



To explore the attitudes of banking employees in SA towards voluntary brand ambassadorship



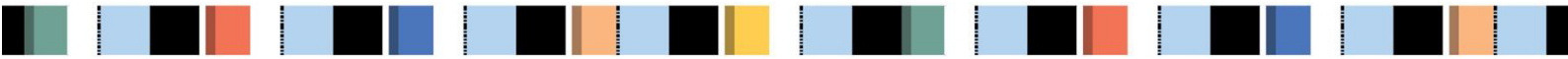
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31 / 10 / 2024



DECLARATION

I, **Agnes Ramaesele Hlagala**, declare that this Innovation Project submitted for the **Master of Business Administration** degree to The Independent Institute of Education is my own, unaided work and has not been previously submitted to another University or Higher Education Institution for degree purposes. Any assistance that I have received has been duly acknowledged in the report.

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ABSTRACT

The South African banking sector has undergone a significant transformation, moving from a traditional branch-centric model to an era of anytime-anywhere banking driven by consumer demand for real-time service and personalised experiences. This technological evolution has also reshaped the roles of banking employees, making them more familiar with digital devices and the bank's product offerings, enabling them to interact more effectively with customers. However, there is limited research on the role of banking employees as brand ambassadors, particularly within the South African context. This gap presents an opportunity to explore how employees perceive voluntary brand ambassadorship and their willingness to adopt such roles beyond regular work hours.

Research indicates that employees' attitudes and behaviours are crucial for organisational success, and global organisations are increasingly leveraging employees in their marketing strategies to enhance brand image and customer retention. This study investigates their perceptions and intentions, seeking to provide insights into the factors influencing voluntary brand ambassadorship beyond regular work hours.

The researcher adopted a qualitative interpretative approach, utilising semi-structured interviews with a purposive sample of ten banking employees (five managerial and five non-managerial) from various banks in Gauteng, South Africa. The sample size was deemed appropriate, enabling in-depth insights into employee perceptions, and achieving data saturation, ensuring no new insights emerged during analysis. Snowball sampling was used to identify additional participants meeting the inclusion criteria. The study employed thematic analysis to identify recurring themes in employee perceptions and motivation.

The findings indicate that most banking employees are familiar with brand ambassadorship and prefer voluntary participation. Those aligned with the brand's values and knowledgeable about its products are more enthusiastic about the role, especially when supported by policies and recognition. Managerial employees expressed more reluctance than non-managerial employees due to role misalignment, while the latter had a more positive attitude driven by personal traits and pride in the brand. Benefits such as financial rewards and recognition motivate participation, while concerns about emotional distress and reputational risks hinder it. A supportive organisational culture can help address these concerns and foster inclusive and effective brand ambassadorship.

Keywords: organisational behaviour; employee attitudes; employee engagement; employee brand ambassadorship; thematic analysis; voluntary brand ambassadorship

TABLE OF CONTENTS

DECLARATION.....	i
ABSTRACT	ii
LIST OF ANNEXURES	vi
LIST OF FIGURES	vii
LIST OF TABLES	viii

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

1.1	INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.2	BACKGROUND.....	1
1.3	RESEARCH MOTIVATION	3
1.4	PRELIMINARY LITERATURE REVIEW	4
1.5	PROBLEM STATEMENT	5
1.6	PURPOSE OF THE STUDY	6
1.7	RESEARCH OBJECTIVES	7
1.8	LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY	7
1.9	ASSUMPTION OF THE STUDY	8
1.10	OVERVIEW OF RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	8
1.11	ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS	9
1.12	QUALITY CONSIDERATIONS	9
1.13	CHAPTER OUTLINE	10
1.14	SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY.....	11
1.15	CONCLUSION	11

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1	INTRODUCTION.....	12
-----	-------------------	----

2.2	DEFINING KEY TERMS	12
2.2.1	Organisational Behaviour.....	12
2.2.2	Employee Attitudes.....	12
2.2.3	Employee Engagement.....	13
2.2.4	Voluntary Employee Brand Ambassador.....	13
2.3	THE ROLE OF EMPLOYEE AMBASSADORS	13
2.4	ATTITUDES OF EMPLOYEES TOWARDS BRAND AMBASSADORSHIP	17
2.5	THE IMPORTANCE OF MOTIVATION	20
2.6	POTENTIAL BENEFITS	22
2.7	KNOWLEDGE GAP	23
2.8	CONCLUSION	25

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1	INTRODUCTION.....	27
3.2	RESEARCH PHILOSOPHY (INTERPRETIVISM).....	27
3.3	RESEARCH APPROACH (INDUCTIVE)	28
3.4	METHODOLOGICAL CHOICE (QUALITATIVE).....	29
3.5	RESEARCH STRATEGY (PHENOMENOLOGY)	29
3.6	TIME HORIZON (CROSS-SECTIONAL)	29
3.7	DATA COLLECTION METHOD.....	30
3.7.1	Research Population and Sampling Size.....	30
3.7.2	Sampling Method	31
3.7.3	Data Collection Procedure	31
3.8	ETHICAL CONSIDERATION	32
3.9	DATA ANALYSIS	35
3.10	CONCLUSION	38

CHAPTER 4

DATA ANALYSIS

4.1	INTRODUCTION.....	39
4.2	SAMPLE PROFILE	39
4.3	INTERVIEW TECHNIQUE.....	40
4.4	PRESENTATION OF THEMES AND CODES	41
4.4.1	The role of brand ambassadorship	41
4.4.2	Attitudes of managerial and non-managerial employees	45
4.4.3	Personal potential benefits and disadvantages	51
4.5	CONCLUSION	54

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1	INTRODUCTION.....	56
5.2	OVERVIEW OF THE RESEARCH.....	56
5.3	DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS.....	57
5.4	LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY	66
5.5	CONTRIBUTION OF THE STUDY	67
5.6	RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH	68
5.7	CONCLUSION	68

REFERENCE LIST	70
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LIST OF ANNEXURES

ANNEXURE A: SAMPLE OF INTERVIEW GUIDE	80
ANNEXURE B: SAMPLE OF PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM	81
ANNEXURE C: SAMPLE OF PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM	83
ANNEXURE D: SAMPLE OF AUDIO RECORDING FORM	85
ANNEXURE E: ETHICAL CLEARANCE LETTER.....	86
ANNEXURE F: CODES AND THEMES ADDRESSING RESEARCH QUESTION 2 ..	87
ANNEXURE G: PROOFREADING CERTIFICATE	91
ANNEXURE H: SIMILARITY REPORT	92
ANNEXURE I: SUPERVISORS PERMISSION TO SUBMIT	93

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1.1: Research design and methodology for this study	9
Figure 2.1: The conceptual framework for this study	25
Figure 4.1: An overview of the codes concerned with the brand ambassador role	42
Figure 4.2: Emerged themes and code frequency per employment group.....	46
Figure 4.3: Organisational support to encourage participation.....	53
Figure 4.4: Overview of emerged themes and research questions.....	57

LIST OF TABLES

Table 4.1: Overview of the participants	Error! Bookmark not defined.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter One of this research report provides an overview of the study by introducing the topic of South African banking employees' attitudes regarding voluntary brand ambassadorship outside the typical nine-to-five working hours. The study assessed banking employees' perceptions, familiarity, and attitudes towards voluntary brand ambassadorship. The foundational assumption is that banking employees' actions are aligned with organisational vision, goals, and objectives. Therefore, having them as voluntary brand ambassadors would inspire them to assume a more active role in representing their banks, help them share their knowledge and experiences, and foster long-term relationships between their brand and customers.

This chapter explains the research context, motivation, problem statement, and objectives that framed this study and summarises the preliminary literature review, overview of the research methodology, and ethical considerations.

1.2 BACKGROUND

Globalisation has influenced the new work ethos in marketing, with numerous organisations leveraging employees' support to boost their brand image and attract and retain customers. As a result, employee's roles and responsibilities extend beyond merely satisfying existing customers; they also aim to attract new customers by providing exceptional service to cultivate a loyal customer base and word-of-mouth promotion (Gupta, 2023). However, organisations often overlook the need to integrate employee engagement into their overall branding strategy (Boyd & Sutherland, 2006; Burmann & Zeplin, 2005).

In this context, employees should serve as intermediaries, linking the organisation with its customers, particularly in a world dominated by virtual and digital processes (Karatepe, Ozturk, & Kim, 2019). Consumers yearn for more personal interactions, and the banking industry should acknowledge the significance of internal brand communication in conveying the brand's values and commitments to its employees, empowering them to embody the brand and deliver consistent experiences to external stakeholders (Gupta, 2023; Taku, Saini & Abratt, 2022). Such a strategy will enable companies to build long-lasting relationships with internal and external stakeholders.

There appears to be limited research exploring South African banking employees' familiarity with voluntary brand ambassadorship, an emerging concept globally. This study explored the involvement of South African banking employees in voluntary brand ambassadorship by assessing their perceptions, attitudes, and motivations and offering valuable insights into the representation of their organisations beyond their regular working hours.

The South African banking sector comprises nineteen registered banks, providing financial services to individuals and businesses, employing more than 154,000 employees, and supporting the country's social and economic development (The Banking Association of South Africa, 2020). This emerging market is regulated strictly to align with developed nations' systems (Taku, Saini & Abratt, 2022).

The banking industry has transitioned to anywhere, anytime banking (Kaur, 2015). This approach enables customers to access the banking functionality at a convenient location through various channels, including ATMs, mobile apps, or online platforms, thus enabling them to choose the most suitable options for their diverse needs. This accessibility empowers customers to determine if they are highly satisfied or dissatisfied with the level of service provided, considering aspects such as accessibility of account management, innovative technology, the quality of customer support, and the efficiency of transaction processing. The abovementioned factors influence the customer's decision to continue or discontinue their relationship with the bank. They may advocate for the bank or speak negatively about it, thus discouraging potential customers.

The previous discussion explains that we live in an era when most employees are adept at utilising digital devices and have rapidly transitioned from relying on physical banking branches to effortlessly managing their finances through various mobile platforms. These devices not only enable them to manage their finances but also to gain insights into how their employer is perceived by others outside the organisation. Banking employees are familiar with the company's products and play a crucial role in its operations. Their attitudes and actions, directly or indirectly, influence the brand's reputation, and their job security and career growth are closely linked to the company's success. This influence extends beyond working hours through social media engagement, word of mouth, and community involvement. Therefore, organisational success depends on employees' behaviour and efforts towards delivering the brand promise. Consequently, academia and practitioners focus on internal branding (Punjaisri & Wilson, 2017).

Based on the information presented above, it is necessary to explore employees' attitudes to identify potential challenges and opportunities associated with voluntary brand ambassadorship beyond regular work hours. Researchers in banking and the financial sector have consistently studied banking employee's perceptions regarding the evolving global banking landscape (Kaur, 2015). Their views are valuable to every organisation, and without them, companies would struggle to achieve their financial and operational goals. Supriyanto, Wiyono, and Burhanuddin (2021) note that the determinants of customer loyalty concerning banking services include achieving high-quality service and customer satisfaction. Therefore, researchers recommend that customer satisfaction should always be maintained to increase customer loyalty.

1.3 RESEARCH MOTIVATION

This research was motivated by the increasing recognition of employee brand ambassadorship and the need to close the observed gap by understanding this concept's application within the South African banking sector. The current body of research on brand ambassadorship lacks emphasis on voluntary ambassadorship amplifying influence beyond the typical nine-to-five work hours, with prior studies' primary focus on brand management rather than voluntary brand ambassadorship.

Gone are the days when South African banking employees were seen as just workers expected to fulfil specific contractual obligations within a fixed schedule of 09:00 to 17:00. This perception changed due to the digital transformation expedited by the COVID-19 pandemic. This digital transformation profoundly influences young consumers' behaviours (Nisa & Pramesti, 2020). Most users who engage in social networks are from the younger generation living an active lifestyle. Consequently, organisations should be understanding and supportive in addressing the diverse needs of this new generation of consumers (Moiseeva et al., 2021). Businesses should be prepared to meet young consumers' expectations by being responsive and attentive to their needs.

As is typical of most developing nations, South Africa (SA) has a predominantly youthful population. According to Statistics South Africa (StatsSA, 2024:6), the youth population in South Africa grew from 14.7 million in 1996 to 21.6 million in 2022, an increase of 6.9 million individuals or 38.6%. In an era where digital transformation is one of the key transitions with "catalytic and multiplier effects", South African Internet users increased from 24% of the population in 2010 to 72.31% in 2021 (World Bank, 2024). Harvard Business's review revealed that smartphone users spend an average of 2.5 hours a day checking their phones (Blankson, 2019). This statistic implies that employees have free time

available and are more informed and connected than ever before. This newfound availability, heightened awareness, and increased connectivity can encourage participation, providing opportunities for engagement beyond core responsibilities.

The above discussion implies that employees can be considered key stakeholders in driving organisational success. Foss and Klein (2023) refer to companies prioritising socially progressive causes focusing on diversity, equity, and inclusion as “woke”. Such entities are driven by internal organisational factors, including inclusivity, to enable a corporate culture. These companies hire individuals as brand ambassadors to relay the corporate identity, amplify brand awareness, and generate sales across multiple platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube (Karlsson, 2018; Moiseeva et al., 2021).

The research findings reveal the importance of exploring the emerging strategy of utilising talent from within to add value to existing knowledge. Utilising South African banking employees as voluntary brand ambassadors beyond their formal job responsibilities will create an inclusive, engaging, and equitable work environment. This will, in turn, provide employees with more meaning and fulfilment in their daily work routines while understanding their unique needs by embracing diversity (Kular et al., 2008).

This study’s value lies in its ability to explain the importance of the organisation’s brand reputation, potentially improving how the public views it. The research findings will provide valuable insights to guide banks’ decisions to either refrain from or embrace the new strategy to turn willing employees into brand ambassadors.

1.4 PRELIMINARY LITERATURE REVIEW

The trend of utilising brand ambassadors has become popular in recent years, with companies using these individuals to endorse their products and services through effective marketing techniques, such as word-of-mouth advertising (Karlsson, 2018). An ambassador is a representative (Fisher-Buttinger & Vallaster, 2008), and employees embrace this new role (Andersson, 2019). However, despite employees bringing a brand to life for customers, their efforts are often overlooked (Andersson, 2019; Mitchell, 2002).

Organisational behaviour assists in explaining how individuals and groups interpret events, react, and conduct themselves within organisational settings (Griffin & Phillips, 2023). Consequently, every organisation should understand and manage employees’ attitudes as they help to explain their behaviour. Employees’ conduct influences the customer experience and service branding (Schlager, Bodderas, Maas, & Luc Cachelin, 2011). Attitudes are

predictors of future behaviour (Robbins, Oderdaah, & Roodt, 2001:75) and may affect the firm's performance (Ertz, Rouziès, & Sarigöllü, 2022).

According to the two-factor theory, as indicated by Griffin and Phillips (2023), it is essential to consider motivators and hygiene factors for successful employee motivation as they address different needs. Motivating factors drive employees to perform better, while hygiene factors help prevent dissatisfaction. Individuals who exhibit organisational citizenship behaviour naturally extend their actions to go beyond their role expectations in support of the organisation (Burmam & Zeplin, 2005). The theory of planned behaviour suggests that employees' intentions and attitudes influence their actions, subject to social norms (Ajzen, 1991). These theories provide a comprehensive approach to exploring banking employees' attitudes towards voluntary brand ambassadorship because they consider internal and external factors that can impact their willingness to engage in ambassadorial activities.

In Chapter Two of this research report, the researcher analyses relevant literature focusing on examining the selected theories, namely organisational citizenship behaviour, the theory of planned behaviour, and the two-factor theory. The chapter reviews how these theories relate to employees' attitudes towards voluntary brand ambassadorship. A comprehensive assessment of relevant theories helps to explain factors that influence motivation to serve as brand ambassadors, clarifies the role of brand ambassadorship, and helps predict what might occur in specific situations. Understanding the importance of motivation is crucial for organisational success and employee satisfaction because motivation can help to identify strategies to enhance voluntary participation.

1.5 PROBLEM STATEMENT

Businesses compete for territory in a limited market space, and organisations with poor publicity may risk losing potential and loyal customers. Although numerous company executives understand the importance of communicating the company's strategy and direction to its employees, many neglect internal marketing. They presume that everyone understands the brand's significance and distribute newsletters and memos to convey unique aspects of the company's brand (Mitchell, 2002).

The concept of using employees to serve as brand ambassadors is gaining popularity globally because of its ability to strengthen a company's reputation and shape end users' attitudes towards the brand (Šontaitė-Petkevičienė & Vaščėgaitė, 2022). Limited evidence exists about South African banking employees engaging in ambassadorial activities beyond regular work hours. Their possible disengagement poses significant challenges to the banking sector

and may lead to overlooking employees' expectations, dissatisfied customers, and missed opportunities to gain a competitive advantage.

Research conducted by DataEQ (2021) indicates that most South African banks' reputations are declining because these banks are not meeting their customers' escalating demands, and the surge of unanswered requests on social media may result in unnecessary reputational damage. Customers have a strong dislike for waiting, hence the need for local banks to redesign their processes to shorten the waiting time and enhance their customers' perceptions. Managers can seek input from their employees, enabling them to offer feedback on novel customer problems (Karatepe, Ozturk, & Kim, 2019). Digital marketing is deemed effective due to the rising number of online transactions, thus prompting many organisations to leverage brand ambassadors to promote their products (Nisa & Pramesti, 2020).

Evidence from practical experience indicates that South African banks struggle to uphold a positive brand image among consumers. Hence, it is necessary to explore if banking employees would be open to participating in ambassadorial activities outside regular work hours. The risk of not addressing the challenges can lead to missed opportunities, lowered employee morale, decreased customer retention, and poor financial performance.

1.6 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

Banking employees serve as links between internal banking operations and external interactions with customers (Yoo & Jung, 2019). Therefore, most banks seek to understand their employees' attitudes and perceptions (Kaur, 2015). According to a Russian study, employees are aware of their position as brand ambassadors (Moiseeva et al., 2021). This finding implies that employees are conscious of their actions and communications when representing their brand. The researcher built on this foundation by exploring the awareness and understanding among South African banking employees regarding voluntary brand ambassadorship to determine if similar awareness exists among them, specifically in Gauteng Province. The significance of employees serving as brand ambassadors cannot be overstated because there is a correlation between their behaviours and their companies' reputations.

The purpose of the study was to explore the attitudes of South African banking employees towards voluntary brand ambassadorship through the lens of the theory of planned behaviour, organisational citizenship behaviour, and the two-factor theory. The study compared the perspectives of managerial versus non-managerial employees to understand the potential differences in their attitudes towards ambassadorship. This focus allows for the

examination of how organisational hierarchy may influence banking employees' perceptions and their willingness to engage voluntarily in brand ambassadorship activities outside regular work hours.

This study also explored the perceived benefits and disadvantages of serving as a brand ambassador and the drivers of employee engagement towards voluntary brand ambassadorship. It investigated the extent to which South African banking employees enthusiastically embraced the role of brand ambassadorship, with a resounding "yay" or "nay". This focus helped to uncover the underlying factors influencing participation and, in turn, can help to design tailored developmental strategies for brand ambassadorship, enabling the banking industry to address employees' specific needs, preferences, and concerns.

1.7 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The study did not aim to advocate for or discourage employee brand ambassadorship but to gain a deeper understanding of banking employees' experiences regarding voluntary brand ambassadorship, particularly beyond regular working hours.

The objectives listed below were pursued to achieve the stated aim.

- i. To understand the role of employee brand ambassadorship from South African banking employees' perspectives. The findings can enable the banking sector to identify potential gaps in understanding and assess whether or not employees fully understand the concept of brand ambassadorship.
- ii. To understand South African banking employees' attitudes towards voluntary brand ambassadorship beyond regular work hours. The banking sector can leverage the insights to enhance employee engagement, encourage positive behaviours, and foster a cohesive organisational culture.
- iii. To identify the potential benefits and disadvantages associated with voluntary ambassadorial activities as perceived by South African banking employees. This understanding can enable the banking sector to identify potential barriers or motivators that may impact employees' willingness to participate in brand ambassadorship activities.

1.8 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Theofanidis and Fountouki (2018) describe research limitations as external factors beyond the researcher's control that influence the research structure, findings, and interpretations

and thus warrant acknowledgement in the research report. O’Leary (2004) encourages researchers to outline and acknowledge the study’s limitations to mitigate the risk of misinterpreting the data.

The findings and conclusions drawn from this study cannot be generalised to the broader population due to the limited sample size, which may also limit the representation of perspectives among the research participants. Although not all banks were represented and banking employees from all nine South African provinces did not participate in this study, the findings remain relevant and applicable to understanding banking employees’ broader role in serving as brand ambassadors within the South African banking sector.

The researcher experienced challenges in gaining access to managerial banking employees due to their demanding workloads, and employees with higher levels of motivation may be overrepresented compared to employees with conflicting commitments. The researcher leveraged the LinkedIn network to access participants to ensure flexible options for interviews, such as after-hours or weekends, to mitigate time constraints and prevent sampling bias.

1.9 ASSUMPTION OF THE STUDY

This study operated under the assumptions listed below.

- i. Banking employees can play a significant role as brand ambassadors because they have knowledge and experience regarding their bank.
- ii. Banking employees can use their knowledge and experience to influence consumers’ feelings, perceptions, and responses to their bank’s brand.
- iii. Banking employees refrain from actions that could endanger the bank.
- iv. Insights gained from banking employees in Gauteng are transferrable to comparable banking situations in other provinces.

1.10 OVERVIEW OF RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study was designed to gain rich insight and explore the lived experiences of banking employees. The researcher employed a manageable sample size of fourteen participants residing in Gauteng Province, of which seven were at the managerial level and seven at the non-managerial level. The research methodology employed in this study is explained and justified in Chapter Three. Figure 1.1 below illustrates a high-level overview of the plan for collecting and analysing data for this study. The figure is based on Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill’s (2003) research onion.

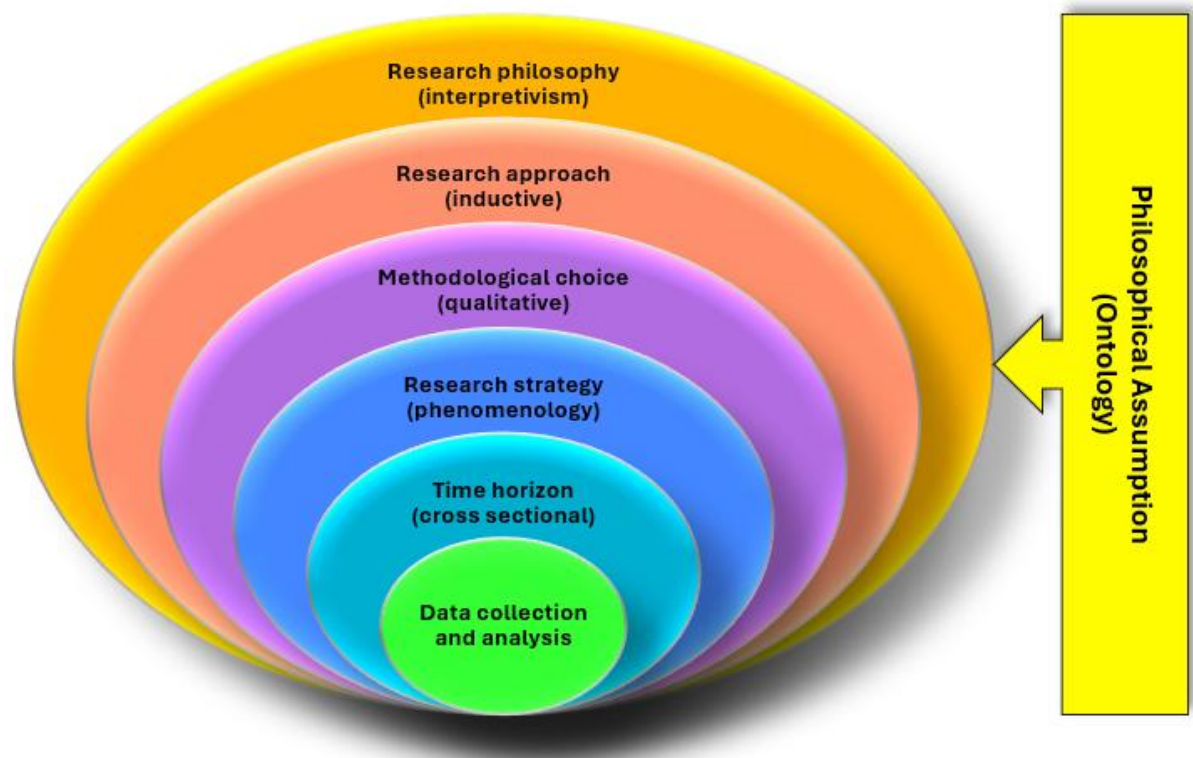


Figure 1.1: Research design and methodology for this study

Source: Researcher's construct based on Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2003)

1.11 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

In compliance with the IIE Higher Degree ethical guidelines, informed consent was obtained from all participants before interviews began, ensuring they understood the study's purpose, their rights, and the confidentiality of their responses. Audio consent forms were also provided to ensure participants understood the measures taken to protect and store the recordings. They were requested to complete and sign the consent forms agreeing to take part in the research.

A gatekeeper's letter was not applicable in this study, participants were invited to share their personal experiences. A detailed discussion of the ethical considerations will be presented in Chapter Three.

1.12 QUALITY CONSIDERATIONS

Trustworthiness in a qualitative study is often associated with credibility, dependability, conformability, transferability, and authenticity. It aims to reinforce the assertion that the findings of the inquiry warrant significant attention (Elo et al., 2014). Chapter Three discusses quality considerations for this study in detail.

1.13 CHAPTER OUTLINE

The section below describes the structure of the research report by outlining each chapter.

Chapter 1: Introduction

This chapter provides context for the research topic, emphasising the importance and qualification for conducting this study. It also offers a broad overview of the research methodology and the ethical issues.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter provides a comprehensive review of the existing literature and theoretical perspectives relevant to the study of banking employees' attitudes towards voluntary brand ambassadorship. The chapter identifies gaps in the literature, including those that need to be addressed in this study.

Chapter 3: Research Design and Methodology

This chapter details the methodology of the study using the research onion by Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill's (2003) to outline the research process. The chapter provides a rationale for the chosen research approach, methods for data collection, and the tools employed.

Chapter 4: Data Analysis

This chapter analyses and interprets data obtained from non-standardised semi-structured interviews, detailing the data preparation process, coding procedures, and theme development.

Chapter 5: Findings, Recommendations, and Conclusion

This chapter serves as the conclusion of the study, presenting the main findings of the study in relation to the reviewed literature to highlight their relevance and implications for future research.

Appendices

This is the last part of the report, where the researcher attached the applicable appendices: the interview schedule, consent form, and an audio recording consent form.

1.14 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The study of organisational behaviour helps explain how individuals and groups interpret events and behave within the organisational context. The significance of exploring banking employees' attitudes regarding voluntary brand ambassadorship encompasses the dimensions explained below.

Firstly, understanding the role of employee brand ambassadors from South African banking employees' perspective will enable the banking sector to identify potential gaps in brand ambassadorship beyond regular work hours.

Secondly, the holistic understanding of employees' perceptions and attitudes will allow the researcher and the banking sector to determine whether Gauteng banking employees are enthusiastic or hesitant about taking on the brand ambassador role. Understanding these attitudes provides valuable insights into banking employees' willingness to represent their organisation in that role, particularly beyond regular work hours. The banking sector can leverage these insights to enhance employee engagement, encourage positive behaviours, foster a cohesive organisational culture, and promote a positive image of their organisation.

Lastly, understanding how employees perceive the personal benefits and disadvantages associated with voluntary brand ambassadorship beyond regular work hours will enable the banking sector to identify potential barriers and motivators that may impact employees' willingness to participate in brand ambassadorship activities. These benefits can be used to support development programmes utilising banking employees as brand ambassadors, and the drawbacks can be used to highlight the potential risks and challenges that prevent employees from undertaking the brand ambassadorship role.

1.15 CONCLUSION

Chapter One introduced the study, outlined the research context, explained the problem statement, aim and objectives, presented a preliminary literature review, provided an overview of the research methodology, and discussed relevant ethical issues. The chapter highlighted the significance of voluntary brand ambassadorship among employees, asserting that their involvement is essential for influencing customer loyalty and brand perception.

This chapter laid the foundation for subsequent chapters in this thesis. In the next chapter, the researcher analyses the relevant literature to understand existing knowledge, identify gaps, and ensure the research builds on existing knowledge.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter One presented a detailed overview of exploring banking employees' attitudes towards voluntary brand ambassadorship. The researcher established the relevance and significance of the research topic and clarified the study's focus and direction. In this chapter, the researcher reviews the relevant literature. A literature review is an academic report indicating the author's understanding of the research topic by analysing previously published studies relating to the chosen topic and identifying gaps that must be addressed (Paul & Criado, 2020). The objective of this study was to understand employees' familiarity with the concept of voluntary brand ambassadors, their attitudes towards this role, and the perceived benefits and drawbacks associated with taking on this role.

This chapter reviews existing literature related to brand ambassadorship, the planned behaviour and two-factor theories, and the three aspects of attitudes to understand banking employees' attitudes (cognitive and affect) and readiness (behavioural intention) to serve as brand ambassadors. These insights will help to determine employees' perceptions and willingness to voluntarily engage in brand ambassadorship activities.

2.2 DEFINING KEY TERMS

2.2.1 Organisational Behaviour

Organisational behaviour is an area of expertise investigating the determinants of behaviour impacting individuals and groups within an organisation to anticipate their actions and manage their reactions (Robbins et al., 2001). In this study, organisational behaviour focuses on organisational factors driving banking employees' willingness to support their banking brand.

2.2.2 Employee Attitudes

Attitudes are learned predispositions connecting individuals' beliefs and values with their feelings, influencing their motivation (Jashapara, 2004). In this study, employee attitudes refer to the drivers influencing banking employees' actions and motivation to promote their banking brand, encompassing their beliefs, values, and individual experiences.

2.2.3 Employee Engagement

Truss, Soane, Edwards, Wisdom, Croll, and Burnett (2006) describes employee engagement as a “passion for work” based on the cognitive, emotional, and physical aspects influencing their work performance. Engaged employees bring these three aspects of themselves to their work role (Saks & Gruman, 2014). In the context of this research, employee engagement reflects how connected and committed banking employees are towards promoting and representing their banking brand.

2.2.4 Voluntary Employee Brand Ambassador

The term “ambassador” originates from the Latin word “ambactus”, meaning servant (Fisher-Buttinger & Vallaster, 2008). An ambassador is a promoter or someone acting as a representative of a specified activity (Karlsson, 2018; Moiseeva et al., 2021). A promoter promotes specified ideals to others, whereas a representative exemplifies the ideals of diversity and inclusion to others (Warren, 2022).

An employee brand ambassador is a dedicated and enthusiastic employee who represents the values and vision of their organisation (Iyer, 2023) and willingly promotes these values to a global audience (Moiseeva et al., 2021).

In the context of this reaserch, a voluntary employee brand ambassador reflects the willingness of banking employees to actively support and positively promote their organisation’s values and brand to a broader audience beyond their regular work hours.

2.3 THE ROLE OF EMPLOYEE AMBASSADORS

Davies and Chun (2003) describe three elements of brand metaphors.

- i. Brand differentiation describes the unique characteristics of a brand, such as the brand’s name and symbol. It is a key principle of the marketing theory, aimed at identifying the origin of a product or service based on its distinctive functional qualities and presence in the market. Differentiated brands offer unique value propositions valued by their defined customer base (Romaniuk, Sharp & Ehrenberg, 2007).
- ii. A brand, when viewed as a person, encompasses its personality, values, and reputation. Employees can serve as brand ambassadors and are integral to branding, as they personify the values and mission of the organisation to various stakeholders (Bendisch, Larsen & Trueman, 2013; Kaur, 2015; Mazzei & Quaratino, 2017).

- iii. A brand, as an asset, encompasses its financial value and economic power. As an asset, a brand represents its ability to generate value, which requires investment and maintenance to preserve its value and usefulness over time (Davies & Chun, 2003; Willmott, 2010). Brand-building activities are no longer solely focused on enhancing the company's reputation; they are also seen as opportunities for financial gain (Willmott, 2010).

The information presented above reaffirms that brands are multifaceted, with unique traits, personality, and financial value, and employees play a role in showcasing these qualities.

Nisa and Pramesti (2020) emphasise the importance of a brand having a distinct identity that fosters meaningful relationships with its consumers and the connection established through its value proposition. The brand serves as a tool for building customer relationships by lowering customers' decision-making costs and reducing risks by providing them with brand familiarity, trust, and reliability (Hasani-Nasab, 2019). Brands have evolved from emotional symbols to playing a crucial role in shaping and defining the relationships between the company and key stakeholders, including employees (Boyd & Sutherland, 2006).

The foregoing discussion reaffirms that the company's branding strategy should not only focus on external perceptions but also consider and prioritise influencing employees' attitudes and behaviours. The concept of employees serving as brand ambassadors was introduced in corporate management, where it described the employee's contribution to brand equity (Harris & De Chernatony, 2001). This phenomenon appeared in the marketing literature and business practices, and it is believed to be aimed at broadening the interpretation of an individual's actions in representing a specific brand (Fisher-Buttinger & Vallaster, 2008). The evolution of brand establishment and marketing has heightened the importance of internal marketing, and numerous organisations are increasingly acknowledging that employees are not merely components of the organisation but are also an integral aspect of their brand (Baca & Reshidi, 2023).

The secret to companies providing outstanding services lies in their recognition of employees as living representatives of their brand. They hire like-minded individuals, focus on intrinsic traits such as a passion for work and personal life, and provide a clear context of the business to ensure a thorough understanding of the company's operations and its definition of success. These companies invest significant time and resources in developing their employees to ensure they are well-equipped to embody the company's core values (Bendapudi & Bendapudi, 2005).

Embedding brand values and fostering a shared understanding among employees promotes brand-supporting behaviour, which can provide a competitive advantage in the marketplace, as employees act as brand ambassadors who positively influence external stakeholders' perceptions, such as those of customers (Chong, 2007).

Mitchell (2002) argues that while internal marketing is essential for strengthening employees' connection to the brand's services and products, many company executives often fail to inform and involve their employees. Chong (2007) notes that values not truly internalised by employees may lead to misalignment between their behaviours and actions. Similarly, Mitchell (2002) indicates that employees who do not feel connected to the brand are more likely to become disengaged and undermine expectations due to a lack of comprehension of the promises the company has made to the public.

The above findings support Bendapudi's conclusions about hiring like-minded employees, as they highlight the importance of linking internal and external marketing practices. According to Burmann and Zeplin (2005), failure to maintain consistency between the promises conveyed in brand advertising and the actual customer experience will harm the brand's credibility and strength. Charters (2009) argues that consistency is subjective, as some consumers desire uniformity, whereas others value a brand based on how its products meet expectations in various settings. In both cases, a clear understanding of customer expectations is essential. This implies that a company not aligned with its employees can lose customers who expect consistent service.

An employee brand ambassador is a passionate, proactive employee who embodies the values and vision of an organisation, surpassing job requirements to promote positive brand awareness beyond the organisational context (Iyer, 2023). Therefore, an effective, deliberate strategy is needed to inspire employees to "*live the brand*" (Maxwell & Knox, 2009). Internal branding fosters supportive behaviours among employees, given that employees are expected to embody the brand's values and culture in all aspects of their lives (Boyd & Sutherland, 2006; Taku, Saini & Abratt, 2022; Watson, 2008). Müller (2018) argues that internal branding encourages employees to live the brand, whereas culture management persuades employees to adopt the organisation's culture. This suggests that employees should align their behaviours and attitudes with the company's brand language.

Organisational citizenship behaviour (OCB) refers to voluntary actions undertaken by individuals beyond their role expectations within the organisation. Brand citizenship behaviour is an extension of OCB involving externally targeted behaviours such as helping

others, demonstrating brand enthusiasm, endorsing the brand, engaging in self-development, and promoting the brand (Burmam & Zeplin, 2005). Organisations can outperform their competitors by leveraging the creative abilities and innovative potential of their employees (Axelsson & Sardari, 2011). Similarly, savvy marketers may find it beneficial to focus on maximising the contributions of their employees (King & Grace, 2009). The primary categories of brand ambassadors include contracted representatives, such as celebrities, and employee brand ambassadors (Šontaitė-Petkevičienė & Vaščėgaitė, 2022).

Fisher-Buttinger and Vallaster (2008), when describing the hierarchy-of-effects models referenced in Lavidge and Steiner's 1961 journal, note that advertising is effective when consumers are aware of the company's product offerings (cognition), are persuaded to like the products (affection), and are encouraged to purchase them (intention).

The role of a brand ambassador is to serve as an advertising medium, helping to raise brand awareness among consumers while embodying the corporate identity through their appearance, behaviour, values, and ethical standards. (Moiseeva et al., 2021). Brand ambassadors actively communicate (Frandsen & Johansen, 2011) and have a considerable impact on brand awareness, brand image, and purchasing intentions (Dewi, Oei, & Siagian, 2020; Moiseev et al., 2021). Therefore, they are regarded as credible brand advocates who influence others through personal endorsements and word-of-mouth, often deemed more impactful than traditional advertising methods (Andersson & Ekman, 2009).

Employees can serve as brand champions, brand builders, and brand evangelists to strengthen the brand image and transform the brand vision into reality (Morhart, Herzog, & Tomczak, 2009). They often adopt ambassadorship as part of their personal or social identity, and those who are actively engaged are more likely to advocate for their organisation (Andersson, 2019). Employee advocacy is a thoughtfully planned process with well-defined objectives (Thomas, 2020) undertaken by satisfied, loyal employees who voluntarily participate in brand promotion activities (Levinson, 2018). Those employees live the organisation's brand, conducting themselves in a manner that reflects the company's core values and culture (Boyd & Sutherland, 2006).

Studies have found that an effective employee ambassador programme is likely to enhance customers' brand experience (Aoki, Tudor, Borders, & Lester, 2020; Schlager et al., 2011). Organisations should provide comprehensive training and support to brand ambassadors, enabling them to develop effective communication skills to convey the brand's message convincingly to the public (Moiseeva et al., 2021). Success is inevitable when internal

stakeholders resonate with the brand's values and managers' behaviour is guided by genuine conviction (De Chernatony & Segal-Horn, 2003). It is recommended that brand HR management ensure person-brand fit and culture-structure fit to recruit and promote suitable individuals (Burmann & Zeplin, 2005). Identifying employees who want to create independent content aligned with the brand can enable the organisation to provide adequate support and empower individuals to generate genuine and engaging content (Saleem & Hawkins, 2021). As a result, organisations should not rely on traditional in-role methods that use control techniques or prescribe behaviours; instead, the focus should be on creating an organisational culture that inspires authentic, voluntary, and consistent brand-relevant behaviours (Mazzei & Quarantino, 2015).

Employee ambassadorship can benefit organisations' marketing and public relations functions. Public relations is a branding discipline focusing on building and managing organisations' brand reputations by building relationships, influencing opinions, and shaping behaviours between organisations and consumers (Rees, 2020). Companies with sound reputations hold a substantial advantage (Robbins et al., 2001). Internal marketing is essential for strengthening employees' connections with brands' services and products (Mitchell, 2002).

The presented literature indicates that the role of an effective employee ambassador is to be active and knowledgeable in promoting, representing, and advocating for a brand. Being active involves taking the initiative to attract an audience, whereas being knowledgeable involves understanding the product offerings and brand values. Promotion requires sparking interest, allowing the audience to view the brand or product offerings from the ambassador's perspective. Advocacy entails empowering the audience with insights about the brand or product and fostering lasting relationships.

2.4 ATTITUDES OF EMPLOYEES TOWARDS BRAND AMBASSADORSHIP

The implications from a South African perspective on internal branding highlight the importance of collaboration between HR and marketing teams, nurturing employees' understanding and alignment with brand-supporting behaviours, which is crucial for building strong brands (Saini & Abratt, 2022).

Boyd and Sutherland (2006) emphasise the importance of prioritising employee ambassadors as a core business objective, as this cultivates a culture where employees feel valued and acknowledged, take pride in their work, and, in turn, foster loyalty and commitment. According to Mitchell (2002), employees' beliefs about the brand stem directly

from the brand's core identity. Therefore, the objective of internal branding closely resembles that of external marketing campaigns, as both aim to establish an emotional connection with employees.

In the study conducted by Andersson (2019), employees embraced the ambassadorship role as they believed it was an expectation from external stakeholders. However, this role led to identity conflict during and outside work hours. Moreover, there was a disparity between the employees' self-image and the identity expected of them by their employers. This implies that employees may have personal desires and values regarding how they want to be perceived but feel pressured to conform to their employer's expectations. Such misalignment can create tension between banking employees and their employers, potentially affecting customer service and company profitability. This is significant, given that customer service quality relies entirely on employees' capabilities, conduct, and behaviour towards customers (Yoo & Jung, 2019). As a result, it is crucial to leverage employees' creativity by addressing their specific needs for security, recognition, and fairness, ensuring they feel appreciated, respected, and motivated to deliver their best efforts in the workplace (Bendapudi & Bendapudi, 2005).

In light of the foregoing discussion, this study adopted the theory of planned behaviour (TPB) due to its relevance to the research topic. The TPB suggests that individuals' actions are guided by their intentions and shaped by their attitudes, subject to social norms (Ajzen, 1991). Attitudes are an intrinsic human element that influences and motivates intention and behaviour (Ajzen, 1991; Nomi, & Sabbir, 2020). They revolve around cognitions based on knowledge or the perception of what appears to be true. The affective aspect is based on feelings or emotions towards something. The combination of cognition and affect influences behavioural intent. Although intentions are a good predictor of behaviour, they do not necessarily translate into actual behaviour (Griffin & Phillips, 2023:117). The formation of attitudes is influenced by personal moral values, experiences, and personality traits.

Bang, Odio and Reio (2014) utilised the TPB to examine the factors that impact brand reputation and moral obligation. The authors found that individuals are more likely to have increased volunteer intentions when they experience a high level of moral obligation, strengthening their intention to act or behave in a certain way. Their voluntary participation may be enhanced if influenced by external subjective norms, such as social media or recommendations from family members or trusted sources. Therefore, it is important to note that individuals value the experiences of those they hold dear, and favourable attitudes and subjective norms foster positive behavioural intentions because they have a direct correlation

with purchase intention (Ajzen, 2020; Nomi & Sabbir, 2020). Positive feelings and recommendations from trusted sources may strengthen an individual's intention to act or behave in a certain way. However, various constraints, such as a lack of time, inability to perform, or personal issues, may hinder participation despite positive influence (Bang, Odio & Reio, 2014).

The above discussion reaffirms the finding that positive intentions do not necessarily result into corresponding actions. Instead, social and organisational influences, which shape an individual's perception of how they believe others view them, can influence employee behaviour towards brand ambassadorship (Ajzen, 1991; Mazzei & Quarantino, 2017). Conversely, various constraints – such as lack of time, inability to perform, or personal issues – may hinder an individual's ability to participate as a brand ambassador, even in the presence of positive influences (Bang, Odio & Reio, 2014).

Furthermore, engaged employees are more likely to contribute to organisational success without the need for persuasion (Govender & Bussin, 2020). In this context, a lack of employee engagement may decrease productivity. Engaged employees are mentally invested in their work responsibilities. Generally, when people feel worthwhile and valued, they experience a sense of meaningfulness, which may lead to a higher level of engagement (Saks & Gruman, 2014). Values and emotions exert a substantial influence on employees' behaviour. Employees with high intrinsic work values tend to be attracted to challenging jobs that allow them to learn new skills, whereas those with low intrinsic values may prefer simpler jobs and resist change (Griffin and Phillips, 2023:123-124).

It is essential to note that an employee's behaviour must consistently align with the expectations set by the brand promise (Maxwell & Knox, 2009). When the brand promise is not upheld consistently, it undermines the customer's brand experience and diminishes credibility (Burmann & Zeplin, 2005). Employees can become brand ambassadors when their behaviour aligns with the brand promise (Fisher-Buttinger & Vallaster, 2008). An employee's behavioural response is influenced by how they internalise and embody the brand values. Employees are more likely to regard themselves as brand ambassadors when their values positively align with the brand's values (Baker, Rapp, Meyer, & Mullins, 2014).

In today's modern era, brands must keep up with consumers by being relatable, offering the necessary support, and demonstrating empathy. Therefore, brands must turn loyal, charismatic employees into brand ambassadors (Moiseeva et al., 2021). The core of TPB revolves around the individual's intention to exhibit a particular behaviour, with its objective

being to provide a systematic structure for understanding the diverse factors that influence individuals' intentions (Ajzen, 1991).

2.5 THE IMPORTANCE OF MOTIVATION

According to Andersson and Ekman (2009), ambassadors' motivation can vary depending on how they were selected for the role. Some view ambassadorship as an honorary task – a mark of recognition for their good deeds. Conversely, some sign up voluntarily – they tend to be motivated by the desire to help create a positive momentum and to socially network with other professionals. The results of studies conducted by Boyd and Sutherland (2006) and Sotirofski (2023) indicate that most employees believe they are actively encouraged to “live the brand”. Consequently, numerous companies are motivated to empower their employees as brand ambassadors. Employees who care about and believe in the brand are more likely to be motivated and loyal to the company, fostering a sense of purpose and identity (Mitchell, 2002).

Managers can integrate the company's brand messages into employees' day-to-day activities to ensure alignment and to make on-brand behaviour a natural and automatic part of how employees act (Mitchell, 2002). This suggests that deliberate and consistent exposure to the company's brand values and messaging can help employees internalise the company's principles and instinctively act as expected. Hence, organisations must remind employees regularly about the brand promise and clarify their roles in delivering it during customer interactions (Taku, Saini & Abratt, 2022).

Ravazzani and Mazzei (2017) indicated that companies should consider employees' concerns in decision-making and establish open communication channels to foster a culture of dialogue and feedback within the organisation. This strategy will reinforce consistent employee brand behaviour and allow employees to express their positive or negative views and opinions freely. This implies that companies must be open to criticism and receptive to feedback to maintain alignment with their employees. There should be mutuality between companies and employees.

Furthermore, informal management, together with employee empowerment, was found to be more effective in maintaining a consistent brand than formal management (Henkel, Tomczak, Heitmann & Hermann, 2007). Brand consistency can be attained by supporting employees through empowerment programmes, intrinsic motivation, and power sharing, encouraging them to be energetic, more focused, and make independent decisions without supervisory approval (Forrester, 2000; Kaur, 2015).

Motivated behaviour to enhance performance can be achieved when jobs are designed with well-defined roles and responsibilities, unambiguous goals, established performance standards, encouragement for employee participation, flexible control over work, and when performance is linked to organisational rewards (Griffin & Phillips, 2023). Individuals are motivated by goals that are not imposed, specific, difficult yet attainable, and combined with monetary rewards (Lunenburg, 2011). Griffin and Phillips (2023) define motivation as a set of forces that lead individuals to behave in a particular way. Thus, high levels of performance may occur when employees have the desire to do the job well (motivation), can do the job effectively (ability), and have the necessary information, materials, resources, and equipment to perform the job (environment). The absence of these conditions may adversely influence organisational performance: *Performance = Motivation × Ability × Environment*.

When employees are given the power and opportunity to establish new connections with external resources such as customers, it strengthens their abilities, fosters independence, and boosts their capacity to generate the desired outcomes for themselves and the organisation (Forrester, 2000). Employees who feel empowered and confident in their abilities are highly likely to see voluntary brand ambassadorship as an opportunity to contribute to personal and organisational success.

Herzberg's two-factor theory argues that motivation can be enhanced through intrinsic (motivation) or extrinsic (hygiene) factors because the absence of satisfaction does not necessarily equate to dissatisfaction (Griffin & Phillips, 2023). Employees should be informed of the rules of engagement and be provided with a thorough orientation and training on how to raise their concerns professionally, particularly when engaging on social media (King & Grace, 2009). This discussion implies that the success of internal brand management relies on generating relevant content, sharing knowledge, and providing supportive measures to boost employee performance (King & Grace, 2009). South African non-profit organisations acknowledge the benefits of utilising social media for communication but neglect to recognise employees as ambassadors in their communication strategies (Swart, du Plessis & Greeff, 2021). These oversights imply that these organisations are not leveraging their employees fully to represent the brand.

According to Thomas (2020), employees in non-managerial roles are unfamiliar with the tools for content creation and management and lack the awareness and training to become effective advocates. Training imparts the technical skills required to perform a specific task, and interpersonal skills are useful for communication. Therefore, lack of ability can be improved through training programmes to ensure skills acquisition, and the lack of a

conducive environment can be addressed by soliciting resources and creating a more favourable environment for growth (Griffin & Phillips, 2023). Training and development programmes can empower and help employee brand ambassadors to gain a detailed understanding of the brand's core values and messaging, gaining confidence to communicate effectively with consumers across various channels (Iyer, 2023).

2.6 POTENTIAL BENEFITS

Employee brand ambassadorship is somewhat unpopular in organisational communication. However, its benefits are increasingly under discussion (Šontaitė-Petkevičienė & Vaščėgaitė, 2022). Yoo and Jung (2019) indicate that banking employees in lower-ranking positions are motivated to exceed their contractual duties to gain recognition from high-powered customers. South African organisations should create an inclusive environment and implement initiatives that align with employee expectations (Govender & Bussin, 2020).

According to Bendapudi and Bendapudi (2005), a strong employee-brand alignment can significantly bring the brand to life. The authors provide an example illustrating how companies listed as the best places to work increased their retention rates by building a sense of community rather than focusing solely on increasing transactions and sales revenues. This implies that companies should prioritise financial gains while addressing employees' concerns to ensure a balanced approach.

The identification of employee-based brand equity (EBBE), as described by King and Grace (2009), indicates that organisations can nurture a strong internal brand environment when considering employees' perceptions, understanding of the brand, expertise, abilities, and motivations to assess if their work behaviours align with the brand promise. According to the TPB, intentions reflect individuals' willingness, preparedness, and plan to participate in a particular action (Ajzen, 1991). Therefore, factors such as a sense of belonging, social interaction, increased recognition, and exposure can motivate internal stakeholders to engage in ambassadorial activities (Rehmet & Dinnie, 2013).

The two-factor theory underscores the significance of considering motivating and hygiene factors when aiming to motivate employees effectively. Motivational factors include accomplishment, the nature of the task, recognition, accountability, and opportunities for growth and advancement, while hygiene factors encompass pay, corporate policies, interpersonal relationships, working conditions, and supervision (Griffin & Phillips, 2023).

Rewards can be in the form of compensation, such as commissions, exclusive discounts, and credit rewards (Raavi, 2020); incentive systems, such as bonus programs based on company profits and equity-based compensation programmes; and indirect compensation, known as employee benefits, which may include benefits such as paid time off, pension or retirement programmes. Perquisites, primarily awarded to top executives, include special benefits or privileges such as chauffeured car services. Exceptional performance can also be acknowledged through awards, prize-giving events, or praise for behaviours that align with organisational culture and values (Griffin & Phillips, 2023).

Rewards can be intangible or tangible. Monetary incentives can stimulate an individual's thought (cognitive) process, whereas non-monetary incentives can engage an individual's emotional (affective) process. Organisations can combine incentives to encourage participation (Fisher-Buttinger & Vallaster, 2008). Employees should have the option to choose a benefit package tailored to their needs. Organisations should implement flexible benefits and avoid a "one-size-fits-all" approach because motivation does not always revolve around money or a challenging job (Griffin & Phillips, 2023; Robbins et al., 2001). Additionally, incentivising and rewarding ambassadors may enhance their sense of brand loyalty.

Reward systems can enhance employee involvement, motivation, retention, and recruitment by offering competitive and equitable reward structures (Griffin & Phillips, 2023:231). This strategy contributes to the organisation's effectiveness by encouraging positive behaviours among individuals and teams (DeMatteo, Eby, & Sundstrom, 1998). However, employees primarily driven by extrinsic factors such as social status, financial incentives, and praise tend to be less creative than those motivated by intrinsic factors such as enjoyment, a sense of accomplishment, and passion (Boon, 2018; Robbins et al., 2001).

2.7 KNOWLEDGE GAP

Brand ambassadorship is an off-script role that requires individuals to push boundaries and explore new possibilities. There is limited research on the topic of brand ambassadors within a South African context. A favourable corporate reputation can foster customer loyalty, with employees playing a pivotal role in corporate reputation management (Gotsi & Wilson, 2001).

The existing literature predominantly advocates for employees to "live the brand", implying that when employees authentically live the brand, they become effective brand ambassadors (Al-Shuaibi, Shamsudin, & Abd, 2016; Gotsi & Wilson, 2001). Sotirofski (2023) indicates

that numerous companies are motivated to empower their employees as brand ambassadors. Research findings from a South African study conducted by Taku, Saini and Abratt (2022) indicate that employees tend to exhibit supportive behaviour when they feel a strong identification with the brand, are committed to the brand, and are aware of its core values and goals. South African non-profit organisations acknowledge the potential benefits of using social media for communication but neglect to acknowledge employees as ambassadors in their communication strategies (Swart, du Plessis & Greeff, 2021). This oversight implies that these organisations are not leveraging their employees fully.

The existing literature does not specifically address whether or not banking employees are willing to embrace the brand ambassadorship role outside regular work hours. Employees' behaviour during and after work can harm or enhance brand equity (Boyd & Sutherland, 2006). For this reason, this study is valuable for understanding South African banking employees' perceptions regarding "living the brand" – how they identify with the brand – and exploring their awareness of the role of brand ambassadorship. It also aims to shed light on whether they will embrace or resist the concept of "living the brand" outside regular work hours. The study focuses on the lived experiences of managerial and non-managerial bank employees.

Marketing, public relations, and human resources professionals should seek methods to recognise employees' needs and empower them to engage effectively with customers and other stakeholders (Sotirofski, 2023). Businesses should develop relationship-oriented strategies that promote sustainable interactions between internal and external stakeholders (Chen & Wu, 2016). Understanding employees' attitudes can be beneficial for managers attempting to predict employee behaviour (Robbins et al., 2001:75).

2.8 THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR THIS STUDY

The conceptual framework guiding this study focus on the comprehensive exploration of South African banking employees' attitudes towards voluntary brand ambassadorship by incorporating elements of employee engagement, motivation, organizational culture. The framework integrates organisational citizenship behaviour to focus on proactive behaviours, the theory of planned behaviour to explore feelings that influence participation, and the two-factor theory to address both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Figure 2.1 below illustrates the conceptual framework for employee brand ambassadorship.

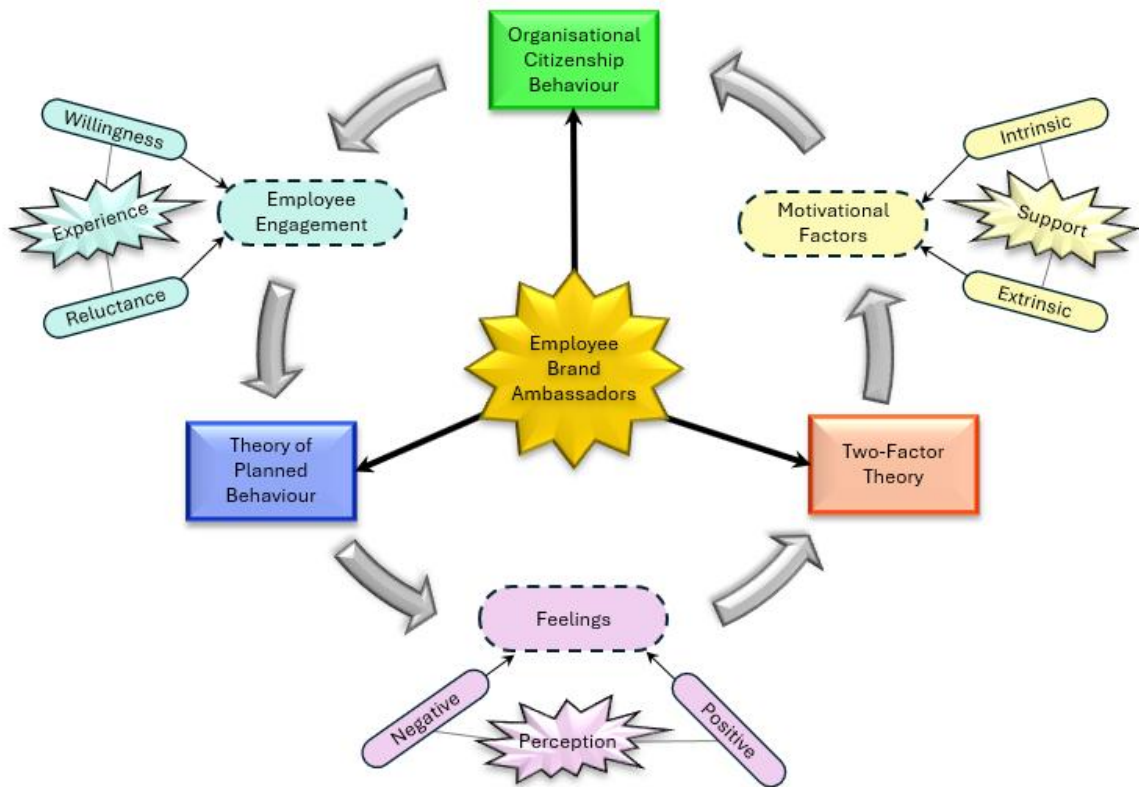


Figure 2.1: The conceptual framework for this study

Source: Researcher's construct

2.9 CONCLUSION

This chapter provided a detailed exploration of the literature on brand ambassadorship, highlighting key theories, definitions, and motivational factors influencing employee engagement. Ambassadorship appears to be an off-script role, requiring individuals to push boundaries and explore new possibilities. However, there is limited research on brand ambassadorship within the South African context. A favourable corporate reputation can foster customer loyalty, and employees play a pivotal role in managing corporate reputation (Gotsi & Wilson, 2001).

The existing literature predominantly advocates for employees to “live the brand”, suggesting that when employees authentically embody the brand, they become effective brand ambassadors (Al-Shuaibi, Shamsudin, & Abd, 2016; Gotsi & Wilson, 2001). Research findings from a South African study by Taku, Saini and Abratt (2022) confirmed that employees tend to exhibit supportive behaviour when they identify with the brand, are committed to it, and are aware of its values and goals.

Overall, the review of existing literature fails to address whether or not banking employees are willing to embrace ambassadorship roles outside regular work hours voluntarily. Given that employee behaviour can either harm or enhance brand equity, it is crucial to understand

the perceptions of South African banking employees regarding “identifying with and living the brand” (Boyd & Sutherland, 2006). There is a need to explore their awareness of the role of brand ambassadorship and determine if they would embrace or resist the concept of “living the brand” outside regular work hours.

Marketing, public relations, and human resources professionals should seek methods to recognise employees’ needs and empower them to engage effectively with customers (Sotirofski, 2023). Businesses should develop relationship-oriented strategies that support long-term relationships between internal and external stakeholders (Chen & Wu, 2016). Understanding employees’ attitudes can help managers predict employee behaviour (Robbins et al., 2001:75).

Chapter Three outlines the research methodology implemented for this study, detailing the specific strategies and methods employed to collect and analyse the data.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Chapter Two laid the foundation for the role of employee brand ambassadors, factors that can influence employees' attitudes, and the importance of motivation when considering the internal and external factors that can impact banking employees' willingness to engage in brand ambassadorial activities.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

O'Leary (2004) argues that what was once straightforward has become complex due to the increased number of research methods. The purpose of a research study is to address issues of interest through systematic and methodological means (Kothari, 2004).

This chapter details the specific strategies and methods used to explore banking employees' experiences and perceptions regarding voluntary brand ambassadorship, employing an interpretive paradigm and qualitative methods to gain in-depth insights. The chapter explains the research approach, strategy, and data collection procedure, along with justifications for each choice. It also addresses ethical and quality considerations. The researcher ensured that rights and confidentiality were upheld throughout the research process.

The following section explains Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill's (2003) research on to illustrate the structured elements involved in the current study.

3.2 RESEARCH PHILOSOPHY (INTERPRETIVISM)

This study investigated banking employees' experiences by adopting the interpretivism paradigm. Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2003) note that epistemologically, interpretivism recognises that knowledge is socially constructed, therefore favouring a qualitative methodology using small samples to gain in-depth understanding. Ontology seeks to understand the nature of reality. Within the ontological framework, interpretivism recognises individuals' subjective experiences and social context (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2003). Given this explanation, interpretivism allowed the researcher to view the world from banking employees' perspectives.

Research paradigms are commonly grouped into positivist, interpretivist, or critical realist (Kuhn, 1962). The positivist paradigm, also known as the scientific method, is used to test a theory (Weaver & Olson, 2006). Interpretivism is a naturalistic paradigm emphasising the

importance of social phenomena in understanding the human experience; it relies heavily on participants' views within a given context (Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006). However, their understanding would not offer universal interpretation as it is specific to individual perspectives and circumstances (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020; Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2003). Interpretivism allowed the researcher to explore the subjective interpretations of banking employees' perspectives based on their experiences. Findings from the interpretive approach may not be universally applicable to all situations, but they can be relevant in similar contexts and offer valuable insights for future research (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020). The interpretive paradigm acknowledges that humans differ from physical phenomena and emphasises aspects of participants' behaviour. In adopting the interpretivism paradigm, the researcher explored the background, organisational environment, and personal experiences influencing employees' attitudes toward voluntary brand ambassadorship.

Interpretivism enabled the researcher to investigate the perceived benefits and disadvantages associated with the voluntary brand ambassadorship to understand the reasons behind banking employees' attitudes and motivational factors within their social context. As noted earlier, this depth of understanding is crucial for designing tailored developmental strategies for brand ambassadorship and providing a deeper understanding of banking employees' perceptions, attitudes, preferences, and expectations. Lastly, this understanding can enhance the general, and particularly banks' comprehension of employee brand ambassadors.

3.3 RESEARCH APPROACH (INDUCTIVE)

This qualitative study adopted an inductive approach to collect data and draw conclusions. The data comprised a rich collection of banking employees' views, feelings, experiences, and perceptions about voluntary brand ambassadorship beyond regular work hours. Clarke and Braun (2017) highlight that an inductive approach is valuable when exploring new areas of study. Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2003) note that the inductive approach is suitable when the research objective is to "get a feel of what is going on" to understand the nature of the problem and how people interpret events. This study aimed to explore and understand the subjective experiences and perceptions of banking employees regarding voluntary brand ambassadorship. For these reasons, the inductive approach was considered appropriate. This approach allowed the collection of rich and detailed data, which was valuable due to the relatively new focus on employee brand ambassadorship in South Africa, particularly within the banking sector.

3.4 METHODOLOGICAL CHOICE (QUALITATIVE)

This study did not involve the quantification or measurement of particular attributes; it aimed to gain comprehensive understanding of participants' experiences. The researcher adopted a qualitative approach using an interpretative phenomenological design to obtain an in-depth understanding of the research topic from banking employees' perspectives. Phenomenological research explores participants' lived experiences (Alase, 2017) to understand the social world in its natural setting by gathering data on sensory experiences such as individuals' perceptions and feelings (Rossman & Rallis, 2011). Qualitative methods are particularly effective for investigating psychological concepts such as beliefs and attitudes, as these methods capture the participant's perspective on factors influencing behavior (Hammarberg, Kirkman & de Lacey, 2016). In qualitative research, data is typically collected in the form of words and visual content (O'Leary, 2004). Unlike quantitative methods, qualitative researchers go to the people rather than extricating people from their daily lives; they engage with individuals face-to-face to observe and have rich conversations (Rossman & Rallis, 2011).

The adoption of qualitative methodology provided the researcher with the opportunity to gain rich insights by exploring the subjective experiences and social context influencing banking employees' attitudes, beliefs, and motivations concerning voluntary brand ambassadorship beyond regular work hours. The study contributed to developing new perspectives and understanding through a qualitative approach within an interpretive paradigm. This strategy may help to generate hypotheses for further investigation.

3.5 RESEARCH STRATEGY (PHENOMENOLOGY)

Phenomenology is a qualitative research approach seeking to describe and capture the lived experiences directly from those who have experienced them through informal interviews (Mapp, 2008). The researcher conducted in-depth, one-to-one interviews to explore the lived experiences of managerial and non-managerial banking employees, aiming to understand their beliefs, perceptions, motivations, and feelings about taking on the brand ambassador role. This method focuses on capturing subjective experiences, allowing the researcher to gain an in-depth understanding of the specific factors that may influence willingness to participate in brand ambassadorship activities.

3.6 TIME HORIZON (CROSS-SECTIONAL)

This study employed a cross-sectional investigation, indicating that the data was collected during a single time frame. This approach provided a brief overview of the studied

phenomena, allowing for interpretation and analysis of the data without considering changes over time.

3.7 DATA COLLECTION METHOD

Lawrence and Tar (2013) indicate that qualitative data analysis involves organising data, breaking it down into manageable components, applying critical thinking to integrate various elements, and extracting interesting elements for the research findings. The subsequent sections discuss elements such as the population of interest, sampling size, data collection procedure, ethical considerations, and data analysis employing thematic analysis.

3.7.1 Research Population and Sampling Size

The population of interest for this study included managerial and non-managerial banking employees. The sample consisted of ten banking employees: five at the managerial level and five at the non-managerial level across various banks in South Africa situated within the Gauteng Province, excluding general workers. General workers were excluded to maintain focus on banking employees who were directly involved in decision-making processes, customer interactions, finance, marketing, human resources, and those responsible for the development and maintenance of banking systems. The selection of managerial and non-managerial employees allowed for a subtle comparison between the perspectives of the two levels to shed light on their differences or similarities in attitudes, perceptions, and motivations towards voluntary brand ambassadorship.

Potential participants were contacted privately via LinkedIn based on their profiles and professional experience. A detailed message was drafted to explain the purpose and benefits of the study and invite them to participate. Engagement was maintained with those who showed an interest, and snowball sampling was used to obtain referrals when it was difficult to locate participants who met the selection criteria. Purposive sampling was adopted to identify participants guided by the specified inclusion criteria (Acharya, Prakash, Saxena & Nigam, 2013).

The researcher ensured diversity in terms of professional background, culture, and a balanced ratio of five managerial and five non-managerial participants. Baker and Edwards (2012) recommend a sample size of between twelve and twenty participants when aiming to generate deep insights. This range enables researchers to plan, structure interviews, conduct interviews effectively, and partially transcribe the collected data. Alase (2017) suggests a number between two and twenty-five for phenomenological research. Although testing every

individual in the population would be ideal, sampling is used for its practicality and efficiency (Lohr, 2021).

3.7.2 Sampling Method

Sampling methods are classified into probability sampling, where every individual has an equal opportunity to be randomly selected, and non-probability sampling, which does not guarantee equal probabilities of selection and may result in selection bias (Acharya et al., 2013). This research employed a non-probability purposive sampling method to focus on individuals with specific attributes related to the study. According to Tongco (2007), purposive sampling is deemed appropriate when time and resource constraints must be considered and when community members hold information essential to the research objectives. Qualitative researchers may not know in advance the exact amount of data required and often collect data until they reach empirical saturation, where no new insights are emerging (Baker & Edwards, 2012).

This study utilised a sample of ten banking employees guided by data saturation, the point at which no new insights were being generated. This sample size reflects a balance between the need for rich insights and resource constraints. Data saturation enabled the researcher to determine when the gathered data adequately addressed the research objectives. Upon data saturation, the researcher concluded the data collection stage.

3.7.3 Data Collection Procedure

Interviews can be semi-structured to probe answers by allowing interviewees to explain their responses, and this method is often appropriate when adopting an interpretive epistemology (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2003). An interview is a meeting between two or more people to exchange information. Open-ended questions enable participants to express their opinions and knowledge, and through observation, the investigator can learn about behaviours and their corresponding significance (Sukmawati, 2023).

This study utilised non-standardised semi-structured interviews, conducted in person. The interview schedule included open-ended questions designed to address the research objectives, encourage participation, and allow interviewees to share their thoughts, opinions, and experiences. This approach helped to uncover a wide range of perspectives and understand the underlying meanings behind their responses. The questions focused on banking employees' attitudes, perceptions, and experiences related to voluntary brand ambassadorship. The researcher observed participants' verbal and non-verbal cues to detect hesitation or uncertainty, allowing for clarification or follow-up questions to gain deeper

insights. With participants' consent, the interviews were audio-recorded for accuracy and data verification. They were conducted in English, and the location of the interview was arranged according to the interviewees' preferences; they were conducted outside their regular work hours.

3.8 ETHICAL CONSIDERATION

IIE's Higher Degree Committee granted the researcher ethical clearance to proceed with data collection. In a qualitative research study, ethical considerations involve protecting human subjects by adhering to ethical principles and implementing strategies to safeguard the identity of every participant throughout the dissemination process (Arifin, 2018). Given this requirement, the researcher took the following ethical considerations into account when conducting this study.

The invitation to participate in the study provided an overview of the research. Individuals who expressed interest by responding received a participation consent form "Annexure H (a)" and an audio-recording permission form "Annexure H (b)" to sign to ensure they understood what to expect on the day of the interview. This approach upheld ethical standards by ensuring transparency and informed consent, providing participants with comprehensive information in advance to help them understand the nature of the study, their involvement, their rights, and the risks associated with participation.

Informed consent refers to an individual's right to make an informed decision (Stuart & Barnes, 2005). The researcher explained the study's purpose, benefits, and procedures and encouraged participants to seek clarification on any aspect of the study. Once they had all the necessary information, they were empowered to make well-informed decisions about their voluntary participation in the research. All participants were informed that the researcher neither endorsed nor discouraged employee brand ambassadorship. This approach ensured neutrality, avoided bias, and encouraged truthful responses. Biographical information was collected from all participants to provide a transparent context and enable others to assess the study's transferability. This information can be used to evaluate the potential for generalisation. Participants were requested to complete and sign a consent form agreeing to take part in the research. Participation was voluntary, and data collection only began after obtaining informed consent.

Anonymity and confidentiality. The researcher safeguarded participants' identities and personal information by replacing identifying details with numerical codes and storing the data in a protected Google Drive folder to ensure protection against unauthorised access.

Confidentiality ensures that the collected information is kept secret, whereas anonymity prevents disclosure of participants' identities (Stuart & Barnes, 2005). The research participants' rights were respected by protecting their identity and keeping their personal information confidential. The audio recordings and interview transcripts were stored with participants' numbers in a password-protected folder. If mentioned, the names of banking organisations were replaced with "XXX" when transcribing the interview recordings. This approach ensured credibility by protecting and maintaining participants and organisations anonymity. The researcher also emphasised voluntary participation, granting participants the ability to withdraw at any time without facing consequences.

No harm. This principle involves managing the causes of anxiety, unexpected events, or possible consequences (Stuart & Barnes, 2005). This study posed no physical or psychological harm or risk to the participants or their employer, as it did not disclose any identifying information or use any indicators that could associate the study with a specific bank.

No deception. The participants were encouraged to share their honest opinions without fear of repercussions, as the researcher was an independent entity. The researcher did not use deceptive messaging to coerce the participants to take part in the study. In this regard, the LinkedIn invitation message was clear and truthful. The researcher was conscious of using verbal and non-verbal cues to prevent unintentional influence over participants' responses. The researcher had to remain objective because the aim of the study was not to advocate for or discourage employee brand ambassadorship but rather to gain an in-depth understanding of banking employees' experiences regarding voluntary brand ambassadorship beyond regular working hours.

Reciprocity. This is a give-and-take system, helping participants to understand their role in achieving a broader purpose (Pascoe Leahy, 2022). As part of reciprocity, the researcher shared the research findings with those interested in the outcome. This allowed them to recognise and appreciate their significant contributions to the body of knowledge concerning employee brand ambassadorship within the banking sector.

Power. A power imbalance can be addressed by creating a collaborative and respectful environment that fosters mutual trust (Pascoe Leahy, 2022). The interviews were conducted in a conducive environment to accommodate participants' preferences and ensure they felt sufficiently empowered and comfortable when sharing their perspectives and experiences. The interviews were respectful and unbiased.

3.9 TRUSTWORTHINESS OF THE STUDY

The study adopted a phenomenological approach to understanding participants' lived experiences. During the interviews, the researcher maintained a non-judgmental attitude to create a safe environment, encourage openness, and build trust. The researcher also employed active listening techniques, including reflective listening, such as restating participants' comments to ensure accurate understanding. The researcher asked clarifying questions prompting participants to describe detailed descriptions of their experiences.

The study's trustworthiness was ensured by following the steps outlined in the ensuing sections.

Transferability

Transferability involves assessing if the research outcomes can be generalised or applied to other situations, and authenticity refers to the extent to which the researcher is fair and faithful (Elo et al., 2014). The researcher provided an in-dept overview of the research context in Chapter One, outlining and acknowledging the study's limitations. These inclusions can help to mitigate the risk of data misinterpretation.

Dependability

Dependability entails the consistency and reliability of data (Elo et al., 2014), linking data collection, analysis, and theory-building processes (du Plooy-Cilliers, Davis & Bezuidenhout, 2021). The researcher described the research design and methodology and justification for the choices. The study was conducted as planned, without deviations. This demonstrates consistency and adherence to the approved procedures. The researcher also maintained an audit trail, documenting every event throughout the research process.

Confirmability

Confirmability is the extent to which the research outcomes reflect the collected data and participants' perspectives (Elo et al., 2014), ensuring the research findings are accurately grounded in the data (Plooy-Cilliers, Davis & Bezuidenhout, 2021). The researcher regularly reflected on their biases to maintain objectivity and participated in supervision sessions with the assigned supervisor. These sessions helped ensure that the analysed data accurately represented the participants' views, with interpretations supported by direct quotes, providing insights from participants' actual responses rather than the researcher's personal

views. Awareness of one's assumptions fosters reflexivity, which helps promote transparency.

Credibility

Interpretive research is subjective and can lead to biases in data collection, analysis, and interpretation, which may affect the reliability of the findings (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2003). Credibility can be enhanced through triangulation by using various sources to cross-reference identifiable patterns (Stahl & King, 2020). The principle of credibility involves interpreting participants' responses accurately (Golafshani, 2003). The researcher employed data triangulation by collecting insights from managerial and non-managerial employees, providing a comprehensive view of banking employees' attitudes towards ambassadorship and increasing the study's credibility.

To ensure credibility, direct quotes from participants were used to preserve the authenticity of their experiences without altering their views and opinions. These practices allowed for cross-checking the accuracy and trustworthiness of the findings, enhancing data validation and corroboration.

Authenticity

The researcher ensured authenticity by purposefully selecting participants from diverse backgrounds and utilising snowball sampling to obtain referrals, particularly where it was challenging to locate members of the population. The researcher also documented all aspects of the research process thoroughly, including interview transcripts, and coded the decisions to ensure transparency and accountability in data collection and analysis. Trustworthiness was further established by adhering to the strategies mentioned in this study, spending a considerable amount of time listening to the recordings and reviewing the transcripts multiple times to identify recurring ideas, and consistently cross-checking the participants' perspectives in the transcribed data and audio recordings to validate and verify the research findings.

3.10 DATA ANALYSIS

This study employed thematic analysis, guided by inductive reasoning, to analyse the qualitative data and provide a rich thematic description. Thematic analysis is particularly effective for qualitative research that aims to discover patterns through interpretation (Alhojailan, 2012). It is a qualitative data analysis method to identify and organise linked themes related to participants' views, experiences, and perceptions. These themes represent

important aspects that relate to the research questions, helping to decode pivotal aspects of the data (Clarke & Braun, 2017). The approach involves exploring the data without a predefined framework, allowing themes to emerge organically (Lester, Cho & Lochmiller, 2020).

This study adopted the five steps of thematic analysis described by Naeem, Ozuem, Howell and Ranfagni (2023) to provide an overview of how the conceptual framework was constructed.

1. Data familiarisation.
2. Selection of keywords.
3. Coding.
4. Theme development.
5. Data conceptualisation.

The first step requires the analyst to familiarise themselves with the data. This includes reviewing the data gathered via semi-structured interviews utilising open-ended questions (Naeem et al., 2023). Highlighting quotes relevant to the research objectives and identifying meaningful segments can speed up the analysis process later, which is why it is recommended to generate transcripts oneself rather than hiring a professional transcriptionist (Lester, Cho & Lochmiller, 2020). This phase is about exploring and comprehending the data, making re-reading essential to build familiarity (Guest, MacQueen & Namey, 2012).

The researcher followed the data familiarisation approach by listening to the recorded audio and comparing it with the transcribed text. This process involved gathering interview audio files stored in a secure folder, converting the audio into text format using Notta transcription software, manually anonymising the transcripts, and correcting any errors in the transcription. Each file was saved using the corresponding participant's name, such as "Participant 1 Transcript.docx". This hands-on familiarity helped the researcher better understand the participants' perspectives.

The second step involved identifying recurring words and phrases. Selecting keywords required re-reading the gathered data to identify patterns (Naeem et al., 2023). This step involved an in-depth examination of the data to detect and highlight frequently occurring keywords. The researcher followed this keyword selection approach, re-reading the gathered data and conducting a manual analysis to identify features related to employees' beliefs, feelings, perceptions, experiences, and motivations towards voluntary brand ambassadorship.

The third step involved marking relevant sections and text that aligned with the research questions. Coding involves assigning short phrases or codes based on the identified keywords to capture the core messages (Naeem et al., 2023). The first phase of coding involves identifying significant statements, experiences, and reflections, aiming to reduce the data by highlighting elements with analytical value. The second phase connects the identified codes, and the last phase links these connections to the study's conceptual or theoretical frameworks (Lester, Cho & Lochmiller, 2020). Structural coding involves identifying textual cues that indicate where the analyst began asking questions from a structured guide, marking the start of text segments linked to that structural code (Guest, MacQueen & Namey, 2012). The researcher followed this approach, focusing on relevant data and assigning initial codes, such as “role”, “willing”, “interest”, “voluntary”, and “benefits”.

The fourth step involves organising and developing themes by identifying recurring patterns, organising codes, and grouping related patterns that link with the research questions (Naeem et al., 2023). Themes vary in scope and detail; some are broad constructs related to multiple expressions and can be developed at different levels (Guest, MacQueen & Namey, 2012). If a participant's input is unrelated to the research objective, there is no need to invest effort in coding such statements (Guest, MacQueen & Namey, 2012).

The researcher followed the theme development approach using Microsoft Excel to organise the highlighted data. This stage involved reducing the data by copying only relevant features from the transcripts into Excel for theme development, ensuring that data for all participants was stored in one file. The process involved examining the codes and grouping related ideas. For example, the theme “live the brand” emerged from grouping codes such as “brand value alignment” and “brand commitment,” as both codes reflect a strong positive relationship with the brand.

Conceptualisation involves interpreting and considering how the identified keywords, codes, and themes align with or diverge from the literature and theoretical framework, followed by interpreting the results (Naeem et al., 2023). The researcher examined the findings from the thematic analysis with existing literature, enhancing the overall understanding of brand ambassadorship.

3.11 CONCLUSION

This chapter outlined the methodological framework used in this interpretive study, which employed a qualitative approach through open-ended, semi-structured interviews. By adopting this paradigm, the researcher prioritizes delving into participant's subjective experiences, emphasizing that knowledge is socially constructed.

The chapter justified the research methodology and discussed ethical considerations to protect the welfare, dignity, and rights of research participants. The application of thematic analysis facilitates the identification of significant codes and themes, while also contributing new insights.

Chapter Four focuses on presenting and analysing the gathered data from banking employees concerning their experiences and views towards voluntary brand ambassadorship, exploring the themes that emerged from the thematic analysis.

CHAPTER 4

DATA ANALYSIS

Chapter Three outlined the research methodology utilised in this study and justified the choices made. The chapter also identified the population and sample, describing the implementation of ethical considerations and the study's trustworthiness.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides a foundation for understanding Chapter Five by analysing the qualitative data gathered from banking employees, to identify key codes and themes that emerged during the data analysis process.

This foundation will help in connecting insights into the research questions and objectives. The chapter also presents participants' biographical information, visual representations of the analysed data, and detailed descriptions of the themes to provide a comprehensive understanding of each theme.

4.2 SAMPLE PROFILE

This study originally intended to utilise purposive sampling to engage fourteen banking employees – seven at the managerial level and seven at the non-managerial level from various South African banks situated within Gauteng Province. However, data saturation was attained after interviewing ten participants, five managerial and five non-managerial banking employees. This approach ensured sufficient exploration of banking employees' attitudes towards voluntary brand ambassadorship.

Table 4.1 below provides a detailed overview of the participants, highlighting key characteristics relevant to the study. This information is crucial for understanding the context of the findings and interpreting how participants' characteristics might influence their attitudes and responses.

Participant	Province	Workplace sector	Position level	Years of experience
Participant 1	Gauteng	Banking	Non-managerial	25 years
Participant 2	Gauteng	Banking	Managerial	25 years
Participant 3	Gauteng	Banking	Non-managerial	8 years
Participant 4	Gauteng	Banking	Non-managerial	12 years
Participant 5	Gauteng	Banking	Non-managerial	11 years
Participant 6	Gauteng	Banking	Managerial	21 years
Participant 7	Gauteng	Banking	Managerial	26 years
Participant 8	Gauteng	Banking	Managerial	13 years
Participant 9	Gauteng	Banking	Managerial	14 years
Participant 10	Gauteng	Banking	Non-managerial	18 years

Table 4.1: Overview of the participants

Source: Researcher's compilation

Participants in this study were selected based on the sampling methods outlined in Chapter Three, utilising LinkedIn filters to identify banking employees in Gauteng Province who possess relevant professional experience. Their expertise allows them to offer informed perspectives crucial for understanding the potential for banking employees to embrace or refrain from assuming roles as brand ambassadors. All selected participants met the study's criteria, either representing managerial or non-managerial employees. This inclusion allowed for a comparison between the two groups to explore their attitudes towards voluntary brand ambassadorship beyond regular work hours. Their diverse perspectives from various South African banks provided valuable industry-specific insights.

4.3 INTERVIEW TECHNIQUE

Chapter Three outline the methodological framework of this study, which employed interviews as the primary data collection tool to capture the perspectives of banking employees regarding voluntary brand ambassadorship. The researcher approached the sessions without preconceived notions, aiming to attain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. The interview sessions were conducted between May and July 2024, held at times suitable and convenient for the participants. Each interview had an average duration of 40 minutes each, involving a total of ten banking employees from various South African banks. The of semi-structured format enabled the researcher to

conduct an in-depth exploration of individual experiences while providing participants with the opportunity to expand on their insights. Ethical and quality considerations were addressed to ensure the protection of participants' rights and the integrity of the data collection process. This method serves to strengthen the validity and reliability of the study.

4.4 PRESENTATION OF THEMES AND CODES

The subsequent sections explain the thematic analysis, highlighting how banking employees perceive the role of brand ambassadorship, their attitudes, and motivating factors towards voluntary brand ambassadorship beyond regular work hours. The section describes and discusses each theme, providing a foundation for understanding their perceptions and experiences.

4.4.1 The role of brand ambassadorship

This section presents the findings on how banking employees view the role of a brand ambassador outside regular work hours, seeking to identify their awareness and interpretation of the employee brand ambassador role.

Theme descriptions for research question 1: What is the role of a brand ambassador as perceived by banking employees?

Figure 4.1 below provides a visual overview of the key characteristics associated with the role of a brand ambassador as perceived by banking employees. It illustrates the various codes identified through participant feedback, highlighting the most frequently mentioned attributes, such as in-depth knowledge and expertise about the brand, effective brand representation, and the importance of displaying a positive attitude and professional integrity for success in the role. Participants believe that a brand ambassador's expertise enhances their ability to represent the brand effectively, while a positive attitude and professional integrity contribute to building stronger customer relationships.



Figure 4.1: An overview of the codes concerned with the brand ambassador role

Source: Researcher's construct using MAXQDA24

Theme 1: Unfamiliar with the term

This theme represents unfamiliarity with the role of a brand ambassador, highlighting employees' lack of awareness and understanding. One managerial participant mentioned that they recently read about employee brand ambassadors, stating, *"It wasn't something I knew existed"*.

This initial unfamiliarity reflects a need for better communication about the role of brand ambassadorship. A lack of understanding can lead to missed opportunities for effective brand representation.

Theme 2: To live the brand

This theme explores the role of brand ambassadorship, where employees embody their belief in the brand and its value proposition, reflecting their confidence and trust in the brand they represent. Two key codes were identified under this theme: brand value alignment and brand commitment. Together, these codes underscore the importance of genuine representation and sustained engagement in the role of brand ambassadors. The below section describes these codes in detail.

Brand value alignment

This code occurred twice, with participants emphasising the importance of aligning personal beliefs with the brand's values. Participant 10 mentioned that their alignment with the brand is natural, saying, *"It is who you are, not a hat you wear on a certain day or certain times of the day,"* while Participant 1 highlighted the significance of believing in *"the value proposition that the brand brings to the market."* Participants 1 and 10 mentioned that brand ambassadors genuinely believe in the brand and remain aligned with its values during and outside of regular working hours.

Brand commitment

This code appeared once. Participant 1 stated, *"They believe in their own product,"* reflecting the deep sense of loyalty and dedication that employee brand ambassadors have towards the brand, reinforcing their effectiveness as representatives.

Theme 3: To advocate for the brand

This theme highlights the role of advocating for the brand as a key responsibility of employees acting as brand ambassadors, capturing the essential skills and attributes required to promote and endorse the brand. The most frequently mentioned key codes include those described below.

Brand knowledge and expertise, sales and customer experience, honest evaluation

These codes were referenced 14 times. Participants emphasised the importance of having the necessary skills and attributes to advocate for the brand effectively. They believed that training and development programmes equip brand ambassadors to handle queries from inside and outside the organisation. This is evident in Participant 9's comment: *"I think someone who's willing to learn and advance their skills outside of the working environment."* This training allows them to *"share their knowledge with others"*, as noted by Participant 4. Participant 3 mentioned that formal brand ambassadors are knowledgeable, persuasive, and good at presenting sales pitches. *"But informally, at home, to my family, to my friends, I give fair and honest evaluation of the products."* Participant 3 suggested that employees with sales experience are better suited to be brand ambassadors, as their efforts are guided by market research, which enables them to be more effective in achieving their sales goals: *"They feed off market research ... they feed off what's happening in the industry."*

Positive personality and attitude, authenticity and passion for work, and ownership mentality

These codes were referenced seven times. Participants emphasised that brand ambassadors are authentic and passionate about their work because they resonate with the products and they love what they do. The benefits of a positive attitude may include taking proactive actions, inspiring others, engaging in active interactions, achieving successful outcomes, and adopting an ownership mentality. As Participant 8 stated: *“If you’ve got a positive attitude, you’ve got a positive outlook about life in general, and then whatever you’re representing, you’ll do a good job.”*

Adaptability and flexibility, selling the brand, networking skills

These codes were referenced nine times. Participants believed that an effective brand ambassador is adaptable and flexible. Some sell products while others sell the brand, and they demonstrate key skills in effective networking. Participant 5 emphasised that the ability to adapt and learn is essential when aiming to disrupt the market. Participant 9 believes that brand ambassadors actively engage in networking sessions to increase the brand’s visibility and build and maintain meaningful connections. Participant 2 believed: *“It would be about selling the brand.”* Participant 5 stated: *“There must be targets such as how many clients were you able to onboard?”*

Theme 4: To generate goodwill

This theme portrays brand ambassadorship as a role that fosters goodwill towards the brand, emphasising how employees can build trust for the brand. The most frequently mentioned key codes include those presented below.

Represent the bank, empower others, amplify the good, cheerleaders

These codes were referenced 16 times. Participants believed that a brand ambassador represents and promotes the brand. Participant 1 described them as a vessel or pipeline cheerleading for the brand. Participant 3 characterised them as individuals who can *“advertise, promote, and encourage people to take on their bank’s specific products.”* Participant 7 mentioned, *“You can be a brand ambassador without being appointed ... it’s just my character to empower others”*. Participant 5 stated, *“They create interest and inspire people.”* Participant 8 highlighted the importance of *“giving good representation of the company in public.”* Other participants also believe that brand ambassadors amplify the

brand's positive attributes, take personal responsibility for representing it, and influence public perception.

Content creation and sharing, social media following, build strong relationships

These codes were referenced six times. Participants believed effective brand ambassadors are recognisable, familiar with content creation, have a large social media following, and leverage their social influence to build trusting relationships. This was evident in Participant 5's statement, *"It's no use in putting an employee who doesn't have any social presence to be an ambassador. It's not going to add any value. What clients are they going to hope to get?"* Participant 6 mentioned that brand ambassadors maximise their reach by sharing content regularly, *"You must commit to sharing information at a particular interval."*

4.4.2 Attitudes of managerial and non-managerial employees

This section focuses on banking employees' preferences, feelings, value perceptions, and experiences regarding voluntary brand ambassadorship. It also reveals the differences in attitudes between managerial and non-managerial groups. This information can help to understand the factors that influence participation and voluntary engagement at different organisational levels. Therefore, it is logical to discuss related themes together to provide a detailed understanding of the various aspects and discuss how they affect each group of employees. This approach aims to identify significant differences between managerial and non-managerial perspectives, making it possible to highlight patterns and trends.

The section below describes the emerged themes, followed by a comprehensive discussion.

Theme descriptions for research question 2: What are the attitudes of managerial and non-managerial employees towards voluntary ambassadorship beyond regular work hours?

Figure 4.2 compares the emerged themes and the frequency of each code occurrence, highlighting the managerial and non-managerial employees' perceptions and experiences regarding brand ambassadorship. Annexure F provides a comprehensive comparison.

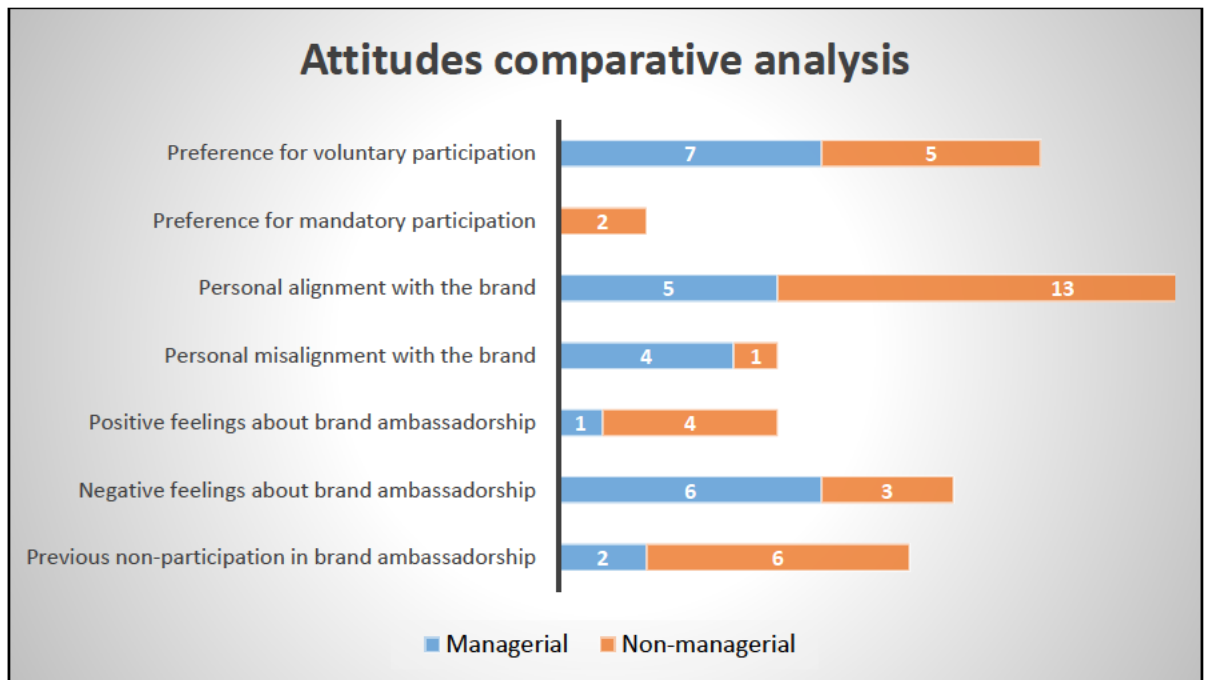


Figure 4.2: Emerged themes and code frequency per employment group

Source: Researcher's construct using Excel

Theme 1: Preferred forms of participation

The participants prefer voluntary rather than mandatory participation, as having a choice fosters a sense of motivation and commitment. The analysis of managerial versus non-managerial participants regarding their preferred forms of participation is presented below.

Managerial participants

Participants 7 and 9 agree that people cannot be forced to become brand ambassadors. Participant 2 emphasised that *“Voluntary views are authentic views, a more multifaceted view for the organisation.”*

Non-managerial participants

Participants 1 and 5 acknowledge the importance of genuine commitment to a successful brand ambassadorship. Participant 1 emphasises that the role cannot be contractual, as it requires ongoing dedication, *“It’s 24/7,”* while Participant 5 addresses the consequences of forcing participation: *“Anything mandatory is always a failure, you can’t force people.”*

Comparative analysis

Nine of the ten participants believed that employees should have the option to choose whether or not they want to represent their banking brand, expressing a preference for voluntary participation in brand ambassadorial activities outside regular work hours. Four

managerial and two non-managerial participants believed that voluntary participation encourages genuine engagement, suggesting that employees who participate voluntarily provide continuous representation, are authentic, and are likely to offer richer and more diverse insights into the brand.

Managerial employees showed greater engagement, as evidenced by their higher number of responses reflecting a stronger preference for voluntary participation. This theme was slightly stronger among managerial employees. However, non-managerial Participant 1 noted that mandatory participation can foster a sense of duty, helping to maintain a unified and consistent brand image.

Theme 2: Personal alignment

The analysis reveals that, within the theme of personal values and beliefs regarding alignment with the organisation, managerial participants exhibit a higher level of personal misalignment, while non-managerial participants show a greater sense of personal alignment, which enhances their feelings of being valued as banking employees.

The analysis of managerial and non-managerial participants regarding their alignment is presented below.

Managerial participants

Participants 6 and 9 identified collaboration and diversity as key factors in their alignment. Participant 6 emphasised the importance of collaborating “*at all levels and on a personal basis.*”

Participant 7 expressed frustration that their current role does not align with their passion and academic qualifications, leading them to prioritise their brand, which is more aligned with their beliefs. Similarly, although Participant 8 understands that a bank is a profit-oriented business, it conflicts with their values of helping others without expecting anything in return. Participant 9 felt valued in their previous role but experienced a political agenda in their current role. Thus, their sense of feeling undervalued, “*There's a lot of politics ... some decisions are taken in rooms where I'm not present, yet I am the leader.*” Participant 2 emphasised that their initial alignment with the brand was due to the job security and stability their organisation offered. However, they now feel undervalued due to a lack of recognition and career stagnation. They acknowledge that their organisation finances their studies, and they believe their colleagues with a “*pale*” complexion are progressing regardless of not having the relevant qualifications: “*I'm black and female it works for both of us*”. This could

imply a perception of preferential treatment or racial bias in the allocation of resources or B-BBEE goals. Thus, the belief is that the funding of their education is tied to their racial and gender identity rather than being based on merit.

Non-managerial participants

Participants 1 and 3 identified financial compensation and a flexible work arrangement as key factors in their alignment. Participant 1 also highlighted an appreciation for training and exposure in their current role. Participant 3 mentioned, *“I’m relatively valued in the sense that they pay a market-related salary ... bonus ... working hours are flexible.”* Participant 10 feels valued through the tangible contributions and efforts in their role. They appreciate the recognition they receive, which boosts their sense of value. Participant 5’s employment as a consultant impacts their perception of value within the banking organisation, implying that they believe consultants and permanent employees are not valued the same way.

Comparative analysis

Key factors in alignment include organisational integrity, flexible work arrangements, financial compensation, collaboration, and diversity. Four managerial participants revealed strong personal misalignment, while only one non-managerial participant showed misalignment. Four of these responses were driven by concerns about unfairness and inequality, with the fifth highlighting a focus on profit over people. Two managerial participants and four non-managerial participants demonstrated alignment with the brand. The overall results indicate a higher level of personal misalignment among the managerial group than the non-managerial group.

Theme 3: Feelings about brand ambassadorship

The analysis reveals that, within the theme of personal feelings, non-managerial participants have a positive attitude towards taking on the role of brand ambassadors outside regular work hours. In contrast, managerial participants revealed negative feelings about this responsibility.

The analysis of managerial and non-managerial participants regarding their alignment is presented below.

Managerial participants

Participant 7 is willing to act as a brand ambassador outside regular work hours due to their natural inclination to share accurate banking information for the benefit of others. The role resonates with their “*character and the kind of person*” they are.

In contrast, Participant 6 expressed that public speaking does not align with their interests and strengths, “*I think it’s just not my thing.*” Participant 8 mentioned that ordinary employees, such as themselves, are not permitted to express their personal opinions about the company outside regular working hours, as designated ambassadors are authorised to manage public relations, social media, and other such responsibilities. This is evident in the quote: “*We’ve got appointed brand ambassadors ... I’m not allowed to give my opinions, positive or negative.*” Participant 9 shared similar sentiments, viewing themselves as a separate entity, like a “PTY Ltd”, and maintaining ethical boundaries by clarifying that they are speaking in a personal capacity, not representing their employer. Participant 9 also expressed a lack of confidence in their ability to serve as a brand ambassador, stating: “*I’m not equipped for that.*” Participant 2’s reluctance stems from receiving negative feedback about their brand from personal networks and their belief that their organisation does not value their education. As a result, they prioritise education and personal branding over brand representation.

Non-managerial participants

Participant 1 is willing to act as a brand ambassador outside regular work hours provided it adds value to the brand. However, they would discontinue their efforts if they felt that their input and feedback were not valued. Participant 10’s feelings about taking on the role of employee brand ambassador are positive and natural, stemming from their belief that their brand offers unique features compared to competitors: “*I tend to advertise the tech-side of our capabilities ... naturally and ironically, it makes a difference.*”

Participant 3 feels obligated to respond to queries from family and friends regarding the bank’s products, finding it unfair and uncomfortable. These feelings of frustration stem from the lack of incentives from the organisation to take on additional responsibilities outside regular working hours. Participant 4 mentioned that being a brand ambassador after regular work hours will be challenging due to personal commitments and responsibilities. Participant 5 expressed uncertainty about the role: “*I wouldn’t know, because I’ve never explored that.*”

Comparative analysis. Two non-managerial participants indicated positive feelings about brand ambassadorship driven by personal characteristics: pride in brand technology and the desire to add value. Similarly, one managerial participant revealed positive feelings driven by personal traits. However, in general, managerial participants expressed a higher number of responses reflecting negative sentiments towards brand ambassadorship compared to non-managerial participants. The non-managerial group had more participants willing to take on the role of brand ambassador outside regular work hours than the managerial group, and a higher number of codes or responses indicated a greater level of willingness.

The overall results suggest that non-managerial banking employees are more likely to assume the role of brand ambassador outside regular work hours than managerial employees.

Theme 4: Previous non-participation in brand ambassadorship

The analysis reveals that, within the theme of past attitudes related to reluctance to act as brand ambassadors outside regular work hours, non-managerial participants indicated past reluctance due to uncertainty and negative perceptions. The analysis of managerial and non-managerial participants regarding their previous non-participation to determine the reasons behind their attitudes and decisions is presented below.

Managerial participants

Participant 8 described a social media incident where a customer posted negative reviews after losing a large sum of money through the bank: *“For the fault to happen it has to happen with a client’s involvement unless the client is kidnapped, a gun is pointed at them ... you can’t just wake up now and your money is gone.”* This Participant trust the bank’s systems and security; however, their fear of potential backlash from dissatisfied users led them to choose not to engage as a brand ambassador on social media.

Non-managerial participants

Participant 10 mentioned that their decision to act as a brand ambassador is purely influenced by the context and dynamics of each situation. They evaluate the potential impact of their participation, and when they perceive a lack of value from their input, they disengage. Participant 1 chose not to act as a brand ambassador after their bank offered a less favourable interest rate than other banks. They felt their bank was not giving them fair value in return for their loyalty: *“A competitor was willing to give me a lower interest rate compared to my bank.”*

Participant 3 admitted to having limited product knowledge about the bank's new insurance offerings and felt unqualified to provide recommendations to their social networks.

Comparative analysis

Three non-managerial and one managerial participant had previously chosen not to act as brand ambassadors. The non-managerial group had a higher number of responses and more participants who were previously reluctant to act as brand ambassadors when compared to managerial participants, indicating a greater past reluctance regarding brand ambassadorship among non-managerial participants.

4.4.3 Personal potential benefits and disadvantages

This section focuses on the perceived benefits and disadvantages associated with voluntary ambassadorial activities outside regular work hours. The aim is to identify motivating factors that may encourage or discourage voluntary participation. This section describes and then discusses each theme.

Theme descriptions for research question 3. What are the personal benefits and disadvantages of voluntary brand ambassadors as perceived by banking employees?

Theme 1: Perceived personal benefits

This theme represents the advantages banking employees believe they may receive from acting as a brand ambassador outside regular work hours, focusing on potential elements that may encourage participation.

Participant 1 stated, *"If the brand is doing well, personally, I think financially you'll probably do well as well."* Participant 4 acknowledged that financial gain is their primary motivator but emphasised that proper training is crucial for understanding the expectations and requirements of the role. Participant 5 believes that ambassadorship provides increased visibility, which can help to advance an individual's branding and career, providing an opportunity to create authentic content. Participant 3 perceives true brand ambassadorship as a role with distinct compensation, such as being featured in advertisements on billboards and television, leading to fame and recognition: *"Being a brand ambassador to me doesn't only mean telling my family and friends about the product ... they must put me on a billboard. They must feature me in a radio ad or a TV ad. You know, they must make me feel like a brand ambassador in the true sense"*.

Participant 8 stated, *“If I were allowed to talk freely ... If there are no consequences ... English is not my first language.”* This participant feels that their articulation in English may not be as precise as that of native English-speaking ambassadors, thus preferring to communicate in their native language.

Participant 7’s choice to act as a brand ambassador is driven by intrinsic motivation and a clear intention to provide value to their community *“I do it most of the time, just out of my own passion ... whenever I can I try and make sure that people are empowered”*. They have never been rewarded for their efforts and do not expect external rewards outside of regular working hours. They find value in building a personal brand associated with positive attributes such as success, helpfulness, and authenticity. This suggests that employee brand ambassadorship should focus not only on promoting the banking brand but also on making a positive impact in communities and fostering personal growth.

Theme 2: Perceived personal disadvantages

This theme represents the personal drawbacks associated with ambassadorial activities outside regular work hours, focusing on potential elements that may discourage voluntary participation.

Although Participant 4 is open to taking on the role of employee brand ambassador, provided their conditions are met, they acknowledge that their introverted nature may pose challenges in certain aspects of the job. Participant 6 indicates that risks can be intentional or unintentional, affecting the individual’s and the company’s reputation. These risks include saying the wrong things, attracting negative attention or backlash from the audience, and responding to time-consuming questions. Moreover, personal challenges and emotional distress can cloud employees’ judgement, impacting their ability to make sound decisions.

Participant 8 expressed concern about job security, stating: *“I may lose my job if they find that I said certain things which the bank feels like I had no right of saying.”* Participant 1 noted, *“the employer understand that their reputation is tied between the two of you beyond the five o ‘clock.”*

Participant 5 mentioned that employees might overwork themselves due to personal or contractual obligations, leading to burnout, reduced time with family, and insufficient rest, which can adversely affect mental and physical health. Participant 7 shared the same sentiment, noting that emotional distress can occur due to personal attacks from dissatisfied customers. This is evident in the quote: *“If you’re getting personal attacks from someone not*

being happy due to their previous experience". This suggests that the actions of one employee brand ambassador can impact others if they fail to satisfy customers. Participant 3 emphasised the importance of adhering to regulatory requirements such as the FAIS Act, noting that legal consequences may arise for informal employee brand ambassadors providing financial advice without the necessary qualifications and training. Participant 10 asserted, *"It could become increasingly difficult to be that ambassador because you don't naturally fit the role anymore."* This perception implies that individuals' preferences may change over time, leading to role misalignment.

Theme 3: Organisational support to encourage participation

This theme highlights the improvements that banking employees believe their organisation can make to enable voluntary brand ambassadors to be more effective in their roles. It focuses on organisational support to encourage participation, aiming to identify the support mechanisms employees perceive as beneficial for encouraging participation.

The image below illustrates the identified theme and corresponding codes.



Figure 4.3: Organisational support to encourage participation

Source: Researcher's construct using MAXQDA24

Participant 1 stated: *"Honestly, I think there needs to be less celebrity ambassadors ... the expectation is for the employees to actually feedback to the brand if it is not doing well in the market, to make it better."* Participant 3 highlighted the importance of offering diverse educational channels, such as *"email, PDFs, or voice notes, or podcasts,"* and obtaining input from employees to ensure alignment. Participants 6 and 7 emphasised the need to provide clear guidelines and policies for employee brand ambassadors, ensuring they understand their roles, responsibilities, and boundaries. Defining these parameters ensures

consistency and helps to prevent potential missteps when representing the brand. Participant 10 suggested regular check-ins to assess and maintain employees' level of excitement, track changes over time, and ensure ongoing engagement, especially during shifts in leadership or brand direction.

Participant 2 believed that the banking organisation did not provide opportunities for employees to work in various departments and that internal mobility is key to encouraging and utilising internal talent. Participant 5 emphasised the importance of wellness, training, mentorship programmes, and awareness to help employee brand ambassadors excel in their roles, advocating for the creation of specific positions for them to add value to the organisation's long-term strategy. This approach would help the organisation avoid pitfalls faced by companies like Nokia, which failed to adapt and invest in long-term strategies.

Participant 8 expressed concerns about banks' current approaches to charitable initiatives, noting that they appear to favour areas linked to top executives rather than being distributed fairly across all communities: *"They just need to care more about their employees ... engage in activities that seem to uplift employees' communities... I've seen one of the CEOs, the sponsoring activity is the crèche in her area where she grew up - this is discrimination."*

4.5 CONCLUSION

This chapter outlined participants' selection criteria, described the themes that emerged during the data analysis process, and provided a foundation for understanding Chapter Five.

In summary, this chapter explored the differing attitudes of banking employees towards voluntary brand ambassadorship outside of regular work hours, highlighting mixed feelings about the role. The findings reveal that non-managerial banking employees are more likely to embrace brand ambassadorship outside regular work hours than managerial employees. Both employee groups prefer voluntary participation, believing it fosters genuine engagement and provides diverse insights. Non-managerial participants generally feel more aligned with the organisation's values, while managerial participants exhibited a stronger misalignment due to perceived unfairness and inequality. Moreover, non-managerial participants expressed more positive feelings and a greater willingness to fulfil brand ambassadorship role during their personal time, outside regular work hours.

The level of reluctance to take on ambassadorship role based on past experiences was higher among non-managerial participants. Most participants identified financial compensation and rewards as key motivating factors for participation, while they viewed reputation damage

and emotional distress as significant drawbacks. Most participants believe that to effectively encourage their participation, the organisation should provide recognition and support to validate their efforts, offer comprehensive training to equip them with the necessary skills and promote their wellness.

Employees' feelings and the brand's direction can change over time, especially with the introduction of new leadership. Therefore, regular check-ins are essential to monitor and address any shifts in banking employees' attitudes. This ensures ongoing alignment and effectiveness in their roles as voluntary brand ambassadors outside regular work hours.

Chapter five compares the analysed data with existing literature to evaluate whether the findings align or differ and discusses the conclusions and recommendations for future studies.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In Chapter Four, the researcher analysed different attitudes of banking employees towards voluntary brand ambassadorship, by gathering data from targeted research participants through semi-structured interviews. Given that this is qualitative study, data was analysed through thematic analysis. The emerged themes helped to directly explain participants' experiences, beliefs, attitudes, and behaviours.

5.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, the researcher first re-introduces the purpose of the study, the problem statement, and emerged themes. Thereafter, presents the findings derived from the thematic analysis. The researcher compares the literature review with the analysed data to determine if the results confirm or disconfirm the existing literature. Based on the results, the researcher then proposes suggestions or recommendations for future research.

5.2 OVERVIEW OF THE RESEARCH

The expectation for employees to act as brand ambassadors has become increasingly popular across various industries worldwide, particularly as organisations recognise the significant impact employee engagement can have on enhancing a company's reputation and influencing consumer attitudes (Karatepe et al., 2019; Nisa & Pramesti, 2020; Šontaitė-Petkevičienė & Vaščėgaitė, 2022). However, there is limited evidence on how South African banking employees, particularly those in managerial and non-managerial positions engage in such activities beyond regular work hours.

The purpose of this study was to explore the views and attitudes of South African banking employees towards voluntary brand ambassadorship, focusing on the differences between managerial and non-managerial employees. Through qualitative analysis, the researcher investigated the familiarity with brand ambassadorship role, explored the participants' feelings and beliefs regarding taking on this role, and assessed factors that drive or hinder their willingness to act as brand ambassadors beyond regular work hours. Using thematic analysis to gain rich insights, the study analysed how differences in attitudes affects the participants' perceptions and their willingness to engage in voluntary brand ambassadorship activities, beyond the regular working hours.

The visualisation presented in Figure 4.4 below links the themes to the research questions.

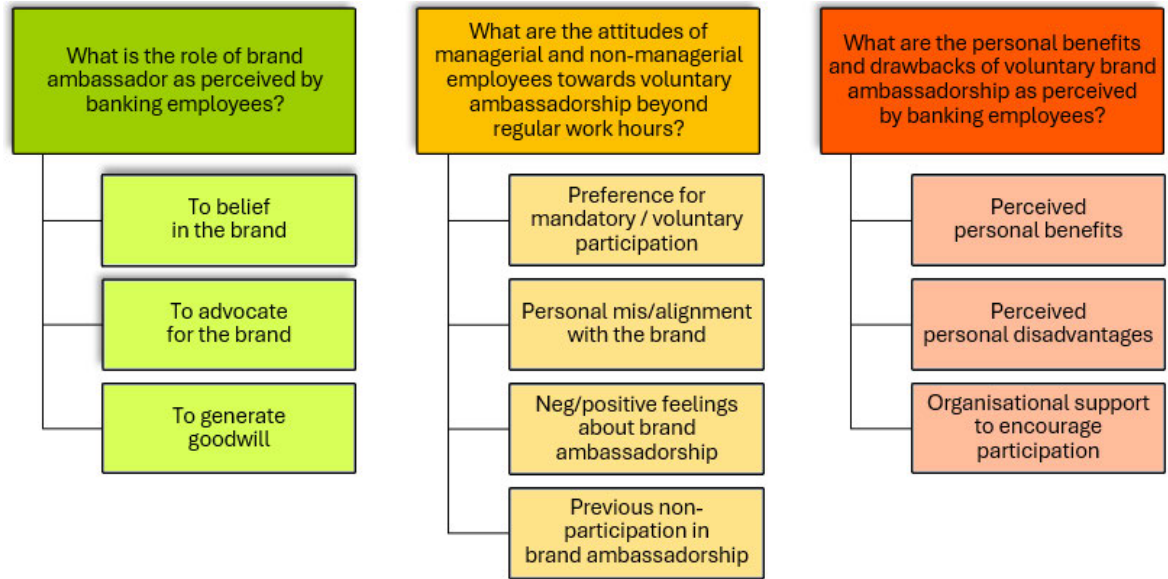


Figure 4.4: Overview of emerged themes and identified research questions

Source: Researcher's construct using Microsoft Word

5.3 DISCUSSION OF THE RESULTS

The ensuing section discusses the themes that emerged from the first research question and draws conclusions based on the identified themes.

RQ1: What is the brand ambassador's role as perceived by banking employees?

Finding 1: Unfamiliar with the term

Only one participant was initially unfamiliar with employee brand ambassadorship, while all other participants were familiar with the concept. This suggests that, overall, banking employees are aware of the ambassadorship role.

The results align with the literature, which implies that numerous companies often neglect to involve their employees in the overall branding strategy (Boyd & Sutherland, 2006; Burmann & Zeplin, 2005; Mitchell, 2002). This negligence can lead to a lack of awareness and familiarity among employees regarding brand ambassadorship.

The results revealed that variations in familiarity can lead to differences in understanding and engagement. Therefore, organisations seeking to embrace ambassadorship should address this gap through clear internal messaging and by creating learning platforms to enhance awareness, ensuring that employees are fully informed and aware of the available opportunities of performing the brand ambassadorship's role.

Finding 2: To live the brand

The results revealed that brand ambassadors live the brand in their everyday actions and interactions, including beyond the regular working hours. This role involves continuous representation of the brand, always upholding the brand's values, and also emphasising that employees can be more effective when they genuinely believe in the brand's values and are confident in what their brand offers to the market.

These results align with Chong's (2007) study, which showed that employees who genuinely believe in the brand's values perform well in ambassadorial roles. The banking sector should focus on internal branding to align its employees with the brand's values (Maxwell & Knox, 2009; Müller, 2018; Taku, Saini & Abratt, 2022). According to De Chernatony and Segal-Horn (2003), employees who are committed and truly believe in the brand's values are highly likely to be successful as brand ambassadors.

The above highlights that employees' effectiveness as brand ambassadors is closely tied to their belief in the brand. Therefore, organisations seeking impactful brand ambassadorship should focus on aligning the employees' values with the brand's core values. Strong beliefs in the brand can help cultivate a loyal employee base.

Finding 3: To advocate for the brand

The results revealed that banking employees' abilities can influence their effectiveness as brand ambassadors, because this role involves having the skills and attributes required to advocate effectively for the brand. The required skills include: strong communication skills, networking skills, a positive attitude, a sense of duty, the ability to engage with a diverse audience, and customer and sales experience. In-depth brand knowledge is crucial for brand ambassadors to address queries and represent the brand confidently during and outside regular work hours. Therefore, the effectiveness of a brand ambassador can be enhanced by having the required skills and competencies as well as genuine passion for the brand's products.

Participants also highlighted that adaptability and setting well-defined targets are essential for disrupting the market, as they allow brand ambassadors to navigate the dynamic trends and market conditions while remaining aligned with the brand's goals. Setting achievable targets provides brand ambassadors with direction and focus, enabling them to be goal-oriented. These elements ensure that brand ambassadors remain strategically focused and responsive to change.

Participants believe there is a distinction between formal and informal brand ambassadors, suggesting that employees adjust their behaviours based on their environment.

These results align with the literature, emphasising that companies invest their time and resources in developing and nurturing employees' expertise and abilities (Bendapudi & Bendapudi, 2005; King & Grace, 2009). As a result, employees who exhibit brand citizenship behaviours tend to have positive attitudes, enthusiasm, and commitment to continuous improvement (Burmam & Zeplin, 2005). Empowering employees to establish new connections enhances their overall abilities and independence (Forrester, 2000).

Employees with a personal connection to the brand's products can enhance their advocacy, thereby strengthening customer trust and loyalty. Extensive brand knowledge enables employees to provide accurate information, while a proactive attitude fosters motivation and active engagement. Therefore, these traits are beneficial to foster ability to advocate for the brand effectively, particularly in a competitive environment. Moreover, adaptability to changing conditions allows brand ambassadors to continuously innovate and address the shifting market demands, while flexibility enables them to engage with diverse audiences, thereby creating suitable content on a regular basis. The distinction between formal and informal brand ambassadors highlights the need for tailored strategies to support different types of employees in discharging their ambassadorial roles.

Finding 4: To generate goodwill

The results revealed that brand ambassadors can foster positive perceptions as they humanise the brand and generate goodwill by presenting a relatable image that resonates with consumers rather than just promoting a product. The participants believed that banking employees can act as brand ambassadors through their actions, influence, and behaviour that create goodwill towards the brand, even if they are not formally appointed to undertake that role. Banking employees are aware that living in a digital era requires brand ambassadors to be proficient on utilising online platforms to represent and promote their brand. This will enable them to build a loyal following, share timely information, and ensure that the audience remains engaged and informed. Generating goodwill among employees is linked to their positive feelings towards the brand, since the employees who possess attributes such as an energetic attitude, strong networking abilities, familiarity with content creation, a large social media following, and the ability to build trust through their networks are highly likely to be effective brand ambassadors. They can represent, promote, and sell the brand.

These results align with the literature, which emphasises that engaged employees can significantly impact perceptions about a brand and build customer relationships (Andersson, 2019; Govender & Bussin, 2020), because they often integrate ambassadorship into their personal or social identity (Andersson, 2019). Creating independent content can empower individuals to generate genuine and interesting content. Employees can act as brand champions, brand evangelists, and brand builders (Morhart et al., 2009), fostering goodwill through their actions and behaviours. Thomas (2020) notes that non-managerial employees are unfamiliar with content creation and management tools, whereas, according to Saleem and Hawkins (2021), identifying employees who are eager to create brand-aligned content allows the brand to support and empower them in producing authentic and engaging content.

The results suggest that effective brand ambassadorship is characterised by proactive public representation through actions and influence. Therefore, organisations that seek to maximise brand ambassadors' impact should focus on selecting employees who are not only passionate and knowledgeable but also possess strong networking skills and a significant social media presence. Organisations can enhance their brand's reach and credibility by supporting formal and informal brand ambassadors, encouraging personal brand advocacy, and leveraging employees' enthusiasm and personal networks. They should also provide employees with the necessary resources and tools for content creation.

RQ 2: What are managerial and non-managerial employees' attitudes towards voluntary ambassadorship beyond the regular work hours?

Finding 1: Preferred forms of participation

All managerial participants and 90% of the non-managerial participants expressed a strong desire to engage in brand ambassadorship voluntarily rather than being compelled to do so, as they believe that having the autonomy to choose whether or not to participate encourages unbiased feedback, provide multifaced views, ensures true participation, and promote continuous advocacy. One non-managerial participant believed that mandatory participation helps to enhance a sense of duty and ensure a consistent brand image.

Preference for mandatory participation does not align with the existing literature, which generally emphasises the benefits of voluntary participation in fostering engagement and authenticity among brand ambassadors. Lunenburg (2011) emphasise that self-selected goals inspire heightened determination. Successful brand ambassadorship is often achieved when individuals participate willingly, driven by genuine enthusiasm (De Chernatony & Segal-

Horn, 2003). Brand ambassadors are passionate, active employees who take the initiative beyond the organisational context (Iyer, 2023).

The results suggest that brand ambassadors are more likely to engage deeply and truthfully when their participation is voluntary. A strong alignment between employees and the brand can lead to increased participation in voluntary brand ambassadorship activities. The results do not seem to be supporting mandatory participation in performance of ambassadorship's role.

Finding 2: Personal alignment

The overall results indicate that non-managerial employees have a greater level of personal alignment than managerial employees. The results revealed that banking employees' engagement in brand ambassadorship can be influenced by alignment of personal values with the brand's values. A proportion of 90% of the managerial participants and 10% of the non-managerial participants felt that their values and beliefs did not match those of the brand they represent, while 40% of the managerial participants and 90% of the non-managerial participants reported a personal misalignment between their personal values and that of their brand's.

The managerial participants expressed frustrations about a perceived lack of recognition and internal politics, such as being excluded from decision-making processes. They also perceived that promotions and opportunities are influenced by racial and gender factors rather than merit, a focus on profit over people, and a misalignment between current roles and personal passions. Frustration for a non-managerial participant working as a banking consultant stemmed from feeling undervalued due to the perception that consultants are valued less than permanent employees.

Key factors in alignment include organisational integrity, flexible work arrangements, financial compensation, collaboration, and diversity.

These results align with the literature, which emphasises how brand alignment between employees and the values of the brand fosters supportive brand behaviours, leading to a culture that makes them feel valued and supported (Boyd & Sutherland, 2006). The brand identity influences the beliefs of its employees (Mitchell, 2002). Identity misalignment can lead to tensions between employees and employers (Andersson, 2019). According to Bendapudi and Bendapudi (2005), maximising employees' creativity involves addressing their needs for security, recognition, and fairness.

The above results suggest that personal alignment among managerial and non-managerial participants varies significantly based on their personal values, current employment role fit, compensation, recognition, and workplace dynamics. On the contrary, misalignment occurs due to unaligned personal values, current employment role misfit, lack of recognition, and perceived biases. These findings suggest that organisations should focus on addressing value misalignments. Internal politics and biases can lead to low employee morale, and addressing these issues through transparent practices and policies is essential for enhancing employee engagement, as it strengthens brand advocacy and fosters a positive organisational culture.

Finding 3: Feelings about brand ambassadorship

The results indicate that non-managerial employees have more positive feelings about brand ambassadorship than managerial employees. A proportion of 90% of the managerial participants and 60% of the non-managerial participants reported negative feelings towards acting as brand ambassadors, meaning that 10% of the managerial participants and 40% of the non-managerial participants reported having positive feelings about brand ambassadorship.

Key factors underpinning negative feelings include a lack of experience, restrictions on communication due to appointed brand ambassadors, work-life balance, informal ambassadorship; feeling that brand-related activities beyond regular work hours is not recognized and valued; and employees' reluctance to embrace the role of brand ambassadorship.

Key factors contributing to positive feelings include character-driven engagement, pride in brand technology, the desire to add value, and ease of communication.

The above results suggest that employees' understanding regarding their role outside regular work hours differs, with some believing in continuous representation, while others perceive appointing specific employees as brand ambassadors to be implying that unselected employees are not suitable to undertake the ambassadorship role beyond the regular working hours. This, limit ordinary employees' ability to add value to the brand.

These results align with the literature, emphasising that positive feelings can influence an individual to act or behave in a certain way, and constraints such as a lack of time and personal issues can hinder participation (Bang, Odio & Reio, 2014). The two-factor theory argues that motivation can be facilitated through intrinsic and extrinsic factors (Griffin & Phillips, 2023).

The results further reveal positive (willingness) and negative (reluctance) feelings among banking employees, suggesting that employees with positive feelings driven by value alignment and intrinsic motivation, such as personal pride and satisfaction in their current positions, are more likely to engage willingly in brand ambassadorship. In contrast, negative feelings, such as a lack of experience, inadequate recognition, and challenges in balancing work and personal life, can increase reluctance to engage in the ambassadorship role. Therefore, to encourage participation, organisations should address the negative factors by providing the necessary support, recognising efforts beyond the regular working hours, and ensuring that ambassadorship role aligns with employee's intrinsic motivation. Moreover, organisations should clearly define and communicate the roles and responsibilities of formal and informal ambassadors. This clarity is essential, as it ensures that all ambassadors understand their specific functions, which can enhance their effectiveness and alignment with the organisation's goals.

Finding 4: Previous non-participation in brand ambassadorship

The overall results indicate a higher degree of reluctance among non-managerial participants than among managerial participants. A proportion of 60% of the non-managerial participants and 10% of the managerial participants reported previous non-participation in brand ambassadorship. They consciously made the decision not to act as brand ambassadors due to lack of training and information; unmet expectations based on employees' anticipated outcomes; and owing to fear of social media backlash. As a result, some employees were reluctant to endorse new products, while others selectively participated as ambassadors and chose where and when to engage.

These results align with the existing literature, which emphasises that effective ambassadorship requires comprehensive training and support to ensure that employees gain a thorough understanding of the brand (Iyer, 2023; Moiseeva et al., 2021). The absence of motivation, ability, and a conducive environment can adversely influence organisational performance (Griffin & Phillips, 2023).

The results suggest that managerial participants' primary concern and reason for their reluctance was the potential negative fallout from public interactions. In contrast, the non-managerial participants were more concerned about inadequate product knowledge. To address this, organisations should train employees comprehensively to ensure that they are well-informed, have clear guidelines and support mechanisms to minimize selective participation and address fear of backlash. Employees who are well-informed, possess the

necessary skills and work in supportive environments are more likely to perform brand ambassadorship role effectively.

RQ3: What are the personal benefits and disadvantages of voluntary brand ambassadorship as perceived by banking employees?

Finding 1: Perceived personal benefits

The results revealed that the perceived personal benefits play a crucial role in motivating banking employees to participate as voluntary brand ambassadors outside regular working hours. Most participants identified financial compensation and rewards as key motivating factors that make them to take on the additional role of ambassadorship outside the regular working hours, followed by comprehensive training, wellness programmes, and social support. Additionally, participants value the opportunity to create authentic content using their native language to avoid potential issues associated with precision and clarity, the potential for increased visibility that could enhance their brand, and recognition and fame, such as being featured in television advertisements and on billboards.

The results align with the existing literature, which emphasise that branding activities have evolved beyond merely boosting the reputation of a company, and they are increasingly being viewed as opportunity for financial gain (Willmott, 2010). Comprehensive training is essential for enabling brand ambassadors to communicate the brand's message effectively (Moiseeva et al., 2021). The literature predominantly supports the importance of training programmes. However, it lacks emphasis on wellness programmes. The two-factor theory emphasise that personalised benefit packages, opportunities for growth, increased recognition, and exposure can lead to heightened employee engagement and satisfaction (Griffin & Phillips, 2023).

These results suggest that banking employees are motivated by intrinsic and extrinsic factors, depending on their values, career, and personal goals. Therefore, there is a need to re-look at the standardized set of benefits and consider the option of implementing flexible benefits systems to address the diverse preferences of employee brand ambassadors.

Finding 2: Perceived personal disadvantages

The results revealed that perceived personal disadvantages can significantly impact employees' willingness to take on the role of brand ambassadorship outside the regular working hours. Most participants expressed concerns, including emotional distress, attracting negative attention from the audience, responding to questions that may be time-

consuming, role misfit over time, and constraints concerning language use as factors that can potentially lead to disciplinary action, the possibility of losing one's job, and damage to personal and organisational reputation, loss of credibility and trust.

These results align with the literature, which emphasise that the inability to perform the job effectively can be detrimental (Griffin & Phillips, 2023), and hiring like-minded people can lead to providing outstanding services (Bendapudi & Bendapudi, 2005). The Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1991) and Herzberg's two-factor theory (Griffin & Phillips, 2023) support the idea that both intrinsic and extrinsic factors should be managed to mitigate the risk of disengagement.

The raised challenges can lead to increased stress, burnout, and job dissatisfaction, particularly when employees feel unsupported or if their roles evolve in ways that no longer align with their strengths and interests. The fear of job loss, disciplinary action, and reputational damage can create a climate of anxiety, making it difficult for employees to perform at their peak level and creating an unhealthy work environment. These drawbacks may potentially discourage voluntary brand ambassadorship. It is worthy to note that, some employees are highly motivated by extrinsic factors, while others are motivated by intrinsic factors. Organisations should hire like-minded people to ensure value alignment, consider employees' mental and physical health by implementing supportive measures to prevent overwork and emotional distress and provide training on legal and regulatory requirements to guard against legal issues, particularly related to providing financial advice.

Existing literature lacks emphasis on the constraints of limited career flexibility, emotional distress, and language barriers associated with being a brand ambassador. These constraints can significantly impact the banking employees' ability to engage effectively as a voluntary brand ambassador.

Finding 3: Organisational support to encourage participation

The results revealed that organisational support is crucial in encouraging voluntary brand ambassadorship. The primary organisational support strategies to encourage participation include comprehensive training, transparent organisational culture, and employee recognition. The participants expressed a preference for utilising internal talent over celebrity ambassadors, diversification of educational resources to ensure that they have access to a variety of learning methods, being provided with clear guidelines and regular check-ins to prevent missteps and ensuring alignment. Participants believe that internal mobility and the implementation of wellness and mentorship programmes will help to

develop internal talent by addressing evolving needs and supporting the development of employee brand ambassadors. Others believe adopting a fair approach to charitable activities is essential to ensure that all employees feel valued and supported. Feedback and criticism can help identify areas of concern, foster continuous improvement within the organisation.

These results align with the literature, as they emphasise the importance of prioritising employee brand ambassadorship as a fundamental part of the company's core strategy (Boyd & Sutherland, 2006), since it reinforces consistent employee brand behaviours, by considering their concerns in decision-making and establishing a culture of open dialogue (Ravazzani & Mazzei, 2017). Training provides the technical skills needed to perform specific tasks, while interpersonal skills enhance effective communication (Griffin & Phillips, 2023). Employees should know the rules of engagement (King & Grace, 2009).

The results suggest that organisations could gain from shifting away from heavy reliance on celebrity ambassadors and focusing more on utilising internal talent to enhance authentic representation. The use of varying educational channels can improve effectiveness in communication and training. Opportunities for internal mobility, wellness, and fair recognition can promote a sense of value among employees.

Well-defined policies and guidelines and regular check-ins can reduce the risk of inconsistent brand representation. Therefore, to bridge the gap of bias community initiatives, the banking sector should consider providing geographical demographics of resource allocation for community initiatives. This would enhance transparency and demonstrate the bank's commitment to community development across all regions. A supportive environment can make employees feel valued, motivated, and empowered to participate in ambassadorship activities, strengthening the organisation's overall culture and performance.

5.4 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The study's sample was reduced to ten banking employees in Gauteng using purposive sampling and the use of LinkedIn for participant recruitment may have introduced sampling bias, which excluded banking employees who are not active on LinkedIn. As a result, the findings may not be applicable to the broader banking population or employees in other regions of South Africa or internationally within the continent and beyond. It must be acknowledged that the findings from purposive sampling may not be generalised, since the results of this study are based on participants' subjective opinions and experiences. Participants' perspectives are influenced by their unique backgrounds, individual experiences, and jobs, which may shape their views on brand ambassadorship. Therefore, it

is crucial to interpret the results carefully to ensure that conclusions are accurate and contextually relevant.

5.5 CONTRIBUTION OF THE STUDY

This study contributes to the literature on brand ambassadorship within the banking sector by exploring the attitudes and perceptions of banking employees towards voluntary brand ambassadorship outside the regular working hours. The findings generated additional new body of knowledge, offered several key contributions to academic research and practical applications in marketing and human resource management.

The study addressed the familiarity gap among banking employees, highlighting that some employees are aware of the concept while others are not. This lack of uniform understanding suggests a need for the banking sector to bridge the gap in awareness by educating their employees through various platforms to ensure a uniform understanding of the ambassadorship role. It also highlights the differing attitudes between managerial and non-managerial banking employees towards voluntary ambassadorship, suggesting that fostering an inclusive culture can enhance brand advocacy across all levels and reduce disparities in discharging the ambassadorship role. Additionally, the study reveals that while personal benefits such as financial compensation motivate participation, disadvantages such as emotional distress hinder engagement. Therefore, organisations should also address potential drawbacks to ensure sustained engagement; they should offer support through intrinsic and extrinsic motivators when promoting voluntary brand ambassadorship.

The findings from this study indicate that voluntary brand ambassadorship outside regular working hours is a feasible and valuable strategy for non-managerial banking employees. Non-managerial employees in Gauteng exhibit a greater willingness to engage in brand ambassadorship beyond regular working hours, while managerial employees in Gauteng show more reluctance. This suggests that pursuing voluntary brand ambassadorship could be beneficial for non-managerial employees, and organisations can consider implementing such programmes. However, the study also highlights the need for further research to address the factors contributing to managerial employees' reluctance, to better understand the overall impact of voluntary brand ambassadorship on organisational culture. By focusing on employees' perceptions and attitudes towards voluntary brand ambassadorship, particularly beyond regular working hours, this study fills an important research gap and provides insights into the potential benefits and challenges associated with voluntary participation. These findings can assist organisations in designing effective ambassadorship programmes

that align with employees' values and motivations, thereby fostering a positive organisational culture and enhancing employee engagement.

5.6 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The study provides a foundation for understanding brand ambassadorship as perceived by the banking employees. It revealed that, managerial employees exhibit a higher-level of personal misalignment with the brand. This misalignment undermines brand ambassadorship as it hinders their willingness to advocate for the brand. Therefore, future researchers can address this gap by conducting a comprehensive study that explore the experiences of individuals feeling undervalued, due to lack of personal alignment with the brand which emanate from factors such as office politics; fairness; and equality. Such studies would not only address existing gaps but also provide valuable insights into the impact of personal and brand value misalignment, particularly among managerial employees, highlighting the implications for employee engagement and brand ambassadorship within organisations.

Future researchers can also address the gap in the understanding of what is regarded as innovative when representing the brand; the qualities or actions that define brand ambassadors as innovative. This line of inquiry could differentiate between employees who represent the brand in a conventional manner and those who bring creativity, dynamism, and resourcefulness to their roles. Understanding how innovation empowers employee brand ambassadors could provide valuable insights into how they contribute to the brand's long-term success. Future studies can build on this by evaluating the role of creativity and innovation in brand ambassadorship, offering practical implications for enhancing employee engagement and brand advocacy strategies.

5.7 CONCLUSION

The analysed data indicates that banking employees perceive brand ambassadorship as a role that requires them to believe in the brand, to advocate for the brand, and generate goodwill. The commitment to "live the brand" requires a genuine belief in its core values and personal alignment with those principles, while effective advocacy requires strong communication and content creation skills, alongside comprehensive brand knowledge. Moreover, generating goodwill relies on cultivating positive relationships and relatable interactions.

The results revealed that willingness to embrace ambassadorship varies between managerial and non-managerial employees, with diverse factors influencing their levels of enthusiasm or reluctance. There is generally higher willingness to engage in brand ambassadorship among non-managerial employees. Many of them expressed positive feelings about acting

as brand ambassadors, driven by personal traits, pride in their brand, and the perceived benefits such as financial compensation, recognition, and career advancement. They showed greater alignment with the brand's values, which contributes to their readiness to promote the brand outside regular work hours. In contrast, non-managerial employees appear to be reluctant to engage in brand ambassadorship due to perceived disadvantages, including a lack of personal knowledge about products and potential conflicts with personal time and commitments.

There was more reluctance among managerial participants to embrace ambassadorship outside the regular working hours. These negative sentiments were influenced by personal discomfort, organisational restrictions on public communication, and perceived misalignment with the brand's values. They expressed concerns about the risks associated with ambassadorship, such as reputational damage and the complexities of navigating organisational politics. However, few managers showed willingness to provide accurate information and promote the brand, driven by intrinsic motivations and a sense of duty.

In summary, while non-managerial employees are generally more willing to embrace ambassadorship, managerial employees appear to be more cautious. Therefore, the key to increasing overall willingness lies in addressing specific concerns for each group. This study was designed to investigate the degree to which South African banking employees will enthusiastically embrace the role of brand ambassadorship beyond the regular working hours, with a resounding 'yay' or 'nay'. The study revealed that non-managerial employees are more inclined towards "yay", and managerial employees lean more towards "nay".

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ANNEXURE A: SAMPLE OF INTERVIEW GUIDE

Biographical information of the participants:

- (1) Which province do you currently live in?
- (2) Are you currently employed in the banking sector?
- (3) Is your current position managerial or non-managerial?
- (4) How many years of working experience do you have in total?

RQ1: What is the Role of employee brand ambassadors from the SA banking employee's perspective?

- (1) How familiar are you with the concept of employee brand ambassadorship? what are your initial thoughts about it within the banking sector?
- (2) In your opinion, what are the qualities of a brand ambassador in the banking sector?
- (3) Why do you think those qualities are important?
- (4) From your perspective, what are the expectations placed on employee brand ambassadors?
- (5) Can you describe what makes a brand ambassador to be effective in the banking sector?

RQ2: What are the attitudes of banking employees towards voluntary ambassadorship beyond regular workhours?

- (1) In your opinion, do you believe representing the brand should be a voluntary or mandatory responsibility? Please explain.
- (2) Can you describe how you feel about being an ambassador for your organization outside regular working hours?
- (3) If you have, can you describe a situation where you chose not to act as a brand ambassador? what were the reasons behind that decision?
- (4) Do you feel valued in your role as a banking employee?
- (5) How well do you believe your personal values align with those of your organizations? What are those values?
- (6) If you have, can you describe experiences you've had acting as a brand ambassador?
- (7) Did you play the role during working hours or outside regular working hours?

RQ3: How do employees perceive personal benefits associated with voluntary brand ambassadorship beyond regular work hours?

- (1) What would motivate you to willingly take on the role of a brand ambassador outside regular working hours?
- (2) From your perspective, what are the personal advantages of choosing to act as brand ambassador outside regular working hours?
- (3) From your perspective, what are the disadvantages of acting as a brand ambassador outside regular working hours?
- (4) If any, can you describe any concerns you might have about engaging in brand ambassadorship activities outside regular working hours?
- (5) What improvement do you believe your organization can make to enable employees to fulfil the role of brand ambassadors effectively?

ANNEXURE B: SAMPLE OF PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM



Annexure H (a) – PARTICIPANT OR RESPONDENT CONSENT FORM

Explanatory information sheet and consent form for participants
To whom it may concern, My name is <u>Agnes Ramaesele Hlagala</u> and I am a student at The IIE's MSA. I am currently conducting research under the supervision of <u>Dr. Kyraj Chitima</u> about exploring the experiences and perceptions of banking employees in South Africa towards voluntary brand ambassadorship, to uncover their attitudes and the underlying factors that may influence participation. I hope that this research will enhance our understanding of whether banking employees can voluntarily become brand ambassadors outside the typical nine-to-five workhours. I would like to invite you to participate in my study. In order to explain to you what your participation in my study will involve, I have formulated questions that I will try to fully answer so that you can make an informed decision about whether or not to participate. If you have any additional questions that you feel are not addressed or explained in this information sheet, please do not hesitate to ask me for more information. Once you have read and understood all the information contained in this sheet and are willing to participate, please complete and sign the consent form below.
What will I be doing if I participate in your study? I would like to invite you to participate in this research because your valuable experience and unique perspective as a banking professional would be greatly appreciated and enrich the depth of this study. If you decide to participate in this research, I would like to meet with you either in person (face-to-face interview) or virtually (online interview), which is anticipated to last between thirty minutes to one hour. You can decide whether or not to participate in this research. If you decide to participate, you can choose to withdraw at any time or to decide not to answer particular interview questions.
Are there any risks/ or discomforts involved in participating in this study? Whether or not you decide to participate in this research, there will be no negative impact on you. There are no direct risks or benefits to you if you participate in this study. You might, however, indirectly find that it is helpful to talk about your experiences, preferences, and perception. If you find at any stage that you are not comfortable with the line of questioning, you may withdraw or refrain from participating. This study poses no physical or psychological harm or risk to the participant and their employer, as it will not disclose identifying information or use any indicators that could associate the study with a specific bank. The interview will be conducted in a conducive environment chosen by the participants to ensure comfort and convenience.
Do I have to participate in the study? • Your inclusion in this study is completely voluntary. • If you do not wish to participate in this study, you have every right not to do so. • Even if you agree to participate in this study, you may withdraw at any time without having to provide an explanation for your decision.

What will happen to the information that participants provide?

Once I have finished all interviews, I will write summaries to be included in my research report, which is a requirement to complete my **Master of Business Administration**. You may ask me to send you a summary of the research if you are interested in the final outcome of the study.

What happens if I have more questions about the study?

Please feel free to contact me or my supervisor should you have any questions or concerns about this research, or if there is anything you need to know before you decide whether or not to participate.

You should not agree to participate unless you are completely comfortable with the procedures followed.

My contact details are as follows:

Agnes Hlagala



The contact details of my supervisor are as follows:

Dr. Kyril Chitima



Participant or respondent consent

I, _____, agree to participate in the research conducted by **Agnes Ramaesele Hlagala** about **exploring the attitudes of banking employees in South Africa (SA) towards voluntary brand ambassadorship, to explore their level of enthusiasm or openness towards brand ambassadorship outside the typical nine-to-five workhours.**

This research has been explained to me and I understand what participation in this research will involve. I understand that:

- I agree to be interviewed for this research.
- My confidentiality will be ensured. My name and personal details will be kept private.
- My participation in this research is voluntary and I have the right to withdraw from the research at any time. There will be no repercussions should I choose to withdraw from the research.
- I may choose not to answer any of the questions that are asked during the research interview.
- I may be quoted directly when the research is published, but my identity will be protected.

Signature

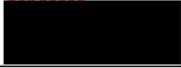
Date

ANNEXURE C: SAMPLE OF PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM



Annexure H (a) – PARTICIPANT OR RESPONDENT CONSENT FORM

Explanatory information sheet and consent form for participants
To whom it may concern, My name is <u>Agnes Ramaesele Hlagala</u> and I am a student at The IIE's MSA. I am currently conducting research under the supervision of <u>Dr. Kyraj Chitima</u> about exploring the experiences and perceptions of banking employees in South Africa towards voluntary brand ambassadorship, to uncover their attitudes and the underlying factors that may influence participation. I hope that this research will enhance our understanding of whether banking employees can voluntarily become brand ambassadors outside the typical nine-to-five workhours. I would like to invite you to participate in my study. In order to explain to you what your participation in my study will involve, I have formulated questions that I will try to fully answer so that you can make an informed decision about whether or not to participate. If you have any additional questions that you feel are not addressed or explained in this information sheet, please do not hesitate to ask me for more information. Once you have read and understood all the information contained in this sheet and are willing to participate, please complete and sign the consent form below.
What will I be doing if I participate in your study? I would like to invite you to participate in this research because your valuable experience and unique perspective as a banking professional would be greatly appreciated and enrich the depth of this study. If you decide to participate in this research, I would like to meet with you either in person (face-to-face interview) or virtually (online interview), which is anticipated to last between thirty minutes to one hour. You can decide whether or not to participate in this research. If you decide to participate, you can choose to withdraw at any time or to decide not to answer particular interview questions.
Are there any risks/ or discomforts involved in participating in this study? Whether or not you decide to participate in this research, there will be no negative impact on you. There are no direct risks or benefits to you if you participate in this study. You might, however, indirectly find that it is helpful to talk about your experiences, preferences, and perception. If you find at any stage that you are not comfortable with the line of questioning, you may withdraw or refrain from participating. This study poses no physical or psychological harm or risk to the participant and their employer, as it will not disclose identifying information or use any indicators that could associate the study with a specific bank. The interview will be conducted in a conducive environment chosen by the participants to ensure comfort and convenience.
Do I have to participate in the study? • Your inclusion in this study is completely voluntary. • If you do not wish to participate in this study, you have every right not to do so. • Even if you agree to participate in this study, you may withdraw at any time without having to provide an explanation for your decision.

What will happen to the information that participants provide? Once I have finished all interviews, I will write summaries to be included in my research report, which is a requirement to complete my Master of Business Administration. You may ask me to send you a summary of the research if you are interested in the <u>final outcome</u> of the study.
What happens if I have more questions about the study? Please feel free to contact me or my supervisor should you have any questions or concerns about this research, or if there is anything you need to know before you decide whether or not to participate. You should not agree to participate unless you are completely comfortable with the procedures followed. My contact details are as follows: Agnes Hlagala  The contact details of my supervisor are as follows: Dr. Kurai Chitima 

Participant or respondent consent	
I, _____, agree to participate in the research conducted by Agnes Ramaesele Hlagala about exploring the attitudes of banking employees in South Africa (SA) towards voluntary brand ambassadorship, to explore their level of enthusiasm or openness towards brand ambassadorship outside the typical nine-to-five workhours. This research has been explained to me and I understand what participation in this research will involve. I understand that: • I agree to be interviewed for this research. • My confidentiality will be ensured. My name and personal details will be kept private. • My participation in this research is voluntary and I have the right to withdraw from the research at any time. There will be no repercussions should I choose to withdraw from the research. • I may choose not to answer any of the questions that are asked during the research interview. • I may be quoted directly when the research is published, but my identity will be protected.	
Signature	Date

ANNEXURE D: SAMPLE OF AUDIO RECORDING FORM



ANNEXURE H (b) - AUDIO OR VIDEO RECORDING CONSENT FORM

Consent form for participants	
I, _____, agree to allow Agnes Ramaesele Hlagala to audio record my interviews as part of the research about exploring the attitudes of banking employees in South Africa (SA) towards voluntary brand ambassadorship, to explore their level of enthusiasm or openness towards brand ambassadorship outside the typical nine-to-five workhours. This research has been explained to me and I understand what participation in this research will involve. I understand that: • My confidentiality will be ensured. My name, personal details or any other identifiable information will be kept confidential; • The recordings will be stored in a password-protected file on the researcher's computer; and • Only the researcher, the researcher's supervisor(s) and possibly a transcriber (who will sign a confidentiality agreement) will have access to these recordings.	
Signature	Date

ANNEXURE E: ETHICAL CLEARENCE LETTER



Our Ref: M. 090324
Enquiries: research@iie.ac.za

8 March 2024



Proposal Approval and Conditional Ethics Clearance for Master of Business Administration



Student name: Agnes Ramaesele Hlagala
Student number: [REDACTED]
Brand and campus: IIEMSA



Dear Agnes,

We are pleased to inform you that the Higher Degrees Committee considered and approved your research proposal titled: **The attitudes of banking employees in SA towards voluntary brand ambassador** with minor revisions.



You are requested to critically reflect on the feedback provided by the Academic Seminar panel members (attached to this letter) and address the recommendations, in Annexure E, under the guidance and to the satisfaction of your supervisor. We are confident that the feedback will improve the quality of your work and will assist you in navigating the process to successful completion.

This study has been granted conditional ethics clearance. This means that you must submit the revised research proposal (with an expanded research methodology section) together with the data collection instrument, participant consent form and if applicable gatekeepers' letter to the Programme Coordinator for ethics clearance. Please note that the Higher Degrees Committee meets each month and review all applications submitted by the 1st Thursday of each month. Please keep in mind that you would have to submit your ethics application to Ms Chonzi Mulenga at least 24 hours before the Thursday submission date. You may only proceed with data collection once you have received an Ethics Clearance Letter from the Higher Degrees Committee.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact the programme team or supervisor directly.

All the best with your research studies.

[REDACTED]
Dr Willy Engelbrecht
Chair: Higher Degrees Committee

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ANNEXURE F: CODES AND THEMES ADDRESSING RESEARCH QUESTION 2

Theme 1: Preferred forms of participation

PARTICIPANT	INTERVIEW STATEMENT AND QUOTATIONS	CODES	PREFERENCE
1	"It needs to be voluntary, the moment it's non-voluntary that means you probably won't give honest feedback"	Honest and unbiased feedback	Voluntary
	"Ambassadorship needs to be voluntary so it cannot be contractual... it's a 24/7 thing "	Continuous advocacy	Voluntary
2	"Voluntary views are authentic views"	Honest and unbiased feedback	Voluntary
	"When it is honest views, you're able to get a mixed bucket of opinions and personal experience which gives you, I think, a more multifaceted view of the organisation"	Multifaceted views	Voluntary
		Honest and unbiased feedback	Voluntary
3	"so it will be a voluntary responsibility by virtue of the fact that you don't want to talk bad about your employer."	Avoid conflict of interest	Voluntary
4	"Voluntary basis because there are people who are willing or who like to represent the company, and <i>there are those who cannot confront and engage with others effectively</i> "	Encourage true participation	Voluntary
5	"Should be voluntary. Anything mandatory is always a failure. You can't force people...if it's voluntary people then make effort to own up to it"	Encourage true participation	Voluntary
6	"No one is forced, I do it voluntarily because I like where I work."	Encourage true participation	Voluntary
7	"I think it needs to be a way of how it can be communicated in a way that is conducive for everyone. So when we enforce it, and yet it's not your time that you're enforcing upon me, then it doesn't become realistic."	Encourage true participation	Voluntary
8	"Should be voluntary, Yes, I work for your company, you pay me, but if besides that there's nothing good that I'm enjoying, working for your company - you shouldn't force me to say anything good about your company. if I don't want to.... My contract between you and me as my employer is that I should do a certain job, which is technical. If I'm done with that, I'm done"	Encourage true participation	Voluntary
9	"If you like doing it, then you can do it. If you don't, then it shouldn't be a must for you to do it. Because every person has got a right to express their own use."	Encourage true participation	Voluntary
10	"I'm a firm believer that, when one is in a role and in this instance it would be via employment, it is expected of you to behave in a certain way."	Sense of duty	Mandatory
		Controlled representation	Mandatory

Theme 2: Personal alignment

	INTERVIEW STATEMENT AND QUOTATIONS	CODES	BRAND ALIGNMENT
1	"My value comes in what the bank offers in terms of the training and the exposure, they offer competitive monetary value. <i>The flexible working arrangement</i> makes me feel like I am a valued employee"	Training and exposure	Alignment
		Financial compensation	Alignment
		Flexible work arrangement	Alignment
2	"no, I don't think I am...So I don't necessarily blame them or anyone and I think that's why rather I have decided to throw myself into school and <i>focus on</i> personal development and personal branding"	Unfairness and equality	Misalignment
3	"yes, I think I'm relatively valued in the sense that they pay a market related salary...bonus...working hours are flexible now...they don't phone me on my up on my private line, they don't invade my personal space."	Financial compensation	Alignment
		Flexible work arrangement	Alignment
		No invasion of privacy	Alignment
4	" <i>Yes, the organisation has met all the conditions outlined in my contract</i> "	Contractual satisfactions	Alignment
5	"Organizations are just out there for themselves and they don't care"	Unfairness and equality	Misalignment
7	Participant expressed feelings of frustrations. They feel that their organization is not utilizing their qualifications	Unfairness and equality	Misalignment
8	"Nah, I don't. I'm just a number. Because of the treatment that comes from my management."	Unfairness and equality	Misalignment
9	"in my current one there's a lot of politics, I don't think I'm valued as much as I would want to be because there are some decisions that are taken in rooms where I'm not present yet I'm the leader. "	Unfairness and equality	Misalignment
10	"I do. From a pure work contribution, the level of engagement, the manner of engagement and everything that comes with it makes me feel appreciated."	Recognition and exposure	Alignment
1	"My number one core value is definitely to always continuously improving...being better than yesterday."	Continuous improvement	Alignment
2	"The reason why I joined the organisation was because I felt as though there is an alignment of values and those values primarily have been, at the heart of it, it's been security.."	Job security	Alignment
3	"Values like transparency"	Organisational integrity	Alignment
4	"I think I can say transparency...consistency"	Organisational integrity	Alignment
5	"Well, one, integrity"	Organisational integrity	Alignment
6	"Honesty, Decency, being able to collaborate...I feel like XXX is the first company I've worked for where I truly connect to what the purpose of the company is "	Organisational integrity	Alignment
		Collaboration and diversity	Alignment
8	"I cannot Align with the organization because the organization is a business I'll be suited working for a charity."	Profit over people	Misalignment
9	"Yeah, I do have like, for example, my company, they encourage curiosity, I'm a very curious person, I love learning, and then how else? Integrity... is integrity and diversity"	Organisational integrity	Alignment
		Collaboration and diversity	Alignment
10	"So I value, integrity, honesty, feeling heard, hearing people respect, giving it and receiving it."	Organisational integrity	Alignment

Theme 3: Feelings about brand ambassadorship

	INTERVIEW STATEMENT AND QUOTATIONS	CODES	FEELINGS
1	"100%...as long as it's something that adds to the value of that product "	Value addition	Positive
2	Participant has personal story of referring employment role to their sister, which resulted in the sister not getting feedback from the organization thus, thus their reluctant to embrace the role due negative feedback from the public..	Negative feedback	Negative
	"Outside of my regular hours... I'm busy with school"	Work-life balance	Negative
	"To date my organization has shown me that they don't value my education"	Lack of recognition	Negative
3	"I feel very uncomfortable about that because it's involuntary...But because now you're getting asked by friends and family and you don't want to be rude, then you play the part...this is unfair...because there's no incentive"	Sense of duty	Negative
4	"After work hours I prefer to focus solely on my personal life, my marriage, family and kids"	Work-life balance	Negative
5	"Well, in terms of how it feels, I wouldn't know, because I've never explored that."	Lack of experience	Negative
6	"I don't know. I think it's just not my thing. I'm not a talker everywhere" <i>Participant believe public speaking does not align with their character</i>	Misalignment with personal preference	Negative
7	"I'm just doing it as my character and the kind of person that I am, because I'm always willing to share. I always believe sharing is always caring, I'm benefiting those that I'm sharing information with, in a greater sense of things."	Character-driven engagement	Positive
8	"We are prevented to talk about the company outside of working hours, we've got appointed brand ambassadors... me as an ordinary employee I'm not expected or I'm not allowed to give my opinions...I can't comment on that either positively or negatively I may be fired for doing that."	Communication restrictions	Negative
		Appointed brand ambassadors	Negative
9	"I wouldn't do it unless, because like I told you, I'm not equipped for that."	Lack of experience	Negative
10	"I think I do it quite a bit of it unknowingly. For example, how often do we trend for being offline? Very rarely so. I would do indirect marketing by showing our strength just in the manner of conversation...being able to verbalize what we do differently comes naturally and ironically, it make a difference. And I'm fortunate enough to bank with three banks. And the difference I see in my experience makes it easy if it comes up in conversation, especially if a particular bank is trending on social media for the wrong reasons."	Character-driven engagement	Positive
		Pride in brand technology	Positive
		Ease of communication	Positive

Theme 4: Previous non-participation in brand ambassadorship

INTERVIEW STATEMENT AND QUOTATIONS		CODES
1	"A competitor was willing to give me a lower interest rate compared to my bank ... <i>They failed to give me a fair, competitive rate...</i> it seemed like the value was skewed...That's when I decided to end the relationship"	Non-competitive offerings Unmet expectations
3	"I was asked by a family friend at an informal gathering as to should they should take up the insurance product with the bank...our bank is not a traditional insurance, secondly this insurance product is very new and thirdly I don't have much product knowledge "	Newness of the product Lack of brand knowledge and expertise
8	" <i>Participant describes a social media situation where a customer provided negative reviews regarding losing a large sum of money through their banking organisation...</i> Either they clicked on the link or whatever, but for the fault to happen It has to happen with a client's involvement, Unless the client is kidnapped, a gun is pointed at them...you can't just wake up now. Your money is gone... if I were to comment and say that, obviously, the social media would attack me "	Selective participation Fear of backlash
10	"So I think, from a more personal setting, depending on what the topic of discussion is, whether I want to include myself in it, because sometimes the tension in a discussion is so high that I choose not to participate"	Selective participation Fear of backlash

ANNEXURE G: PROOFREADING CERTIFICATE



Proofreading Certificate

It is hereby certified that this dissertation has been proofread and edited for spelling, grammar and punctuation by a professional English language editor

Client

Agnes Ramaesele Hlagala

To explore the attitudes of banking employees in SA
towards voluntary brand ambassadorship

Editor

Michele van Niekerk

Name

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Michele van Niekerk".

Signature

23 October 2024

Date

I cannot guarantee that the changes that I have suggested have been implemented
nor do I take responsibility for any other changes or additions that may have been made subsequently.
The track changes of the language editing will be available for inspection upon enquiry, for a period of one year.

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ANNEXURE H: SIMILARITY REPORT

ANNEXURE I: SUPERVISORS PERMISSION TO SUBMIT