing discourse and communication about the importance of social media in the business world, the discourse gets reinforced, which increases the relevance on the market even further and also ingrains a perception in the employees' heads that social media and organizational success are strongly correlated with each other. From this, it became apparent in the interviews that one effect this discourse has is that the increasing relevance for organizations of being visible on social media and transforming their business activities in accordance with social media causes an *additional job responsibility*, which employees consciously or unconsciously take on. One participant explained it as follows:

For me, it's part of the job or my role. And I think everyone knows times when they don't feel like doing their job. But still, that means that for me. I have a kind of self-understanding that it's just part of the job.

Therefore, from a Foucauldian power perspective, it can be interpreted that a normalization (Foucault, 1977) of this additional job responsibility has taken place, which turns the job behavior into a norm that is taken for granted and not questioned. The high relevance, as well as the normalization of the additional job responsibility, makes it, therefore, difficult for the employees to withdraw from this notion, whereby the discourse exerts its constraining power (Storey, 2018), and in contrast to previous studies (e.g., Morrison, 2014), the communication on social media loses its voluntary attribute. Nevertheless, it is also worth mentioning that the influence does not only happen subconsciously but can also surface in communication within the organization through direct pressure from other organizational members. One participant even admitted that due to the increasing relevance on the market, she also pushes her co-workers to be active on LinkedIn and engage with her activities.

Of course, I also told my colleagues, 'Hey guys, you have to keep sharing my posts' [...]. They did that, too, of course. And for those who didn't have LinkedIn, I made them open a LinkedIn account.

It is worth mentioning that only in rare cases did the ambassadors' communication get influenced by a management-driven initiative and that the interviewees enjoy the creative aspect of creating their LinkedIn communication. Still, one materialistic practice that constitutes this discourse (Storey, 2018) and thus also increases the pressure on employees is something that can be referred to as *Organizational LinkedIn Culture*. This focuses on common goals and practices around LinkedIn activity. Two participants described the example of a WhatsApp group where co-workers can share their posts for their colleagues to interact with in order to generate the highest possible reach and visibility, which reinforces the relevance of this discourse through communicative practices. Additionally, larger companies also offer prefabricated posts to their employees, which should simplify the posting process on LinkedIn. However, this can be viewed not only from the perspective of discursive power but also from the perspective of organizational control, whereby the normalization of extra job behavior and the pressure of employees to become active on LinkedIn is exploited through such prefabricated posts to control the employees' communication.

That said, it still seems that some ambassadors experience a subtle reluctance for the development of social media-driven business transformation, as well as resistance to LinkedIn's operating principles, such as its algorithm, which can be classified here as *Love-Hate-Relationship* and explained as follows by two interviewees:

By now, it's really getting on my nerves. And yet it is a very powerful tool. And then you just swim with it.

I shied away from LinkedIn for a long time because I thought it was just a giant collecting data. Nevertheless, there's basically no getting around it, because otherwise, you're missing out on a big market if you're not there.

These statements illustrate the dilemma ambassadors can face in navigating between the positive and negative sides of social media communication for professional purposes, but also that power can be met with resistance (Foucault, 1978). However, in this case, it can be argued that the power this discourse exerts makes the ambassadors place their personal assessment behind the relevance of LinkedIn on the market in order to conform to and keep up with the development of social media-driven business transformation. This effect is further

fueled by the urge to post regularly to keep one's visibility high on the platforms – even if, as some interviewees admitted, on some days, they had nothing to share.

5.1.2 From Careerism to Self-Branding Strategies

The second discourse elaborated and developed from the interviews that exerts power on the communicative behavior of employees on social media is the discourse of *careerism*. Other than the previously discussed discourse, careerism occurs on a more individual level and can be described as the “tendency to pursue career advancement through non-performance-based means” (Chiaburu et al., 2013, p. 6). However, in this study, careerism is not related to dissatisfaction in the employee's job but to the rapid changes in the business environment, to which employees are adapting by using social media for personal development.

In the interviews, it became apparent that employees strongly present themselves individually on the platform to strengthen their self-image. One internal rule that has manifested itself in the employees' minds and demands this individualistic communication is that in today's professional landscape employees are replaceable. Especially for participants working in bigger corporations, it was stated that there is a feeling of simply being an invisible number if you do not engage in social media activities. One participant explained this as follows:

I am firmly convinced that our society is so far gone at the moment, especially for us in communications, that we are replaceable. [...] And in order to be seen, it needs an active LinkedIn profile.

The same participant subsequently stated that it was only through her increasing LinkedIn activity that she felt that the higher management was also noticing her. Consequently, the argument gets legitimized that being active and visible on LinkedIn is a sign of success and expertise of the individual employee within this ‘war for talent’ in the working market. However, when asked whether it is still possible to be successful in the future and make a career without LinkedIn, the participants' opinions were strongly divided. Some ambassadors expressed that it would be possible to be successful in a different way; others mentioned that the main game is now happening on social media, which also ties back to and reinforces the effects of the discourse of social media-driven business transformation.

From this internal rule that employees are replaceable and that their visibility is crucial, it became clear that ambassadors feel obliged to create this self-image that is detached from

the organization in order to compete with other talents and to be relevant to a potential employer in case of job loss.

My network should see what I do and what I can do. Because maybe someone is working on a project once and then looking for someone for a project-based collaboration. And then they know, 'ah [interviewee's name] does this, this and this.' [...] So of course, I'm concerned about permanent positions and about better professional opportunities.

In this context, it can also be referred to the *emergence of self-branding strategies* as an acceptable solution to make one's expertise public and gain recognition for achievements that would have been lost under the cover of the corporate brand. At the same time, however, this also shows that contrary to past studies (e.g., Van Zoonen et al., 2018), this urge for self-presentation is not simply intrinsically motivated but firmly embedded in a social construct that is based on substitutability and competition in the labor market. Nevertheless, the ambassadors also highlighted that despite the individual representation on LinkedIn in terms of the discourse of careerism, the reputation of their employer is still highly relevant as it is used to enhance the personal image, which also ties back to what Schaarschmidt and Könsgen (2020) outlined in their study whereby employees are more likely to turn into ambassadors when the employer brand has a high reputation. Therefore, it can be argued that a mutual dependency occurs whereby the organizations, as well as the ambassadors' communication, is needed to enhance both sides' image and to compete in the corporate as well as in the labor market. For the ambassadors, however, this not only means supporting the organizational image on social media but also generating a convincing self-image, which simultaneously makes them strive for perfection and professionalism.

If you are having some kind of mistake or miscommunication on Instagram, it's somehow forgivable. But on LinkedIn, I feel like there's this pressure. There are professionals and people who might be your peers, and they can judge you, they can, have this idea about you, and it can chase you for the rest of your career.

Analyzed with Foucault's concept of discursive power, this finding also highlights the enabling and constraining attributes of discourses (Storey, 2018), whereby the normalization of self-branding strategies creates the possibility for employees to present themselves individually in the labor market but also creates a pressuring *culture of comparison and perfectionism* that makes employees think carefully about what they post to avoid any damage to their

self-image. Finally, in terms of the materialistic understanding of discourse from a Foucauldian perspective, the measurement functions on LinkedIn indicate the value of the employee's communication in the form of engagement rates and the number of likes, to which the ambassadors constantly adapt and perfect their communication.

5.1.3 From Authenticity to an Authenticity Paradox

The third discourse, elaborated after the deconstruction of the interviews, is the importance of *authenticity* in brand communication. Especially on social media, the urge for authenticity and personalization plays a driving role in strengthening the credibility of the company's brand, whereby it is known that employees can be considered the most credible source for authenticity (van der Berg & Verhoeven, 2017). Nevertheless, authenticity cannot be defined as something absolute – as what appears authentic to some seems inauthentic to others (Van Leeuwen, 2001). Nevertheless, in this section, the focus is not on how authentic the participants' communication is perceived but on how authenticity leans on certain norms, which affect communicative activities on social media and control the representation of reality (cf. Van Leeuwen, 2001). One norm particularly present in the interviews was the importance of personalization, such as pictures with faces, personal stories or perspectives of the employees, to create authentic and credible communication and thus enhance its success.

It is way more efficient and more likable. And it also gives this tone of warmth coming from you as a human being rather than just this bunch of formalities.

One major effect this internal rule has on employee ambassadors is an *advanced job responsibility*, which levels up the normalized job responsibility from the first discourse. During the interviews, it became evident that nowadays, it is hardly sufficient to support the company by posting company contributions, but the participants feel obliged to add their own personal touch for credibility. This also gets reinforced through the knowledge about LinkedIn's algorithm, as, according to one participant, company posts are played out less often in users' feeds than personal posts. As a result of this advanced job responsibility and accentuated through the algorithms, ambassadors acknowledged the thinning line between private and professional life, which also supports van Dijck's (2013) as well as Falkheimer and Heide's (2014) claim that due to social media, the division between employees private and professional identities is dissolved. However, the ambassador's attitude towards this dissolution differs. Whereas one part of the interviewees already normalized that in specific

jobs such as sales, personal and professional identity cannot be parted anymore, the other part still expressed some resistance towards the mix of private and professional life, which, however, gets overshadowed by the constraining and constitutive power of the discourse of authenticity. Thus, one participant explained:

I think that are many things that play subconsciously. If then suddenly everyone only posts selfies and I am the only one with professional photos there, then I stand out and I do not want that. Then I would also adapt in the long term.

This also gives rise to the dilemma where employees need to negotiate not just what and if they should post but also how personal they should be to be ‘truly authentic’. As the discourse gets reinforced through the materialistic practice (Prasad, 2017) of impressions and likes as success indicators, participants expressed their frustration that personal and private posts have a higher engagement rate pushing them further into personalizing their professional communication. Consequently, it can be argued that employees find themselves in an *authenticity paradox*, where on one side, authentic and personal content is needed to enhance the credibility of the brand; on the other side, the previous discourse of careerism and the strive for the perfect self-image and organizational image dampens the options for the employees to be genuinely authentic and honest about working life. One participant also expressed this when asked how free employees really are in their communication:

Not really free. Because it's also about the fact that you represent the company. And the company probably doesn't quite coincide always with your values.

Interestingly, several participants also mentioned educational institutions such as universities as drivers that constitute this discourse of authenticity and its effects. In workshops or lectures, they shared the knowledge of the importance of highly personalized communication to attract attention and convince customers. This also exemplifies what Foucault (1977) calls institutional power, where institutions such as universities share knowledge that exerts power and, through this influence further knowledge and discourse, which then gets normalized.

5.2 Visibility and (Self-)Surveillance

As the previous section shows, visibility is central to all discourses and employee communication on social media. Whether this is the visibility of the employer, of one's own self-brand, or the increase of visibility through authenticity, this subchapter analyses the disciplinary power of visibility in more depth, how visibility influences employee ambassadors' communication on social media and how this evokes self-monitoring as well as self-surveillance practices.

5.2.1 Normalization of the Disciplinary Gaze

One aspect that became evident in the interviews is that among employee ambassadors, the visibility on social media has already been normalized and indicated to be "part of the game". However, and surprisingly at the same time, the ambassadors spoke with a certain casualness and self-evidence about the constant visibility, which seems to be the key to survival in the professional landscape.

If you look at the world right now. Usually, doing the job is not enough. You have to be visible if you want to win. [...] And I think that at some point, everyone will be visible. Want it or not? We are already visible [...] So it's inescapable.

On one side, this self-evidence can be traced back to the effects of the discourse of social media-driven business transformation, which normalizes the additional job responsibility, which then gets taken for granted. On the other side, one participant also ties it together with the aspect of networking, whereby he mentioned that it has become a habit within the organizational culture to connect with colleagues and managers over LinkedIn. Consequently, this brings not only general visibility but also a higher exposure of the self in the context of one's professional network, which strengthens self-discipline and the normalization of the so-called *disciplinary gaze* (Prasad, 2017) as well as makes employees conform to the organizational norms and structures as they feel constantly watched. Thus, the same participant, which works in a larger corporation, expressed his perception of visibility in his own LinkedIn network as follows:

There are definitely people who see my posts that have a certain power in the company, and then I also want to make an effort to write a good post [...], I always feel like I'm representing [company name] and I want [company name] to be well represented by my post. And I don't want to post

something full of mistakes, wrong statements, or wrong formulations that somebody would then read.

Additionally, in the interviews, it became apparent that the normalization of this disciplinary gaze also results from the discourse of careerism. As described above, visibility for participants is related to personal and professional development. One driver is the shift towards social recruiting, with most new talents being acquired via LinkedIn. This is confirmed by a participant who works as an IT recruiter, who, especially for higher positions, checks the applicant's profile to see if there are problematic aspects in their posting or engagement activity. Nevertheless, some employee ambassadors expressed particular concern about the visibility, referring to it as a form of surveillance that goes beyond the organizational border and might impact the future career path.

You are afraid of not being attractive enough for an employer, a new potential employer, or even your current employer because you tell too much or the wrong things.

Therefore, it can be argued that due to the previously mentioned discourses that formed certain norms ambassadors are conforming with, visibility and the imagined surveillance have become integrated aspects that just have to be accepted to succeed in the professional landscape.

5.2.2 Strategizing through Self-Monitoring

During the interviews, it became evident that ambassadors do not simply give in to the visibility but exhibit a rather tactical approach to actively use their knowledge about the platform and the mechanisms of visibility for their own benefit. In this context, participants openly admitted that their social media activity is an exaggeration of their own reality to improve their own image and post what creates the highest engagement. This can also be referred to as *impression management*, which goes hand in hand with the discourse of careerism (Chiaburu et al., 2013). However, at the same time, from a critical perspective, it can be referred to as *self-monitoring* and disciplinary practice, where the ambassadors observe and adapt their communication process according to what is considered successful. Van Zoonen et al. (2018) also speak of a filter that is applied to sort out what is not beneficial for their own image. Therefore, it seems that there is an awareness of what aspects this visibility holds, making it important for the ambassadors to use their own strategies to hack this

visibility. For example, one ambassador who has been using LinkedIn very actively for several years explained it like this:

Yes, I also take advantage of it. In the sense of consciously commenting on something of a competitor, for example. Or to be able to discuss topics where I'm also active. I believe that people notice this and that it's part of the process, at least to find one's place.

Here it is important to consider that visibility does not only covers posting behavior but also other engagements such as sharing, commenting, or liking, as due to its digital architecture, not only posts but also likes and comments can be actively tracked on LinkedIn, which are displayed to people inside and outside the own network. The participants use this mechanism and engage more with specific topics to appear in their followers' feeds in order to increase reach and relevance through algorithmic mechanisms. To exploit the visibility even further, ambassadors also rely on the hack of *tagging*, whereby people get mentioned in the posts in the hope that they will engage with the post so that the ambassador's profile appears in even more people's feeds. Again, this exemplifies the high value visibility has on the market and its interconnectedness with the previously addressed discourses. Nevertheless, as a contrast to this more positivistic-sounding side of strategizing, the theme of pressure was also highlighted:

Whenever I'm writing for LinkedIn, I'm thinking carefully if I sound judgmental or opinionated or if it is discriminatory in language or so on. So, this kind of stuff is putting some pressure on you.

This statement is an ideal illustration of the self-monitoring mechanisms that are not only used to improve one's own image but also to avoid misunderstandings, which also points to the fundamental challenge of social media communication in principle since interpersonal communication is suspended. Interestingly, however, what also came through in the interviews is that these self-monitoring mechanisms to enhance the own image prioritize the personal image and only consider the company's image in a second step. This gives the social media communication of employee ambassadors a strong individualistic note, which can be interpreted that employee ambassadorship not necessarily always strengthens loyalty to the organization but, through the discourse of careerism, puts the individual goals to the forefront.

Following up on their various strategies, such as tagging, liking, commenting, and creating posts to portray a particular image or identity on their personal accounts, the participants referred to two aspects they base their knowledge on how they should act on LinkedIn. On one side, their self-monitoring strategies are based on monitoring the environment and observing what works and what does not through engagement rates. In other words, people build their knowledge about visibility on the visibility of others. On the other side, they also referred to their gut feeling, i.e., doing what ‘feels’ right. However, following up by asking them where they believe this gut feeling is coming from, the answers were vague and could not be pointed out clearly. This can be explained with the concept of the superpanopticon society by Poster (2019), whereby self-monitoring through visibility is already so strongly internalized and normalized that it takes place on a rather subconscious level.

5.2.3 Situational Silencing through Self-Surveillance

Derived from the strategies and self-monitoring mechanisms mentioned above, however, it also became clear that these monitoring practices can also intensify and take the form of *self-surveillance* (Deetz, 1998), which is not focused on achieving a positive outcome through strategizing your communication but avoiding negative ones by holding back certain aspects. What can be described here as *situational silencing* makes participants avoid certain topics for fear that they could violate norms or, as one participant says, “unwritten rules” and impact the personal image negatively. In the interviews, this aspect became apparent as the ambassadors felt the constraint to express their opinions freely about specific topics. Especially political topics are consistently avoided because they could offer a large surface for an attack, even though some participants would like to address them.

I rarely post anything political, although I would like to. But we come from the field of journalism... so we know religion, politics etc. These are topics we better not touch.

This caution about the content also ties into what Christensen and Christensen (2022) outline in their study when saying that employees’ communication is adjusted to and disciplined by social expectations. Additionally, by referencing the field of journalism, she points to her journalism studies and thus to an educational institution that exerts disciplinary power through normalized knowledge (Foucault, 1977), which tells the employees what can and cannot be talked about. Similarly, several interviewees agreed that conflicts or dissatisfaction within the organization and organizational failings could not be communicated on

LinkedIn and get strategically silenced, whereas, in contrast, personal failures should be communicated. For example, one participant strongly favors sharing her personal shortcomings, as these could offer certain learnings to her followers. However, when asked if this also applies to organization-related failures, she responded as follows:

Failures from the organization are strictly not shared. Funny no? I think there are people who are inside at the top who put a stop to things like that.

This brings us back to the imagined surveillance and visibility resulting from the strong networking within companies, i.e., superiors could detect something on LinkedIn they disagree with. The subtle and sometimes unconscious anxiety of stepping on someone's toes with one's own communication and violating norms can be explained by Foucault's (1977) concept of the panopticon, whereby the collaborators always assume an imagined audience through visibility, whereby the disciplinary functioning of power automatically kicks in without knowing if anyone is really watching or not. An interesting example that elaborates on this point was provided by two employees who both work for the same large corporation and regularly post updates on their employer's activities. Both posted an internal workshop on LinkedIn about a transformation project within their organization. After the post, the head of the department explained to them that he would not appreciate such internal posts, as they do not bring any sales or offer knowledge to the client. Between the lines, the participants mentioned that such a reaction might come from the organization's good and prestigious reputation, which could be influenced negatively if they openly show that a transformation is happening within the corporation. As a result, one participant explains:

Sure, the announcement from this boss is now somewhere in the back of my mind. Not that I'm afraid to publish such a post again, because I would have enough arguments that speak for such a post. [...] But maybe now I think about what kind of pictures I will use. [...] And maybe I'll frame it a little differently. [...] I think that's purely subordinating yourself, so to speak, in the sense of 'I only communicate messages that are in line with the employer'.

This scenario exemplifies how visibility can reinforce self-surveillance, especially when negative comments by an authoritarian body are expressed. But it is also an example of how power can also be met with resistance because the other employee in this example made clear that he will not adjust his communication and is setting up some meetings to influence this rather traditional view on using social media for an organization's branding purposes,

which also shows the power of the subject to influence certain discourse (Prasad, 2017), which does not receive enough attention in Foucault's concept of power (Alvesson, 1996).

However, what was also observed in the interviews was that silencing differs between various organizational sizes. Thus, it became apparent that the inhibition threshold for people working in a small organization, which is less publicly exposed than large corporations, was lower to address critical aspects. This could also be due to the fact that larger organizations offer voluntary social media training or sporadically guidelines that should dampen the risk of reputational damage through their employees' communication.

5.3 Resistance Self-initiated Employee Ambassadorship

As Foucault (1978) states that resistance results from power, this section outlines and analyzes three main aspects that make employees resist becoming employee ambassadors on social media. Still, it has to be noted that despite the resistance towards employee ambassadorship on social media, all the interviewees have a passive LinkedIn profile, as they were created out of the pressure of the importance of LinkedIn in the current employment market.

5.3.1 Importance of Privacy

One aspect that stood in the foreground of employees resisting the notion of ambassadorship on social media was the value of privacy. It became evident that the division between private and work life is still highly valued and could not be pursued if they became active on LinkedIn as ambassadors. Thus, two participants expressed themselves in a similar sense as follows:

It's also good if you simply have a private life. So, you don't have to be an employee all the time, you can also be your own person.

If I'm now posting on LinkedIn all the time in my private life and I'm out and about for my employer, where is the separation for me?

Both further argue that it is out of the question to use their free time to drive the branding of their employer forward. They also mention the aspect of 'free labor' and their aversion towards doing 'free advertising' for the company. This resistance can be traced back to the discourse of social media-driven business transformation, whereby the effect of additional

job responsibility is met with resistance. Equally skeptical are employees resisting the notion of ambassadorship when it comes to its relation to personal branding and the discourse of careerism, whereby the separation between private and professional identity becomes even more blurred. Although, on the one hand, the participants understand the benefits of personal branding, it can be interpreted that they value their privacy higher than receiving appreciation and recognition from an audience they do not know. For example, one participant who is extraordinarily skeptical of social media in general expresses himself as follows:

If you feel like you must post to advance your career, that's a way of sacrificing your privacy.

Nevertheless, one participant expressed that she is aware of the growing expectations of employees' communicative performance and that she perceives it difficult to withstand the pressure to become more active on LinkedIn – whether in connection with her employer or personal branding – and to stand up for her values and the desire to separate her professional and private life. From a Foucauldian perspective, this exemplifies that resistance does not mean the complete absence of power but outlines its interdependence that results in conflicts (Deetz, 1992). Particularly regarding the discourse of careerism, another participant also expressed that from her perspective, how active she was on LinkedIn should not be relevant to prospective employers. The same participant also shared that simply by experiencing this pressure, her privacy is already affected:

If I then feel social pressure from my colleagues or bosses, then it is no longer private in that sense because they then intervene in my private life in that sense. Maybe not actively, but just through this social pressure at the end.

This statement thus shows that pressure from the professional sphere has already found its way into private life and that it is becoming increasingly difficult for employees to negotiate between social and professional pressure as well as personal values. In contrast, participants also perceive this resistance to employee ambassadorship on social media and the preservation of privacy as a sign of freedom and independence. For example, one participant was clear that by not posting anything and hardly liking anything on LinkedIn, she still controls what other people see and thus think about her.

If I just post, yes, it would bother me because then everyone sees it. But since I don't post it doesn't bother me because I control what is actually seen or not.

Thus, it can be argued that employee ambassadors use social media as a strategy to influence their image, whereas employees resisting this notion turn it around and avoid LinkedIn in order not to jeopardize their image and, thus, their career. However, this also outlines the power, especially the discourse of careerism and the importance of the professional self-image has on both sampling groups and that silencing is a measure for employees resisting the notion to deal with visibility. It is worth mentioning that despite the current resistance to employee ambassadorship on social media, all but one of the resisting participants admitted that they see the possibility that the social pressure and the discursive power of careerism might become too overwhelming, that they will start LinkedIn postings even though they would not feel comfortable in exposing themselves.

5.3.2 The Platforms Perceived Image & Inauthenticity

The second reason why employees resist the concept of employee ambassadorship ties in with the functional principles of social media and the discourse of authenticity. The participants expressed their resistance to the current information overload on social media, which makes them increasingly turn away from these platforms. This also partly ties in with the love-hate relationship as an effect of the discourse of social media-driven business transformation, whereby even people who are active on social media do not support the current mode of operation. One participant described the urge for publicity and visibility as follows:

Sometimes I feel like people just post anything to have something posted. And I find that exhausting as well. Sometimes I find the content exhausting and not so honest and then I also find it difficult to see any added value in it.

She also gives an example of how she had to unfollow various people because the overload of content, which was not relevant to her, had become too much. Similarly, diversity has decreased, with participants increasingly seeing the same thing as they all follow the same 'golden rule'. This relates to the previous section, which discussed self-monitoring and self-disciplinary behavior, which from the Foucauldian perspective, can be explained as the ongoing consolidation of and conformity with a particular norm. Thus, it can be argued that the discourse of the high relevance of social media in personal or organizational branding activities has damaged the image of the platform by diluting the added value on the platform. This is also accompanied by the participants' enormous criticism of the content's

authenticity. Unlike the ambassadors, the resisters see the content on LinkedIn as highly inauthentic and untrustworthy, with the justification that only excessively positivistic sides of their work are shown in order to create a good and positive image.

I am of the idea that I think the people who are the loudest on LinkedIn are the people who need to prove themselves the most.

Instead of daydreaming about, 'Oh, I wish that people had this image of me' I think you can live out this artificial fantasy by communicating to an audience you don't know. And you fancy the idea that they will get an image of you that you want.

Another participant also used the word “love bombing” to describe the current trend of positivity. She understands it as a tactic to manipulate someone to believe something by only posting positive things. She went on to say that this social tendency to post only positive aspects has gone so far that she had to delete her social media apps for a while because she suddenly started comparing herself with all the perfect working lives visible on LinkedIn, even though she was aware that some posts are more appearance than reality. However, this shows the immense power and darker side the discourses around social media and personal branding can have on employees, which can influence their well-being, causing emotional exhaustion (Van Zoonen et al. 2014) or pushing them unconsciously into a direction they do not feel comfortable with.

Another dark side that occurs through this positivistic tone and the adaptation to norms through current discourses, employees perceive to lose their own opinion and voice, which stands in contrast to the ambassadors who use social media to make their perspectives heard. One participant also refers to the previously mentioned ‘filter’, whereby each post is adapted to the current norms and internal rules of the prevailing discourse, and only what is acceptable among the masses can be published. He elaborates:

If you were to say something negative about a topic that does not adhere to the social climate, it would just be career suicide because the atmosphere on LinkedIn would not favor you taking a critical side decision. [...] So, I don't think it's authentic. I think people express the views they know corporations want them to hear or that they will say things that make a modern progressive company interested in them.

After analyzing these quotes, it can be concluded that it is not the platform itself that is met with resistance from the employees, but instead, they turn away from its content, which is generated by the individual communication of the users. Likewise, there is the caution that the platform's image, which is perceived as inauthentic, does not spill over to the employees and that they should not be associated with these attributes. Nevertheless, it can be further interpreted here that this again links to the personal image, which is further influenced by the discourse of careerism.

5.3.3 Organizational Culture

As outlined in the literature review, the organizational culture immensely influences how much employees are willing to support their organization in their branding activities (van der Berg and Verhoeven, 2017; Andersson, 2019a). In the interviews, it became apparent that whereby employee ambassadors have a strong identification with the organization, employees resisting this notion admitted that they are dissatisfied with their organizational culture and cannot identify with their employer's values. Within their resistance, authenticity plays once again a significant role, with employees finding it almost impossible to make authentic posts about their work and their employer that are consistent with their own values. However, here the disciplinary power is not caused by the imagined professional audience but stems from the imagined surveillance of the personal environment. The interviewees mentioned that if they were to post something about their employer, this communicative activity could be labeled as "hypocritical" or "untrue" since the private environment usually knows about the difficult relationship with the employer, which could further call the credibility of the person posting into question.

Following up on this aspect, the interviewees made clear that the materialistic practice of building an internal LinkedIn culture would be insufficient in making them become ambassadors as long as the organizational culture does not align with their own expectations. For example, one participant expressed that many of her colleagues engage in organizational LinkedIn activities; however, she is very resistant to joining these activities, as they seem highly inauthentic to her. Another participant supported this statement by outlining the value of the organizational culture in employee's social media activities as follows:

I think you notice when LinkedIn keeps up a pretense that doesn't really work. And there again, how you feel comfortable, identify with the company or talk about it is firmly connected to the culture. And that's offline. LinkedIn is then like a consequence of how you communicate there.

However, similar to situational silencing among ambassadors caused by the visibility, employees resisting ambassadorship on social media have also expressed that, although they are dissatisfied with their employer, they would never communicate this negative aspect to the outside. This shows how similar the reasons from ambassadors and employees resisting this notion are when it comes to posting negative aspects about their work, which gets further fueled by the normalized positivistic undertone on LinkedIn. Two participants described this as follows:

There will always be some negative things, but you can't share them publicly on LinkedIn because that's kind of bad for you if you're then exposed to criticism.

You take action against the company, but you still work there. You don't want to make enemies or make life difficult for yourself, do you?

Therefore, the imagined audience pushes the employees in a disciplinary direction, whereby the assumed disciplinary gaze from peers and superiors results in indirect organizational control, enhancing the resistance towards becoming communicatively active for the organization. However, how managerial control can further increase this resistance is shown by an example of a participant who expressed a high dissatisfaction with her previous employer. After resigning, her supervisor demanded that she post her position on her personal LinkedIn. Due to pressure also from her colleagues, she felt obliged to do so, despite her initial resistance. After publication, she received questions about the open position, the organizational culture and her job satisfaction. This put her in a dilemma where she had to weigh how honest she could answer since she still felt a particular responsibility towards the corporate image. Due to this incident, her resistance towards employee ambassadorship increased further, which shows what negative consequences direct managerial pressure can have on employees' communicative motivation.

6. Discussion and Conclusion

This section offers a concluding discussion of the findings of this study and concludes this thesis by outlining its wider theoretical and practical contributions as well as suggestions for future research. This thesis derived from the research problem of a currently oversimplified normative and managerial-oriented research perspective on the phenomenon of self-initiated employee ambassadorship on social media. Thus, the aim of this study is to generate new knowledge and deepen the understanding of this phenomenon by taking a critical perspective of power relations and disciplinary structures that influence employees' communication on social media. The focus is on the questions of which and how discourses exert power over employee ambassadors' communication on social media, how visibility influences it, and why certain employees resist the phenomenon.

In the analysis, the complexity of the phenomenon of self-initiated employee ambassadorship on social media has become apparent, and in contrast to previous research on employee communication on social media (e.g., Dreher, 2014; Martin et al., 2015; Pekkala et al., 2022), it is shown that a large proportion of the influencing factors and disciplinary power does not emerge from control within the organization but is an interplay of discourses, social norms, driver effects as well as visibility, that transcend the organizational borders.

First, the study reveals three leading discourses that exert power over self-initiated employee ambassadors on social media, which influence their communication through their enabling, constraining, and constituting nature and lead to various conflicts, dilemmas, and paradoxes, in between which employees have to navigate and negotiate. To begin with, the *discourse of social media-driven business transformation* led to an *additional job responsibility*, which normalized the employee's communicative activities to support the organizational success. However, at the same time, it puts employees in a contradictive *love-hate relationship* that makes them communicate on their personal profiles despite some inner resistance. Furthermore, the *discourse of careerism*, which stems from the belief in the exchangeability of employees, led employees to develop individual *self-branding strategies* on social media to strengthen their own individual image by still using the reputation of their employer but putting their individual branding goals to the forefront to keep up in the 'war for talent'. Concurrent, however, a culture of *perfectionism and competition* expanded,

making them adapt to the pressure of the positivistic undertone on LinkedIn. Finally, the *discourse of authenticity* brought an *advanced job responsibility*, where for employees, it is no longer sufficient to create stories around their work but to do so with their own authentic, personal touch. However, this results not only in an erased line between private and professional life (Falkheimer & Heide, 2014) but also in an *authenticity paradox*, where regarding the previous discourse, employees must constantly negotiate between authenticity and perfectionism. The deconstruction of the power of discourses thus showed not only the pressure that employees are under to comply with social norms and materialistic practices but also how the effects of discourse produce contradiction, tensions and paradoxes in organizational life, in which employees are in constant negotiation between personal, social and organizational realities.

Secondly, the findings display the bidirectional relationship between the abovementioned discourse and the existing visibility and imagined surveillance on social media. Thereby, visibility is not only a continuation of the discourse in order to control whether one adheres to the norms and rules, but these get further consolidated as employees build and internalize the norms and rules through the visibility of other people's content. Similarly, the analysis shows that a *normalization of the disciplinary gaze* has taken place. Within this, on the one side, employees use *self-monitoring practices* and their knowledge about the functioning of the platform to use visibility to manage their personal image strategically; on the other side, visibility is also the reason for *self-surveillance*, whereby topics such as politics or failures within the company are situationally silenced out of fear of rejection from their imagined audience. This also shows what Foucault (1977) describes as visibility as a "trap" (p. 200), as visibility can be used for one's own image benefit and career advancements; at the same time, it limits the freedom of expression (self-monitoring) and pressures employees into a situational silencing (self-surveillance) due to the normalization of an organizational and societal imagined audience.

Thirdly, the findings outline the resistance towards employee ambassadorship on social media whereby the *importance of privacy* and the separation of private and professional life takes precedence over the development of employees' careers. The individually perceived *image and inauthenticity of the platform*, as well as a *negative organizational culture*, are also central aspects that engender resistance, as in contrast to ambassadors, resisting employees turn away from ambassadorship on social media in order to protect their self-image as well as retain one's personal opinions. Nevertheless, as resistance and power are

interrelated (Foucault, 1978; Mumby, 2005), it poses a challenge for employees and, in some cases, also to ambassadors to escape the pressures of discourse and stay true to their own values.

Finally, on a macro level, these findings also show that despite the tensions and conflicts in which employees must navigate, employee ambassadorship on social media is based on different mutual dependencies that exist between ambassadors' and organizations' branding strategies, between discourses and visibility, as well as between power and resistance, enhancing the complexity of the phenomenon that previously has been taken for granted.

6.1 Contributions to Research and Practice

This study makes several theoretical and practical contributions beyond the previously discussed findings. To begin with, by outlining the tensions, contradictions, and paradoxes resulting from discourses and visibility, it became evident that employee ambassadorship on social media is not something done entirely voluntarily or for individual motives (e.g., Morrison, 2014; Van Zoonen et al., 2018) but in a controlled, disciplined, but also strategic manner. By applying this critical employee-centered perspective on the phenomenon of self-initiated employee ambassadorship, this thesis offers a more profound understanding to previous findings such as job responsibility (Xiong et al., 2013), self-presentation (Marin & Nilă, 2021) or the blurring line between private and professional life (Falkheimer & Heide, 2014) by highlighting their origin in power relations. However, this also shows the limitations of ambassadors' actual co-creation opportunities in the branding and communication process of their organization, as they get disciplined not only through the organizational disciplinary gaze but also through the norms and effects of the discourses that are grounded in the whole professional and social sphere.

Furthermore, with its more critical reasoning, this thesis elaborates on managers' actual control over employee communication on social media. The analysis makes it apparent that employees' sensemaking process of their communication on social media is grounded in outer-organizational discourses, which managers cannot directly influence. Therefore, this also opposes the previous research that focuses on strategic management approaches to steer employee communicative activity on social media (e.g., Dreher, 2014; Opitz et al., 2018; van der Berg and Verhoeven, 2017), which could also engender resistance. However, it must be considered that organizations also benefit from these external power relations and the visibility outlined in this study as employees themselves involuntarily turn into strategic

communicators. The urge for the perfect self-image, the authenticity paradox and the mutual dependency between employee and employer for image development make employees comply with the positivist non-critical undertone on social media, which silences critical voices and makes organizations inherit an indirect latent power that protects their reputation.

Additionally, this research outlines the importance of integrating critical theories into strategic and organizational communication research to receive a more holistic understanding of communicative micro-practices of employees that constitute an organization and, through their active agency, influence its success. By questioning and critically analyzing normalized practices, a darker side of underlying power dimensions can be uncovered that should be considered in the ongoing discourse about the communicative responsibilities of employees.

Finally, on a practical level, this study contributes to organizations' and managers' understanding of the larger power dimensions and tensions in which their own self-initiated employee ambassadors are embedded. Encouraging employees in their communication without adding pressure from guidelines, policies or expectations, as well as acknowledging the actual limiting scope of managerial control, could support the employee's negotiation process between the various discourses, norms, visibility and personal values. This also allows a new counter-narrative that employee ambassadorship on social media is not seen as a threat to organizational reputation or exploitation of employees' communicative motivation but as a collaborative interaction between employees and organizations to support each other in one's branding activity. Additionally, organizations and especially managers should focus on the organizational culture, which they can actively influence, and reduce the risk of a culture of silencing and resistance towards ambassadorship on social media. A positive organizational culture allows employees to become active on their channels precisely without pressure or coercion and build a sufficient level of trust, which assists them in their role as strategic communicators to support organizational success.

6.2 Suggestions for Future Research

This study shows how essential critical interpretive empirical research is for the future to look at processes within organizations in-depth and thus to widen the perspective of how the communication of employees, which has significant importance for strategic communication, is influenced by power relations. Overall, future research should engage with a more critical perspective and examine control and power mechanisms as well as the 'darker side'

of organizational communication processes and thus, as researchers, embrace the tensions, paradoxes, and contradictions organizational life has to offer. In addition, future research should further explore the power of the discourses mentioned in the findings and analyze each discourse in depth to provide a more nuanced understanding of their power. Thereby, especially the discourse of careerism could provide further valuable insights due to its power that creates tension between internal and external organizational branding and influences not only ambassadors but also employees resisting ambassadorship. Moreover, due to the relatively limited sample size of employees resisting ambassadorship on social media, it would be appropriate to further analyze the resistance of employees towards various communication practices within organizations, whereby also a case study in one organization with a negative organizational culture or brand image could enable a more profound understanding of resistance towards certain organizational processes.

References

- Agger, B. (1991). Critical Theory, Poststructuralism, Postmodernism: Their Sociological Relevance. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 17, 105–131. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2083337>
- Altheide, D. L. (2013). Media Logic, Social Control, and Fear. *Communication Theory*, 23(3), 223–238. <https://doi-org.ludwig.lub.lu.se/10.1111/comt.12017>
- Alvesson, M. (1996). *Communication, power and organization*. Gruyter.
- Alvesson, M. (2002). *Postmodernism and social research*. Open University Press.
- Alvesson, M. (2021). Critical performativity in practice: the chronicle as a vehicle for achieving social impact. *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, 30(3), 355–362. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1359432X.2020.1739744>
- Alvesson, M., & Blom, M. (2019). Beyond leadership and followership: Working with a variety of modes of organizing. *Organizational Dynamics*, 48(1), 28–37. <https://doi-org.ludwig.lub.lu.se/10.1016/j.orgdyn.2017.12.001>
- Alvesson, M., & Deetz, S. A. (2021). *Doing critical research*. SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Alvesson, M., & Einola, K. (2018). Excessive work regimes and functional stupidity. *German Journal of Human Resource Management*, 32(3–4), 283–296. <https://doi-org.ludwig.lub.lu.se/10.1177/2397002218791410>
- Alvesson, M., & Kärreman, D. (2007). Constructing Mystery: Empirical Matters in Theory Development. *Academy of Management Review*, 32(4), 1265–1281. <https://doi.org/10.5465/AMR.2007.26586822>
- Alvesson, M., & Sköldbäck, K. (2018). *Reflexive methodology: new vistas for qualitative research* (3rd ed.). Sage.
- Alvesson, M., & Willmott, H. (2002). Identity regulation as organizational control: Producing the appropriate individual. *Journal of Management Studies*, 39(5), 619–644. <https://doi-org.ludwig.lub.lu.se/10.1111/1467-6486.00305>

- Andersson, R. (2019a). Employee Communication Responsibility: Its Antecedents and Implications for Strategic Communication Management. *International Journal of Strategic Communication*, 13(1), 60–75.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/1553118X.2018.1547731>
- Andersson, R. (2019b). Employees as ambassadors: embracing new role expectations and coping with identity tensions. *Corporate Communications: An International Journal*, 24(4), 702–716. <https://doi.org/10.1108/CCIJ-04-2019-0038>
- Aral, S., Dellarocas, C., & Godes, D. (2013). Introduction to the Special Issue: Social Media and Business Transformation: A Framework for Research. *Information Systems Research*, 24(1), 3–13. <https://doi.org/10.1287/isre.1120.0470>
- Brinkmann, S., & Kvale, S. (2015). *InterViews : learning the craft of qualitative research interviewing* (3rd ed.). Sage Publications.
- Cassingier, C., & Thelander, Å. (2020). Voicing the organization on Instagram: Towards a performative understanding of employee voice. *Public Relations Inquiry*, 9(2), 195–212. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2046147X20920820>
- Ceilutka, K. (2023). The discontents of competition for recognition on social media: Perfectionism, resentment, and collective narcissism. *Philosophy & Social Criticism*, 49(4), 409–430. <https://doi.org/10.1177/01914537211072883>
- Chiaburu, D. S., Diaz, I., & De Vos, A. (2013). Employee alienation: relationships with careerism and career satisfaction. *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, 28(1), 4–20.
<https://doi.org/10.1108/02683941311298832>
- Christensen, E., & Christensen, L. T. (2022). The Interpellated Voice: The Social Discipline of Member Communication. *Management Communication Quarterly*, 36(3), 496-519. <https://doi-org.ludwig.lub.lu.se/10.1177/08933189211068790>
- da Motta Veiga, S. P., Clark, B. B., & Moake, T. R. (2020). Influence of Job-Dedicated Social Media on Employer Reputation. *Corporate Reputation Review*, 23(4), 241–253. <https://doi-org.ludwig.lub.lu.se/10.1057/s41299-019-00083-z>
- de Chernatony, L. (1999). Brand Management Through Narrowing the Gap Between Brand Identity and Brand Reputation. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 15(1–3), 157–179. <https://doi.org/10.1362/026725799784870432>

- Deetz, S. A. (1982). Critical Interpretive Research in Organizational Communication. *Western Journal of Speech Communication: WJSC*, 46(2), 131–149. <https://doi-org.ludwig.lub.lu.se/10.1080/10570318209374073>
- Deetz, S. A. (1992). *Democracy in an age of corporate colonization : developments in communication and the politics of everyday life*. State Univ. of New York Press.
- Deetz, S. A. (1998). Discursive formations, strategized subordination and self-surveillance. In A. McKinlay, & K. Starkey (Eds.). *Foucault, management and organization theory: From panoptic on to technologies of self*. (pp. 155-172) SAGE Publications Ltd, <https://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781446221686>
- Deetz, S. A. & Mumby, D. K. (1990) Power, Discourse, and the Workplace: Reclaiming the Critical Tradition, *Annals of the International Communication Association*, 13(1), 18-47, <http://doi.org/10.1080/23808985.1990.11678743>
- Dreher, S. (2014). Social media and the world of work. *Corporate Communications: An International Journal*, 19(4), 344–356. <https://doi.org/10.1108/CCIJ-10-2013-0087>
- du Gay, P. (1996). *Consumption and identity at Work*. Sage.
- Duffy, B. E., & Chan, N. K. (2019). “You never really know who’s looking”: Imagined surveillance across social media platforms. *New Media and Society*, 21(1), 119-138–138. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444818791318>
- Falkheimer, J., & Heide, M. (2014). Strategic communication in participatory culture: From one- and two-way communication to participatory communication through social media. In D. Holtzhausen & A. Zerfass (Eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Strategic Communication* (pp. 337-349). Taylor & Francis. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203094440>
- Falkheimer, J. & Heide, M. (2022). Introduction: The Emergent Field of Strategic Communication. In J. Falkheimer & M. Heide (Eds.), *The research handbook on strategic communication*. (pp. 1–13). Elgar. <https://doi-org.ludwig.lub.lu.se/10.4337/9781800379893>
- Foucault, M. (1972). *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. Routledge.
- Foucault, M. (1977). *Discipline and punish: The birth of the prison*. Random House.

- Foucault, M. (1978). *The History of Sexuality*. Penguin.
- Fuduric, M., & Mandelli, A. (2014). Communicating social media policies: evaluation of current practices. *Journal of Communication Management*, 18(2), 158–175.
<https://doi-org.ludwig.lub.lu.se/10.1108/JCOM-06-2012-0045>
- Harris, F., & de Chernatony, L. (2001). Corporate branding and corporate brand performance. *European Journal of Marketing*, 35(3/4), 441–456.
<https://doi.org/10.1108/03090560110382101>
- Hatch, M. J., & Schultz, M. (2003). Bringing the corporation into corporate branding. *European Journal of Marketing*, 37(7/8), 1041–1064.
<https://doi.org/10.1108/03090560310477654>
- Heide, M., & Simonsson, C. (2011). Putting Coworkers in the Limelight: New Challenges for Communication Professionals. *International Journal of Strategic Communication*, 5(4), 201–220. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1553118X.2011.605777>
- Heide, M. & Simonsson, C. (2018). Coworkership and engaged communicators: a critical reflection on employee engagement”, in Johnston, K.A. and Taylor, M. (Eds), *The Handbook of Communication Engagement*, John Wiley & Sons, Hoboken, NJ, pp. 205-220.
- Heide, M., von Platen, S., Simonsson, C., & Falkheimer, J. (2018). Expanding the Scope of Strategic Communication : Towards a Holistic Understanding of Organizational Complexity. *International Journal of Strategic Communication*, 12(4), 452–468.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/1553118X.2018.1456434>
- Hesse, A., Schmidt, H. J., Bosslet, R., Häusler, M., & Schneider, A. (2022). How posting in social networks affects employee-based brand equity. *European Journal of Marketing*, 56(7), 1907–1925. <https://doi-org.ludwig.lub.lu.se/10.1108/EJM-06-2021-0396>
- Hood, K. M., Robles, M., & Hopkins, C. D. (2014). Personal Branding and Social Media for Students in Today’s Competitive Job Market. *Journal of Research in Business Education*, 56(2), 33–47.

- Ind, N. (1998). An integrated approach to corporate branding. *Journal of Brand Management*, 5(5), 323–329. <https://link-springer-com.ludwig.lub.lu.se/content/pdf/10.1057/bm.1998.20.pdf>
- Ind, N. (2001). *Living the brand*. London
- Joglekar, J., & Tan, C. S. L. (2022). The impact of LinkedIn posts on employer brand perception and the mediating effects of employer attractiveness and corporate reputation. *Journal of Advances in Management Research*, 19(4), 624–650. <https://doi-org.ludwig.lub.lu.se/10.1108/JAMR-10-2021-0343>
- Kärreman, D., & Frandsen, S. (2020). Identity, image, and brand. In A. D. Brown (Ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Identities in Organizations* (pp. 408–423). Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780198827115.013.33>
- Kärreman, D., & Rylander, A. (2008). Managing meaning through branding - the case of a consulting firm. *Organization Studies*, 29(1), 103–125. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0170840607084573>
- Macnamara, J. & Zerfass, A. (2012). Social Media Communication in Organizations: The Challenges of Balancing Openness, Strategy, and Management. *International Journal of Strategic Communication*, 6(4), 287-308–308. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1553118X.2012.711402>
- Madsen, V. T., & Verhoeven, J. W. M. (2016). Self-censorship on Internal Social Media: A Case Study of Coworker Communication Behavior in a Danish Bank. *International Journal of Strategic Communication*, 10(5), 387-409–409. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1553118X.2016.1220010>
- Madsen, V. T., & Verhoeven, J. W. M. (2019). The big idea of employees as strategic communicators in public relation. In Frandsen, F., Johansen, W., Tench, R., & Romenti, S. (Eds.), *Big ideas in public relations research and practice*. (Vol. 4) pp. 143–162). <https://doi.org/10.1108/S2398-391420190000004011>
- Marcet Alonso, J., Parsons, E., & Pirani, D. (2022). Career-washing? Unpacking employer brand promises on social media platforms. *European Journal of Marketing*, 56(10), 2804–2825. <https://doi.org/10.1108/EJM-10-2021-0817>

- Marin, G. D., & Nilă, C. (2021). Branding in social media. Using LinkedIn in personal brand communication: A study on communications/marketing and recruitment/human resources specialists perception. *Social Sciences & Humanities Open*, 4(1). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssaho.2021.100174>
- Martin, G., Parry, E., & Flowers, P. (2015). Do social media enhance constructive employee voice all of the time or just some of the time? *Human Resource Management Journal*, 25(4), 541–562. <https://doi-org.ludwig.lub.lu.se/10.1111/1748-8583.12081>
- McKinlay, A., & Taylor, P. (1998). Through the looking glass: Foucault and the politics of production. In A. McKinlay, & K. Starkey (Eds.), *Foucault, management and organization theory: From panoptic on to technologies of self*. (pp. 155-172) SAGE Publications Ltd, <https://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781446221686>
- Merriam, S.B., & Tisdell, E.J. (2016). *Qualitative research: a guide to design and implementation*. (4th ed.). Jossey-Bass.
- Merrilees, B. (2016). Internal branding. Dissecting, re-analysing and re-directing the literature. In F. Dall’Olmo Riley, J. Singh, & C. Blankson (Eds.), *The Routledge companion to contemporary brand management* (pp. 324-337). Routledge. <https://doi-org.ludwig.lub.lu.se/10.4324/9781315796789>
- Miles, S. J., & Mangold, W. G. (2014). Employee voice: Untapped resource or social media time bomb? *Business Horizons*, 57(3), 401–411. <https://doi-org.ludwig.lub.lu.se/10.1016/j.bushor.2013.12.011>
- Morgan, G., & Smircich, L. (1980). The Case for Qualitative Research. *Academy of Management Review*, 5(4), 491–500. <https://doi.org/10.5465/AMR.1980.4288947>
- Morrison, E. W. (2014). Employee Voice and Silence. *Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior*, 1(1), 173-197 <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-orgpsych-031413-091328>
- Müller, M. (2017). ‘Brand-Centred Control’: A Study of Internal Branding and Normative Control. *Organization Studies*, 38(7), 895–915. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0170840616663238>
- Müller, M. (2018). ‘Brandspeak’ : Metaphors and the rhetorical construction of internal branding. *Organization*, 25(1), 42–68. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1350508417710831>

- Mumby, D. K. (2005). Theorizing Resistance in Organization Studies: A Dialectical Approach. *Management Communication Quarterly*, 19(1), 19–44.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0893318905276558>
- Mumby, D. K. (2016). Organizing beyond organization: Branding, discourse, and communicative capitalism. *Organization*, 23(6), 884–907. <https://doi-org.ludwig.lub.lu.se/10.1177/1350508416631164>
- Mumby, D. K., & Stohl, C. (1991). Power and discourse in organization studies: absence and the dialectic of control. *Discourse & Society*, 2(3), 313–332.
- O'Reilly, C. (1989). Corporations, Culture, and Commitment: Motivation and Social Control in Organizations. *California Management Review*, 31(4), 9–25.
- Opitz, M., Chaudhri, V., & Wang, Y. (2018). Employee social-mediated crisis communication as opportunity or threat? *Corporate Communications: An International Journal*, 23(1), 66–83. <https://doi-org.ludwig.lub.lu.se/10.1108/CCIJ-07-2017-0069>
- Pekkala, K., Auvinen, T., Sajasalo, P., & Valentini, C. (2022). What's in it for me and you? Exploring managerial perceptions of employees' work-related social media use. *Employee Relations: The International Journal*, 44(7), 46–62.
<https://doi.org/10.1108/ER-12-2020-0518>
- Poster. (2019). *Critical Theory and Poststructuralism: In Search of a Context*. Cornell University Press.
- Prasad, P. (2017). *Crafting qualitative research. beyond positivist traditions* (2nd ed.) Routledge.
- Probst, B., & Berenson, L. (2014). The double arrow: How qualitative social work researchers use reflexivity. *Qualitative Social Work*, 13(6), 813–827. <https://doi-org.ludwig.lub.lu.se/10.1177/1473325013506248>
- Sandberg, J., & Alvesson, M. (2011). Ways of constructing research questions: gap-spotting or problematization? *Organization*, 18(1), 23–44.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1350508410372151>
- Sartain, L. (2005). Branding from the inside out at Yahoo!: HR's role as brand builder. *Human Resource Management*, 44(1), 89–93. <https://doi-org.ludwig.lub.lu.se/10.1002/hrm.20045>

- Savage, M. (1998). Discipline, surveillance and the 'career': Employment on the great western railway 1833–1914. In A. McKinlay, & K. Starkey (Eds.), *Foucault, management, and organization theory: From panoptic on to technologies of self*. (pp. 155-172). SAGE Publications Ltd. <https://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781446221686>
- Schaarschmidt, M., & Könsgen, R. (2020). Good citizen, good ambassador? Linking employees' reputation perceptions with supportive behavior on Twitter. *Journal of Business Research*, *117*, 754–763. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2019.04.004>
- Shepherd, J., (2023, February 23). *40 Essential LinkedIn Statistics You Need to Know in 2023*. The Social Shepherd. <https://thesocialshepherd.com/blog/linkedin-statistics#6-in-2022-linkedin-saw-a-22-increase-in-engagement>
- Smith, B. G., Stumberger, N., Guild, J., & Dugan, A. (2017). What's at stake? An analysis of employee social media engagement and the influence of power and social stake. *Public Relations Review*, *43*(5), 978–988. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2017.04.010>
- Snyder, M. (1974). Self-Monitoring of Expressive Behavior. *Journal of Personality & Social Psychology*, *30*(4), 526–537. <https://doi.org/10.1037/h0037039>
- Soens, E., & Claeys, A.-S. (2021). Can organizations guide employees' social media behavior? The benefits of incentive rather than restrictive social media guidelines. *Journal of Communication Management*, *25*(4), 454–471. <https://doi-org.ludwig.lub.lu.se/10.1108/JCOM-02-2021-0017>
- Solis, B., & Breakenridge, D. (2009). *Putting the public back in public relations: how social media is reinventing the aging business of PR*. FT Press.
- Storey, J. (2018). *Cultural theory and popular culture: an introduction* (8th ed.). Routledge.
- Sveningsson, S., & Alvesson, M. (2003). Managing managerial identities: Organizational fragmentation, discourse and identity struggle. *Human Relations*, *56*(10), 1163–1193. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00187267035610001>
- Tarafdar, M., Tu, Q., Ragu-Nathan, B. S., & Ragu-Nathan, T. S. (2007). The impact of technostress on role stress and productivity. *Journal of Management Information Systems*, *24*(1), 301–328. <http://doi.org/10.2753/MIS0742-1222240109>

- Thelen, P. D. (2020). Internal communicators' understanding of the definition and importance of employee advocacy. *Public Relations Review*, 46(4), 1–11. <https://doi-org.ludwig.lub.lu.se/10.1016/j.pubrev.2020.101946>
- Thelen, P. D., Yue, C. A., & Verghese, A. K. (2022). Increasing employee advocacy through supervisor motivating language: The mediating role of psychological conditions. *Public Relations Review*, 48(5), 1–13. <https://doi-org.ludwig.lub.lu.se/10.1016/j.pubrev.2022.102253>
- Tobback, E. (2019). Telling the world how skillful you are: Self-praise strategies on LinkedIn. *Discourse and Communication*, 13(6), 647–668. <https://doi-org.ludwig.lub.lu.se/10.1177/1750481319868854>
- van den Berg, A. C., & Verhoeven, J. W. M. (2017). Understanding social media governance: seizing opportunities, staying out of trouble. *Corporate Communications: An International Journal*, 22(1), 149–164. <https://doi-org.ludwig.lub.lu.se/10.1108/CCIJ-06-2015-0035>
- van Dijck, J. (2013). 'You have one identity': Performing the self on Facebook and LinkedIn. *Media, culture & society*, 35(2), 199–215. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0163443712468605>
- van Leeuwen, T. (2001). What is authenticity? *Discourse Studies*, 3(4), 392–397. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24047523>
- van Zoonen, W., Bartels, J., van Prooijen, A.-M., & Schouten, A. P. (2018). Explaining online ambassadorship behaviors on Facebook and LinkedIn. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 87, 354–362. <https://doi-org.ludwig.lub.lu.se/10.1016/j.chb.2018.05.031>
- van Zoonen, W., van der Meer, T. G. L. A., & Verhoeven, J. W. M. (2014). Employees work-related social-media use: His master's voice. *Public Relations Review*, 40(5), 850–852. <https://doi-org.ludwig.lub.lu.se/10.1016/j.pubrev.2014.07.001>
- van Zoonen, W., Verhoeven, J. W. M., & Vliegenthart, R. (2016). Social media's dark side: inducing boundary conflicts. *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, 31(8), 1297–1311. <https://doi-org.ludwig.lub.lu.se/10.1108/JMP-10-2015-0388>

- Verhoeven, J. W.M., & Madsen, V. T. (2022). Active Employee Communication Roles in Organizations: A Framework for Understanding and Discussing Communication Role Expectations. *International Journal of Strategic Communication*, 16(1), 91-110. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1553118X.2021.2014503>
- Wæraas, A., & Dahle, D. Y. (2020). When reputation management is people management: Implications for employee voice. *European Management Journal*, 38(2), 277–287. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.emj.2019.08.010>
- Weick, K. E. (1989). Theory Construction as Disciplined Imagination. *Academy of Management Review*, 14(4), 516–531. <https://doi.org/10.5465/AMR.1989.4308376>
- Weick, K. E., Sutcliffe, K. M., & Obstfeld, D. (2005). Organizing and the Process of Sensemaking. *Organization Science*, 16(4), 409–421. <https://doi-org.ludwig.lub.lu.se/10.1287/orsc.1050.0133>
- Xiong, L., King, C., & Piehler, R. (2013). “That’s not my job”: Exploring the employee perspective in the development of brand ambassadors. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 35, 348–359. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijhm.2013.07.009>
- Young, R. C. (2001). *Postcolonialism: A historical introduction*. Blackwell.
- Zerfass, A., Verčič, D., Nothhaft, H., & Werder, K. P. (2018). Strategic Communication: Defining the Field and its Contribution to Research and Practice. *International Journal of Strategic Communication*, 12(4), 487–505. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1553118X.2018.1493485>

Appendix 1

Requirement Catalogue Sampling

Group 1: Self-initiated employee ambassadors on LinkedIn participants

- Does the participant post regularly on LinkedIn?
- Does the participant fit into one of these groups?

Communication role	Definition	Example of roles and concepts from the literature
The embodier	Displaying organizational characteristics and values by embodying organizational traits through their communication and behavior while doing their job	Brand ambassador, brand builder, organizational citizen behavior, 'living the brand', responsible corporate citizen
The promotor	Strengthening corporate reputation by communicating positive messages about the organization	Brand ambassador, brand builder, employee advocate
The defender	Defending the organization against bad news or criticism from external stakeholders	Faith-holder, brand defender, crisis communicator
The relationship builder	Initiating, maintaining and improving stakeholder relations	Boundary spanner, employer branding, CSR communicator, corporate employee volunteer

Madsen & Verhoeven (2019): Excerpt of 'A typology of employee communication roles'

- Does the participant is financially rewarded for being an employee ambassador?

Group 2: Participants resisting employee ambassadorship on LinkedIn

- Does the participant post regularly on LinkedIn?
- Does the participant have a resisting attitude towards employee ambassadorship on LinkedIn?

Appendix 2

Interview Guide Disciplinary Power & Ambassadorship

Interviewee Details

Interview Date & Location	
Interviewee (Participant Number)	
Gender Interviewee	
Age Interviewee	
Function/Profession Interviewee	
Organization	

Introduction Interview

Thank you for your willingness to participate in this interview and in my study about employee ambassadorship on social media.

The interview will last between 45 to 60 minutes and will be recorded so that I can transcribe and evaluate our conversation. Your information is, of course, confidential. Your statements will be anonymized and not published with your name. The recordings will then be archived internally on my hard drive, to which only I will have access, and will be deleted once the study is concluded.

Before this interview, I sent you a form of consent. Do you have any questions there?

If everything is clear and fine with you, I will start now.

((START RECORDING))

1. Introduction

- 1.1. Do you want to tell me first a little bit something about your profession and work?
- 1.2. What is your professional background?
- 1.3. How long have you been working at your current workplace?

2. Social Media Usage in General (optional)

- 2.1. How would you describe your Social Media Usage in General?
- 2.2. Which platforms do you use?
 - How do you use them?
- 2.3. Does your LinkedIn differ from other platforms?
 - Why and how? / Why not?
- 2.4. How does your environment use social media?
 - What is different from your own usage?

3. LinkedIn and Ambassadorship

- 3.1. What type of things do you like about LinkedIn?
- 3.2. What things do you post/talk about on LinkedIn in relation to your work/organization?
- 3.3. Did you do that already from the beginning? (From when you started working there?)
 - Was it different from other previous organizations? If yes, what changed?
- 3.4. Why do you communicate about your organization on LinkedIn?
 - When do you communicate about your organization? Examples?
- 3.5. Would you consider yourself an “ambassador” or “brand representative” of your organization on LinkedIn? Why / why not?
- 3.6. Would you consider your LinkedIn communication as part of your job?
 - When do you post? During work time or in private time?
- 3.7. How does/did your social media activity influence your relationship with your employer?
 - Identity?
 - Interpersonal connection?
- 3.8. How could your posts / your communication on LinkedIn influence...
 - Your organization?
 - Your job?
 - Your colleagues?
- 3.9. How does your private network react to your LinkedIn activities?
- 3.10. How does your professional network react to your LinkedIn activities?

4. Self-Monitoring / Self-Censorship

- 4.1. When you create and publish a post, how do you proceed?
- Which elements do you keep in mind?
 - Example?
- 4.2. What influences your post? (Topics, Events etc.)
- Example?
- 4.3. What challenges occur in creating your communication on LinkedIn?
- 4.4. What do you hope to accomplish when you post something about your organization or your work?
- What are your expectations?
 - Does it usually match? Why? Why not?
- 4.5. What kind of impact do you think your posts have on your social network connections?

-
- 4.6. What are things you do **not** talk about on LinkedIn about your work or organization?
- Would you like to be able to talk about them? Why? Why not?
- 4.7. How do you know what you can talk about and what not?
- In general
 - About your organization
 - About your job
- 4.8. Which risks do you see in your communication on LinkedIn – especially regarding your organization?
- 4.9. Do you see any negative sides of your engagement on LinkedIn? Why?
- Or LinkedIn communication in general?
 - Examples?

5. Visibility / Surveillance

- 5.1. The digital architecture of LinkedIn is a bit different than on other platforms like Instagram and Facebook. Because when you like or comment on something on LinkedIn, everyone can see it. So the visibility of your activities is way bigger.
- Have you considered this?
 - How does that make you feel?
 - How do you perceive this constant visibility?

- 5.2. Through your regular communication, I think we can say that you constantly become somehow the “face” of the organization (brand representative)
How does this make you feel?
- Do you keep that in mind while you engage on LinkedIn?
- 5.3. How is the content of your LinkedIn communication different than when you would talk with someone face to face? (Is there a difference)
- 5.4. Do you observe what your colleagues/Social network is doing on LinkedIn? Why? Why not?
- 5.5. Can you think of an example where you felt uncomfortable with this visibility?
- 5.6. Was there an occasion that you did something you regret retrospectively?
- If so, why?
 - If not – how do you avoid such situations?

6. Future

- 6.1. In your opinion, do you think your LinkedIn communication will change?
- 6.2. Do you think in general, the communication on LinkedIn will change? Why? Why not?

7. Conclusion

- 7.1. To conclude, is there anything that you think we have not touched on yet or a comment you would like to add?
- 7.2. Could I contact you in case of follow-up questions or clarifications?

Thank you again for your participation. In the next steps, I will transcribe and analyze the audio files. Would you like to receive the report afterward? If so, I would be happy to send it to you.

Do you have any questions?

If not, I would stop the audio recording and end the interview.

((END RECORDING))

Appendix 3

Interview Guide Resistance & Ambassadorship

Interviewee Details

Interview Date & Location	
Interviewee (Participant Number)	
Gender Interviewee	
Age Interviewee	
Function/Profession Interviewee	
Organization	

Introduction Interview

Thank you for your willingness to participate in this interview and in my study about employee ambassadorship on social media. To get a more holistic and critical view of this phenomenon, I include participants that resist this notion to understand why certain employees do not follow it.

The interview will last between 45 to 60 minutes and will be recorded so that I am able to transcribe and evaluate our conversation. Your information is, of course, confidential. Therefore, your statements will be anonymized and not published with your name. The recordings will then be archived internally on my hard drive, to which only I will have access, and will be deleted once the study is concluded.

Before this interview, I sent you a form of consent. Do you have any questions there?

If everything is clear and fine with you, I will start now.

((START RECORDING))

1. Introduction

- 1.1. Do you want to tell me first about your profession and work?
- 1.2. What is your professional background?
- 1.3. How long have you been working at your current workplace?

2. Social Media Usage

- 2.1. How would you describe your relationship with Social Media?
 - Was it always like this? What has changed?
 - Why are you not active?

LinkedIn

- 2.2. You do have a LinkedIn Profile – but you are not posting anything. Why is that?
 - How do you use it?
- 2.3. Is a personal profile on LinkedIn a useful platform for discussing work-related issues?
 - And what about personal issues? Or do you prefer to keep work and personal life separate on social media? Why?
- 2.4. How do the social media or LinkedIn activities of your private environment differ?

3. (Non-)Ambassadorship & LinkedIn

- 3.1. Would you describe yourself as an “ambassador” or “brand representative” of your organization?
 - Why/Why not?
- 3.2. Have you ever considered becoming an ambassador (on Social Media)?
 - Why/Why not?
- 3.3. Do you understand why people take on the role of ambassadors on social media?
 - Why/Why not?
- 3.4. In your opinion: Why do you think other employees are active on LinkedIn?
- 3.5. What do you think are the main drivers that people use their free time to post about their job/work?
- 3.6. When you see a post of someone promoting his/her job constantly on Social Media. How does this make you feel?

- 3.7. Studies have shown that the self-initiated communication of employees on Social Media is highly effective for the authenticity and legitimacy of an Organization. Why do you want to refrain from supporting your organization in its branding activities?
- 3.8. What do you think are the negative side effects of all this LinkedIn communication?
 - Same reasons as why you don't communicate?
 - Where does the reason lie? At the people who use it or the platform itself

4. Control & Power Dimensions

- 4.1. Have you ever felt pressure from your employer or colleagues to promote the company or its products/services on LinkedIn?
 - If so, can you describe how you responded to this pressure?
 - Pressure from somewhere else? (Institutions?)
- 4.2. In your personal and professional network, can you see a change in their communication on LinkedIn – or on Social Media?
- 4.3. In previous interviews, participants mentioned that LinkedIn is essential if you want to find work. What is your opinion on this?
- 4.4. Do you feel some pressure from your personal environment to become more active on Social Media/LinkedIn?

5. Visibility / Surveillance

- 5.1. As you still are on LinkedIn, your career (also your likes and comments if you do) are still visible on LinkedIn. How do you feel about this visibility?
 - Do you perceive it as surveillance?
- 5.2. Do you talk with your surrounding about this constant visibility that is taking place nowadays?
 - What are the replies?
- 5.3. Do you observe what your network is doing?
 - Why? Why not?

6. Future

- 6.1. In your opinion, do you think your LinkedIn activity will change in the future?
 - What needs to happen that you become more active on LinkedIn?
- 6.2. Do you think in general, the communication on LinkedIn will change? Why? Why not?
 - In which directions?
- 6.3. What kind of change do you wish to see in the whole social media sphere in the future?
 - Specific on LinkedIn?
 - And in relation to employee communication on Social Media?

7. Conclusion

- 7.1. To conclude, is there anything that you think we haven't touched on yet or a comment you would like to add?
- 7.2. Could I contact you in case of follow-up questions or clarifications?

Thank you again for your participation. In the next steps, I will transcribe and analyze the audio files. Would you like to receive the report afterward? If so, I would be happy to send it to you. Do you have any questions? If not, I would now stop the audio recording and end the interview.

((END RECORDING))

Appendix 4

Information Sheet

Information Sheet

Master Thesis Study on Self-Initiated Employee Ambassadorship on Social Media

Dear participant,

Thank you for participating in the study on *Self-initiated Employee Ambassadorship on Social Media*. When I first contacted you, I already informed you about the content of the study. However, I would like to ask you to read the following details and to contact me if you have any questions or uncertainties.

Focus and Aim of the Study

Social media has taken on enormous significance in the corporate world. It is no longer just organizations that use these channels to get in touch with stakeholders, but also employees are increasingly using channels such as LinkedIn and participate actively as communicators/ambassadors in their employer's communications via their personal profiles.

Thus, the aim of the study is to gain a deeper understanding of this phenomenon and to explore the motives of self-initiated employee ambassadors on social media. Similarly, the purpose behind the findings of this study is to provide organizations with an alternative and holistic perspective of employee communication on social media.

Methodology

The collection of empirical material (data) will be done through deep interviews with employees from different organizations and different roles. The interviews will be conducted either in person or online via Zoom. The interviews will be held in German (preferably high German) or English.

The data collection process will look as follows:

1. The participant will participate in a 45-60 minute deep interview on the abovementioned topic.

2. Interviews will be audio recorded (based on informed consent)
3. Interview Audio Recording will be transcribed. The participant will stay anonymous at any time, and only the researcher can access the transcripts and audio files.
 - a. If required, the transcriptions can be sent out for review purposes.
4. After the approval of the study, collected data will be deleted. The study and its results will be published in Lund University's database for student theses.

Ethical Concerns

- **Confidentiality:** At any time, the participant's name, position, employer, or further personal data will be anonymized. No personal information will be shared, and the participant's privacy will be secured at all times.
- **Withdrawing:** Before, during, or after the interview, the participant is free to withdraw from his/her participation in the study.
- **Potential Risk:** There is no potential risk identified that could physically or psychologically harm the participant.

Please keep this document for your own record.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me on:



Appendix 5

Informed Consent Form

Informed Consent for participation in a research interview

Master Thesis Study on Self-Initiated Employee Ambassadorship on Social Media

I, _____, agree to participate in a research study led by Alessandra Sossini (researcher) from Lund University, Campus Helsingborg, Helsingborg. The purpose of this document is to specify the terms of my participation in the project through being interviewed.

1. I have been given sufficient information about the research project. The purpose of my participation as an interviewee in this project has been explained to me and is clear.
2. My participation as an Interviewee in this project is voluntary. There is no explicit or implicit coercion to participate.
3. Participation involves being interviewed by Alessandra Sossini (researcher), from Lund University. The interview will last between 45 and 60 minutes. I allow the researcher to take written notes during the interview. I also allow the recording (audiotape) of the interview. It is clear to me that in case I do not want the interview to be recorded, I am at any point in time fully entitled to withdraw from participation.
4. I have the right not to answer any questions. If I feel uncomfortable in any way during the interview session, I have the right to withdraw from the interview at any point in time.
5. I have been given the explicit guarantee that the researcher will not identify me by name in any reports using information obtained from this interview and that my confidentiality as a participant in this study will remain secure. In all cases, subsequent uses of records and data will be subject to standard data use policies at Lund University (Data Protection Policy).
6. I have the right to withdraw my consent at any time.

Date Participant's Signature

Date Researcher's Signature

Please keep this document for your own record.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me on:

