

The Branding value of LinkedIn for SMEs

A Quantitative Study of SMEs LinkedIn Performance impacted by
Emotional Branding and Theory of Planned Behavior

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Abstract

By sharing content on LinkedIn using emotional branding, SMEs can provide performance outcomes to their companies. Both previous investigations on LinkedIn and other platforms, and our accepted hypotheses indicate that LinkedIn usage will enhance company performance. This thesis aims to investigate "How can B2B SMEs benefit through emotional branding using LinkedIn?". Employees' perceptions of Goals, Personal and Company Identification, Sharing Behavior, and performance are investigated to understand SMEs' emotional branding perspective. Additionally, control variables are added to provide more value to our thesis and make the answers more reliable.

The study is investigated in terms of a mixed-method approach, as this topic has barely been researched earlier. The approach combines qualitative interviews of LinkedIn experts with data retrieved from a quantitative survey posted on LinkedIn. The interviews are a part of the preliminary stage of the study, and contribute to the thesis' theory assembling, research model and hypotheses development, and survey. The research model and its credibility is tested in terms of Confirmatory Factor Analysis. Further, a regression analysis investigates the relationships of the variables included in the research model. The data collected is from 122 respondents answering the survey posted on LinkedIn. The hypotheses are accepted, and the analysis indicates that a company can enhance its performance on LinkedIn.

Acknowledgments

This thesis reflects five life-changing years. From being young and curious to delivering our master thesis within Economy and Entrepreneurship. Through these years as students, we have learned about opportunities and challenges by facing deadlines, investigating interesting topics, facing complex subjects of international business, and delivering positive financial statements. University has taught us theories about reality and has given us tools to be prepared for life ahead. However, our real-life experiences throughout these years have been just as educational. By being active at the university and starting businesses alongside the study, we have challenged ourselves beyond our expectations. Working in teams, starting businesses, facing obstacles, financing the business, and finding ourselves have been the real challenges.

We find the possibilities in entrepreneurship; to create, challenge, change, connect, be creative and bold as the most challenging and life-changing work we could ever imagine. By combining our curiosity within the fields of learning in academia and practice, we have found our passions - we want to create change. However, to create change and action, we need to understand the arenas used by the changemakers. LinkedIn is the place for opportunities within business branding. It provides opportunities for people we consider as role models. However, it also allows students, entrepreneurs, and SMEs to share their messages and interact with their business role models.

This paper is a tool for all small and medium enterprises, entrepreneurs, and students who need a branding strategy. Today, we independently run a total of four businesses ourselves. By understanding the power of branding and connections, we would adopt this strategy in our own companies to create change. This paper would not be possible without our amazing supporters. We want to direct a special thanks to the experts Fredrik Fornes, Kristian L. Thomassen, and Sunniva Finne for sharing their knowledge and experiences with LinkedIn. Thanks to Hege Larsen and Jan Eric Heiseldahl for brainstorming about the angle of the thesis. Thanks to Næringsforeningen i Kristiansandsregionen for approving BOLD TYPE management's request for sharing our questionnaire. Thanks to everyone who shared our posts, liked and commented to boost the LinkedIn algorithm and reach out to respondents. We would also show our gratefulness to our partners, family, and friends for their support. We want to thank Stine Øyna, our classmates, and the rest of the School of Business and Law for inspiring us to reach for the stars and never take no for an answer. Last but most important, thanks to our brilliant supervisor Kalanit Efrat for her kind heart, help, and support along the way.

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1 Introduction

Since its beginning, LinkedIn has been a business related platform. The concept of the platform's change over time has been exceptional, moving from a recruitment platform to an arena for sales and marketing (Koch et al., 2018, p. 5; Banerji and Reimer, 2019, p. 46-51). However, the concept of sales has changed. Small and medium enterprises (SMEs) can create a competitive advantage and lower costs by using emotional branding on LinkedIn. This includes the business's intangible assets, such as brand and employees, in the marketing strategy (Barney, 2001, p. 645; Kozlenkova et al., 2013, pp. 1-3; Marr & Adams, 2004, p. 18). Employees, further known as the company's ambassadors, can increase the company's credibility, potential growth, and survival by providing credible information and sharing personal business experiences on LinkedIn (Shih, 2013).

Conclusively, creating a trustworthy concept where people and businesses are selling without giving the audience the "hard sell" statements (Swani et al., 2013, p. 269).

The value of LinkedIn is challenging to measure. However, previous research shows a positive correlation between an entrepreneur's network at LinkedIn and its success rate for investment and resources (Banerji & Reimer, 2019, p.46). Furthermore, emotions have an essential role in consumers' decision-making processes. Therefore, emotions are essential when building a brand and using employees as ambassadors (Samuelson et al., 2016, pp. 222-223).

In this research, quantitative research will indicate how vital personal profiles/ambassadors are for the company.

In the fall of 2022, an investigation of LinkedIn woke our curiosity of how ambassadors are used in SMEs branding strategies. Indications of ambassadors providing trustworthiness led us to understand that the power of emotional branding may be relevant in studies on LinkedIn. By using the resources of the ambassadors, they can create unique customer relationships and brand equity (intangible assets), which results in a competitive advantage (Kozlenkova et al., 2013, pp. 1-3).

This research uses the Theory of Planned Behavior to find the sharing behavior linking emotional branding strategies to LinkedIn. As this research is under-discovered, a mixed

method is utilized. After making a brief theory assembly, a preliminary study was conducted, interviewing three LinkedIn experts in different business sectors. The knowledge gathered from these interviews created a baseline for further theory assembling, research model, and hypotheses. The research question research in this thesis is as follows:

RQ: How can B2B SMEs benefit through emotional branding by using LinkedIn?

As social media is a place for personal expression, it is also a platform for businesses to share knowledge about their brands and make sales. As content provided by personal profiles is experienced of having a more significant reach (Biro, 2016; Laugomer, 2022), the credibility of a personal vs. a company profile is a matter to investigate. In this quantitative paper, a survey has been published on LinkedIn to investigate how emotional branding through using ambassadors can lead to positive performance outcomes for the company.

The thesis will conclude with the research model and the hypotheses, finding LinkedIn a highly relevant platform for building a brand and customer base.

2. Theoretical Framework and Existing Literature

In this chapter, the reader will get an extensive introduction regarding branding value and how it will affect SMEs' branding performance.

2.1 Branding and performance in SMEs

SMEs are defined as "growing small businesses, medium size enterprises, and entrepreneurs." (Abimbola, 2001, p.99). Oyeku et al. (2014) suggest researchers have different views on definitions and metrics for measuring performance in SMEs. A successful organization is described as "the one which adapts mode effectively and takes advantage of the opportunities offered by the business environment" (Oyeku et al., 2014, p.15; Kalleberg & Leicht, 1991, p.138). A company's financial performance (Oyeku et al., 2014, p.15; Islam, Khan, Obaidullah, and Alam, 2011) and a company making it through the first 2-3 years are perceived to be successful (Oyeku et al., 2014, p.15). Further, situational and individual variables have been vital in SMEs' performance (Oyeku et al., 2014, p.15; Owoseni & Akanbi, 2010). A study by Barkhatov et al. (2016) comprehends the factors that modify the course of SMEs in Europe and Russia. Findings indicate a strong correlation between the growth of SMEs and the presence of robust institutions, a healthy community, and a positive outlook on the economy and the small business sector. Society depends on successful SMEs contributing to employment opportunities and economic growth (Oyeku et al., 2014, p.15; Wei-Wen, 2009).

2.1.1 Branding

For decades, branding strategies have been central to the literature regarding marketing and strategy, further recognized as crucial for all firms (Efrat & Asseraf, 2019, p.1). A marketing strategy can be used as a strategic tool to enhance a company's performance (Yin Wong & Merrilees, 2007, p.385), and marketing budgets have increased over the years, expecting more growth in the future. Due to the pandemic, companies have increased their digital presence and will continue working towards a more digital presence as they believe customer behavior has changed (Mora Cortez et al., 2022, p.92). The strategy of branding is "a promise made by a firm to its customers" (Barney, 2014, p.24; Efrat & Asseraf, 2019, p.1), widely recognized for acquiring competitive advantage in domestic markets (Barney, 2014, p.24; Biel, 1992; Calderon et al., 1997; Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001; de Chernatony, 2001; Efrat

& Asseraf, 2019, p.1; Farquhar, 1994; Moore et al., 2000; Mosmans, 1996; Mosmans & van der Vorst, 1998; Rubinstein, 1996; Yin Wong & Merrilees, 2007, p.385). When companies move internationally by creating new markets or acquiring brand assets, both cases will enhance the marketing influence on the company's international expansion, competitive advantage, and performance (Efrat & Asseraf, 2019, p.1).

Expanding the scope of branding entails recognizing it as more than just a marketing communication tool. Additionally, it is a comprehensive business approach that should be integrated across all aspects of the business (Rubinstein, 1996; Yin Wong & Merrilees, 2007, p.385). Businesses should administrate the different aspects of the brand and attach the whole business strategy to it (Rooney, 1995; Yin Wong & Merrilees, 2007, p.385). Marketers declare that the brand should be a priority within a company. Further, branding issues should be coordinated within the business department (Capon et al., 2001; Mosmans, 1996; Mosmans & van der Vorst, 1998; Urde, 1994; Urde 1999; Yin Wong & Merrilees, 2007, p.385). "This approach of brand orientation extends the resource-based theory of marketing strategy, in terms of how brands are created, developed, maintained, and protected, and can result in enhanced performance of firms." (Yin Wong & Merrilees, 2007, p.385).

A brand is a valuable and rare resource. It is non-substitutable and an essential aspect of competitiveness to the business (Keller, 2000; Miles, 2012; Salleh et al., 2017, pp.16-17). Over the years, the Resource-based view (RBV) theory has become critical in marketing research. According to Kozlenkova et al. (2013), the importance of the RBV framework has increased with its function: "provide an important framework for explaining and predicting the basis of a firm's competitive advantage and performance." (Kozlenkova et al., 2013, p.1). The intangible assets within the company can be human capital, information capital, and organization capital (Marr & Adams, 2004, p.18). Articles from previous studies generate theories of competitive advantage using RBV (Barney, 2001, p.644; Nelson & Winter, 1982; Porter, 1980; Ricardo, 1817; Schulze, 1994), where companies' capabilities and resources can provide long-term strategy and positional advantage (Santiago, 2020, p.65). Further, human capital, in terms of employee knowledge, talent, and commitment, contributes to a company's success (Santiago, 2020, p.63). As branding requires many resources, a company can include its employees as ambassadors by them posting on their social media platform. By including employees' talent and word of mouth in their branding strategy, SMEs can grow their profit, allowing the market to grow without a big marketing budget (Barney, 2001, p.645).

2.1.2 Social media

Social media is a broad term containing the devices and platforms used to create user-generated content that users can share (Fahmi Al-Zyoud, 2018, pp.102-103). Further, it is an arena where companies can communicate with their customers, creating a collaboration between customers and businesses. Value creation is increasing as the connection between businesses and customers is complex (Andzulis et al., 2012, p.308). As the exploitation of social media has been tremendous in the marketing strategy of B2C companies, the adoption of social media has been relatively slow in B2B companies (Mora Cortez et al 2023, p.2). Several platforms are meeting the needs of B2C companies, such as Tiktok, Instagram, and Facebook (Mora Cortez et al., 2022, p.92). However, the importance of social media usage is no exception for B2B companies (Efrat & Asseraf, 2019, p.2). Nevertheless, the platforms for marketing reasons in B2B are rare. LinkedIn has become a preferable place for networking, sales, and marketing by B2B companies (Mora Cortez et al., 2022, p.92).

The presence of entrepreneurs and business leaders on social media, especially LinkedIn, has been identified as an essential part of the SMEs journey. As social media is a digital presence, it functions as a customer relationship platform where customers can connect with businesses consecutively. Social media creates unique opportunities for businesses to engage customers on valuable and meaningful levels (Mora Cortez et al., 2022, p.102). Furthermore, a study by Banerji & Reimer (2019) shows that well-connected entrepreneurs on LinkedIn have better access to information and resources, increasing the venture's success. It is an important step further logical in a company's Customer relationship marketing (CRM) system (Mora Cortez et al., 2022, p.92). The total value chain combining the functional branding using webpages, other information channels, and the social platform is essential to meet the customer's needs and communicate with them fully (Mora Cortez et al., 2023, p.103). Furthermore, in B2B, social media impacts sales as to how exposed the buyer has been to social media (Mora Cortez et al., 2023, p.2).

2.1.2.1 LinkedIn as a Tool for SMEs

According to research conducted by Toma (2010), social media and networking sites are becoming increasingly popular for people to establish personal and professional connections. However, a lack of research has focused on LinkedIn as a strategic sales platform for B2B firms (Salo, 2017, p.115). Since its beginning, LinkedIn has been a platform for recruitment.

However, in recent years it has become more dynamic; a platform for sharing about work life, knowledge, and business-related content. In other terms, acknowledged as “the ultimate B2B network known for through leadership content, employee engagement, and a robust platform” (Jackson, 2018).

Mora Cortez et al. (2023) studied data from a new, steadily growing B2B firm for 106 weeks. Their discovery uncovered how new post typology and customer engagement affected firm performance. Furthermore, the study focused on the company's actions on LinkedIn regarding long and short-term posts, website visits, new followers, and the composite of engagement behaviors over time. The main goal was to identify buyers' responses and the effect of long-term and short-term publishing on LinkedIn. The results show a positive correlation between how the number of followers on LinkedIn and website visits affected sales revenue and sales posts. Accordingly, positive sales revenue, social posts, and new followers positively influence engagement (Mora Cortez et al., 2023, p.2).

LinkedIn is used by SMEs, ambassadors, larger companies, and other business people to update current and potential customers and stakeholders. The posting recommended for its users is to be frequent at least 1-2 times daily. Firms posting consequently get twice the customer engagement (LinkedIn 2020; Mora Cortez et al., 2022, p.103). Ambassadors, however, have a more extended reach than companies (Biro, 2016; Laugomer, 2022). Furthermore, the content of the posts are essential. In other words, if the customers are under the impression that the content is without purpose or meaning for the reader, they will lose trust in the company. SMEs or ambassadors should focus on providing customers with value instead of “hard sell” strategies (Swani et al., 2013, p.269).

Banerji and Reimer’s (2019) research shows how well-connected entrepreneurs get more funding. In other words, the research “revealed that several variables in LinkedIn profiles were positively correlated with the number of funds raised by startup companies establishing a link between social networks and entrepreneurial success.” (Banerji and Reimer, 2019, p.46). Additionally, people place significant trust in individuals based solely on their online profiles without meeting them in person (Toma, 2010, p.13). As mentioned, LinkedIn began as a platform for recruitment, and there has been a positive correlation to the ability to attract passive candidates. It is ideal for recruiters to use LinkedIn as a recruitment platform as they build a base of potential people to recruit. The idea that recruitment and promotion can be

done cheaply is adaptable to other branding strategies on the platform (Koch et al., 2018, p.5).

2.1.3 Branding Perspectives

There are different types of branding perspectives. The concept of brand experience has captured significant attention in marketing practice (Sung & Kim, 2010, p.640). Research regarding functional and emotional branding shows that both branding methods are crucial in delivering value to buyers (Efrat & Asseraf, 2019, p.2; Leek & Christodoulides, 2012). Research by Efrat & Asseraf (2019) has analyzed how branding affects a company's marketing strategy performance. The paper enlightens that often, inexperienced businesses neglect to address suitable branding decisions. Instead, these focus on functional branding and ignore the value of emotional branding in their products or services (Efrat & Asseraf, 2019, p.7). Even though their research is based on born globals, it can be relevant for SMEs with inexperienced characteristics. The research found that functional branding had barely any impact on performance. However, emotional branding was shown to be positively related to performance. According to this research, businesses can improve their market positioning when interpreting emotional branding in their strategies. The study suggests that businesses should rethink their market orientation and focus more on their approaches considering market- and branding orientation (Efrat & Asseraf, 2019, pp.5-8).

Several media and LinkedIn experts advocate for businesses to use ambassadors in their branding strategy. An article published on Entrepreneur by Biro (2016): "How to create a social media advocacy program," reflects upon how internal teams can positively affect the reach of social media posting. Further explaining how the employee's post receives eight times more engagements than business profiles. It also portrays how leads through employees' network converts to sales approximately seven times more often (Biro, 2016). Another article portrays and argues for "how to turn your entire staff into a social media army" using word-of-mouth to create brand credibility instead of corporate accounts (Holmes, 2015). Emotions have an essential role in consumers' decision-making processes. Therefore, emotions are important to include when building a brand and using ambassadors. Concerning branding, emotions, and feelings are responses and experiences when exposed to a given brand. Such responses and experiences indicate how consumers tend to experience a

brand. This does not ultimately correspond with how the business wants the brand to be experienced (Samuelsen et al., 2016, pp.222-223).

2.2 Personal and Company Related Identification

This chapter about personal and company identification portrays how identification is important in terms of branding.

2.2.1 Personal identification

Personal identification is complex, further essential to explain personal behavior according to a person's actions (Raz, 1991, p.312). According to social identity theory, "people typically go beyond their personal identity to develop a social identity" (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003, p.77; Brewer, 1991; Tajfel & Turner, 1985). Further, personal validation is one of the most important factors for a person's well-being, identification, and chosen way of life, with social integration and as an employee. Accordingly, "Public validation is an essential element in the process of cultural transmission, preservation, and renewal. It is one of the central arenas for the assertion of traditions, and for challenging traditions and experimenting with new forms of relationships, new attitudes, and styles of life." (Raz, 1991, p.312).

Creating a brand that is attractive and unique to its employers can be a way for them to feel connected to the organization. According to social identity, by making the brand attractive, it can influence the loyalty, satisfaction, and dedication of the employee. As a result, it will influence the company's performance (Maxwell & Knox, 2009; Santiago, 2020, p.66) by creating an ambassador in the employee (Gelb & Rangarajan, 2014, p.99).

An employee represents a company's brand when meeting customers. The human qualities of an employee are often built upon the personal aspects mentioned, as they are motivated to be a good employee. Managers often motivate employees to "project the desired organizational image through their demeanor, appearance, and manner of interacting with customers." (Gelb & Rangarajan, 2014, p, 98; Miles & Mangold, 2004). However, freedom of speech is a public and respected good people appreciate, even though not everyone advantages it. People want to have the opportunity to express themselves freely and for the right to be protected.

Further, censorship insults the people censored, denying their possibility to be themselves (Raz, 1991, pp.303-305). The SMEs that treat their customers and employees well and

respectfully experience employee satisfaction and higher service quality. Furthermore, word-of-mouth communication is an established outcome as personal identification is experienced (Gelb & Rangarajan, 2014, p.98).

2.2.2 Company Related Identification

A company's identity is formed by the organization's "mission, structure, processes, and climate." (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003, p.78; Kunda, 1999; Scott & Lane, 2000). The different communicators of identity contribute to creating brand awareness. The company can control how they identify the company, what to share, and how and where they share information (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003, p.78). Previous identification research has focused primarily on the relationship between employee and employer (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003, p.76; Dutton et al., 1994). The company can exert certain control over its members as employees and channel members. However, the less controllable factors are independent organizations or less controllable people. Further, the value chain is more uncontrollable, like shareholders and customers (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003, p.78).

For a consumer, one of the most crucial aspects of CRM is the connection a consumer feels towards the company. Many factors affect the relationship between the company and the consumer. The most crucial factor is communication. The company identity can be divided into core values and demographics, which make the company and will influence its communication. People identify themselves with a company that has characteristics suitable for its customer. When identification with the company occurs, a customer relationship thrives. It is not about how the company communicates but how consumers perceive their identity (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003, p.77; Dutton et al., 1994).

Bhattacharya & Sen (2003) focus their study on the creation of a company's identity. The identity can cause both positive and negative associations. When a SMEs identity matches a consumer's, it is more likely to find it attractive as it can become a part of who they are. Creating a solid company identity with trustworthiness, attractiveness, and customer identification will lead to company loyalty, customer recruitment, and a stronger claim on the company (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003, pp.79–80).

2.3 Theory of planned behavior

When discussing LinkedIn and emotional branding using ambassadors, it is essential to investigate The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB). TPB implies attitude, beliefs, subjective norms, actional planning, predictive power, and perceived behavioral control as reasons for people's behavior. This theory is formulated to forecast and elucidate human behavior within a particular context (Ajzen, 1991, p.181, 206). Human behavior has been tried, explained, and predicted by behavioral dispositions such as social attitudes and personality traits (Ajzen, 1988; Ajzen, 1991, p.179; Campbell, 1963; Sherman & Fazio, 1983). Overall, people's behavioral achievement is decided by people's motivation and ability. Earlier studies show a person might behave differently according to whom the person interacts with. However, there has been an issue regarding creating a "general attitude to predict specific behaviors directed at the target of the attitude has produced calls for abandoning the attitude concept" (Ajzen, 1991, p.180; Wicker, 1969). Further, different occasions and situations provoke different attitudes and personality traits. (Ajzen, 1991, p.180).

Behavior depends to some extent on motivational factors such as opportunities and resources and will speak for people's actual behavior control. Such factors include "time, money, skills, cooperation of others" (Ajzen, 1991, pp.181-182). When a company with limited resources needs to use ambassadors for branding, the company should educate its employees on what they prefer the ambassador to front within the company and what to avoid. The ambassadors and other employees can speak warmly of their employer to create word-of-mouth to maintain a brand's credibility. This is preferable if there should be a conflict by the brand or if there is a strong competitor (Gelb & Rangarajan, 2014. p, 99). If the intention of the behavior is firm, it would likely be performed. A person believing in their ability to get sales through being active on LinkedIn by adopting norms will be more likely to succeed. Furthermore, the perceived behavioral control combined with behavioral intention can together foresee behavioral achievement (Ajzen, 1991, p.181).

3 Methodology

3.1 Research Design and Approach

Methodology in research is the method used to have an understanding of reality. While people on a daily basis tend to draw relatively quick conclusions, researchers must act consciously with concluding remarks. In social science, a diversity of human feelings and experiences are being investigated. The studies include variation, openness, and quantity. Thus, researchers' conclusions are more reliant compared to an individual's assumptions and predictions. The essential characteristics of empirical research are systematic, thoroughness, and openness. Furthermore, it is essential to mention that outcomes and conclusions of social science studies often are referred to as temporary, with the ability to change over time (Johannessen et al., 2016, pp.25-29).

In modern research, it is common to practice one of the three following approaches: qualitative method, quantitative method, or a combination of both, called "mixed methods" (Johannessen et al., 2016, pp.423-424). The characteristics of qualitative methods are the intention of receiving an "in-depth" understanding of the research objectives. The most common approaches within this method are interviews, questionnaires with open-ended questions, or observations. The approach generates broad answers and findings, reflecting qualitative data outcomes. Quantitative methods are, however, based on statements or fixed questions combined with given answer options. The most common approach for quantitative research is questionnaires. Quantitative research outcomes are based on data in the form of numbers (Johannessen et al., 2016, pp.25-29).

All over, qualitative research has its purpose of developing theories and themes. On the other hand, quantitative research tests theories. Therefore, it is common to use mixed methods in research to both develop and test theories (Gripsrud et al., 2017, p.103).

The research approach for this thesis is based on qualitative and quantitative research. As LinkedIn as a platform for marketing purposes and business strategy is understudied, the authors needed more references to this topic. Therefore, the process began with research on the topic, followed by a preliminary study interview with three LinkedIn experts. The preliminary study used open-ended questions considering the businesses' social media and

LinkedIn usage. As a result, the hypotheses, theory section, and research model were developed. Additionally, by using the findings from the preliminary research and literature review, the quantitative approach was developed in the form of a survey. Overall, the preliminary study aims to assure quality and relevance to the questions in the survey referring to LinkedIn use. In other words, a certain extent of mixed methods is utilized for this study.

3.1.1 Preliminary Stage of the Study (a qualitative approach)

In light of the novelty of the study, the authors realized the topic being a relatively new study in the literature. In order to understand aspects of LinkedIn for SMEs, the authors reached out to several active users on the platform and marketing specialists for informal conversations. The field research gave insight into reports and articles by companies that have investigated the platform and experienced benefits using LinkedIn. This encouraged the authors to talk with experts to understand constructs relevant to this issue in terms of a preliminary study.

The preliminary research included three interviews from the B2B market with a diversity within products and services. In cooperation with the thesis supervisor, an interview guide with open-ended questions (see Appendix A) was developed to seek potential undiscovered outcomes. In other words, the preliminary research aims to identify aspects needed to form the theory assembling. Additionally, common aspects from the interviews were included in the quantitative research method.

The interviewees are acknowledged as LinkedIn experts and use the platform in their branding strategies. The first company provides a service (Company A), the second provides both products and services within technology (Company B), and the last provides services mainly focusing on LinkedIn (Company C). Table 1 briefly summarizes the most common features from the interviews. The most common remarks made a critical baseline for further study.

All companies have different LinkedIn strategies. However, all companies are focusing on content from personal accounts or through their employees' accounts further called ambassadors. It provided them with different performance outcomes such as trustworthiness, credibility, community, and sales. The main similarities were that sharing behavior on LinkedIn led to company performance. Even though the ambassadors are sharing through

their private profiles, it is clear from their profile information that they work for the company. In Appendix B, a more thorough summary of the interviews is presented in addition to the interview guide for the preliminary study.

Preliminary study			
Findings	Company A	Company B	Company C
Common remarks for further investigation	Sharing has been important for trustworthiness and word-of-mouth and creating an online community.	By sharing they have experienced trustworthiness.	By sharing they have experienced sales.
Additional remarks			
Findings	Company A	Company B	Company C
LinkedIn strategy	The CEO posts and engages on LinkedIn continuously as part of the strategy. Other employees participate voluntarily. It is optional as they are experiencing a high demand.	A certain number of employees from all company departments are continuously participating by sharing content on LinkedIn, as part of the company's marketing strategy. All employees are offered a LinkedIn course as part of the onboarding program. Also, needed to be supportive in order to feed the LinkedIn algorithm.	All employees are present on LinkedIn and create value in order to gain trust from LinkedIn users that are not in a buying mode(95%). As a result, the company has experienced a high demand while not having any costs related to marketing. Keep track of the LinkedIn algorithm.
The business' LinkedIn strategy includes employees that are active ambassadors as a part of their job.	Only the CEO uses LinkedIn actively on behalf of the company.	Yes - 5 employees have it as a part of their job. Others do it voluntarily.	All employees. LinkedIn strategy meetings are arranged every week.
Experienced sales through being active on LinkedIn.	A certain extent. The company intentionally limits branding behavior on LinkedIn, due to overcapacity.	Presume part of the sales is connected to LinkedIn. No direct measurements have been done.	All sales come from being active on LinkedIn.
Experienced increased branding value through LinkedIn.	Yes, by connecting with other people and sharing knowledge. Experiences trust from the audience and word of mouth.	Trustworthiness among current customers as ambassadors are continuously active.	Has become known as a LinkedIn expert and has a solid personal and company brand.
Information shared on LinkedIn.	Valuable knowledge, personal experiences, work life, podcasts, speaker jobs.	Valuable knowledge, personal experiences, work life, seasonal posts, campaigns, cooperations with other businesses, pictures with face(s).	Valuable knowledge, personal experiences, work life, cooperations with other businesses, pictures with face(s), humor, and irony
Preferred strategy on LinkedIn: Organic vs ads	Organic and ads	Organic	Organic
Experience a more extended reach when posting from private profiles on behalf of the company.	Organic material and authenticity have a more extended reach than product and sale-related posts.	Organic material and authenticity have a more extended reach than product and sale-related posts.	Organic material and authenticity have a more extended reach than product and sale-related posts.

Table 1: A Brief Summary of Findings from the Preliminary Study

3.1.2 Research Model and Hypotheses

The preliminary study showed a correlation between goals and LinkedIn performance. With this knowledge, the theory section was further developed finding the right aspect of the thesis. Based on this knowledge from the preliminary study and the more thorough theory assembling, the hypotheses and research model were formed.

H1: LinkedIn related goals will enhance employee branding identification

H2: Branding identification leads to Sharing Behavior

H3: Sharing Behavior enhances LinkedIn related company performance

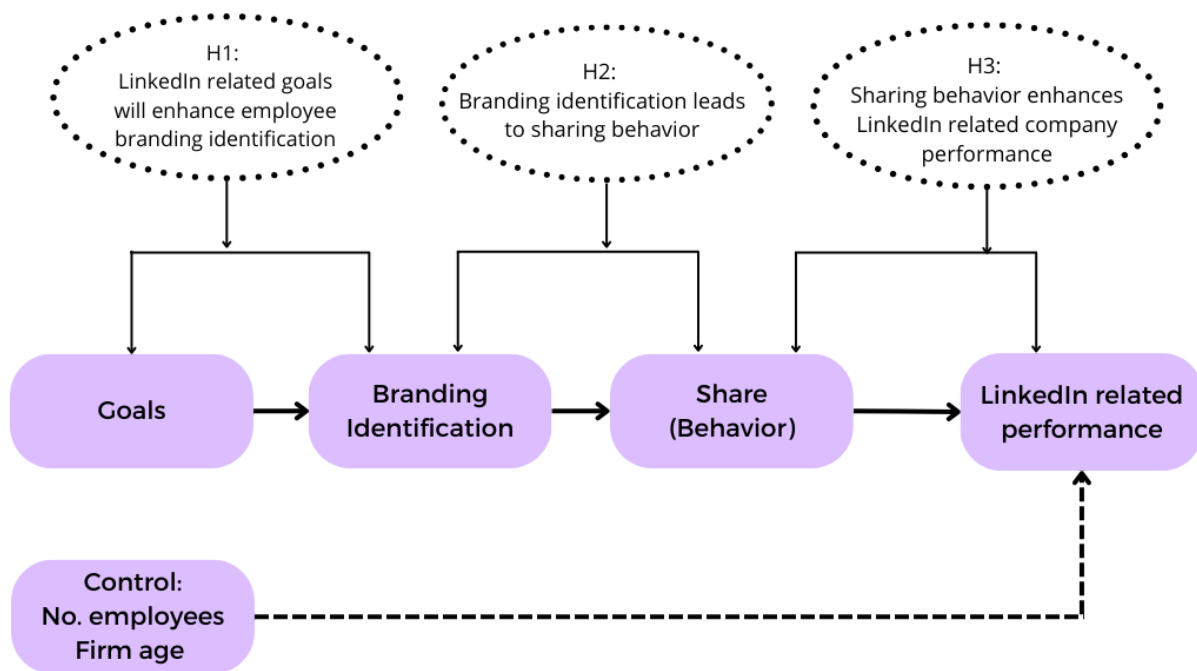


Figure 1: Research Model for the Hypotheses

3.1.3 Quantitative Survey

The preliminary study identified more leads to relevant theory that was necessary to include and investigate. The outcomes touch on topics within theories such as emotional branding, the performance of small companies, and aspects of social media usage. Additionally, branding including Resource-Based View was found relevant, combined with the Theory of Planned Behavior and aspects within branding identification. Furthermore, the experiences of strategic approaches and outcomes from the preliminary study were adapted to the survey for further measurement.

In order to measure theories and topics' relation to businesses' use of LinkedIn, four relevant scales have been designed for the survey. The scales are based on the preliminary study. Additionally, two scales are adopted from previous studies where performance and emotional branding have been measured. Overall, the scales measure seven extents of being agreeable to a statement, also known as a 7-point Likert scale. The scale is a tool to measure individuals' attitudes and images regarding a topic (Gripsrud et al., 2017, p.137).

In the survey, the points of measurement are the following:

- (1) Strongly Disagree
- (2) Disagree
- (3) Slightly Disagree
- (4) Neutral
- (5) Slightly Agree
- (6) Agree
- (7) Strongly Agree

Scales of Goals

The survey includes two scales regarding goals when using LinkedIn. The statements in the scale originate from this study's preliminary stage. Furthermore, these are found as common goals related to LinkedIn. Table 2 and Table 3 illustrate statements regarding Company Goals when using LinkedIn. Table 2 refers to goals considering the Company's presence on LinkedIn. Secondly, Table 3 refers to goals considering the encouragement of having employees as ambassadors on LinkedIn. Findings from the preliminary stage showed companies are experiencing it beneficial when ambassadors post on behalf of the company.

This is a common finding in all preliminary interviews, where the interviewees justified that private profiles have a more extended reach than company profiles on LinkedIn.

Question: What are the goals regarding the company when using LinkedIn?

Create awareness and trustworthiness
Positioning in the market
Being a preferable employer
Sales
Generate customer loyalty

Table 2: Scale of Company Goals

Question: What are the goals regarding the ambassadors/private profiles?

Gather leads
Learn from others
Sales
Share knowledge/valuable information
Build a network
Build relationship with an existing network
Build culture internally

Table 3: Scale of Company Goals Regarding Ambassadors

Scale regarding Emotional Branding Identification

The scale retrieved for measuring Emotional Branding includes emotional aspects of how individuals experience statements regarding their attachment to a brand. The emotional perspectives from the scale are adopted from Park et al. (2010). For this study's purpose, Emotional Branding Identification is measured from the employee's perspective and how they relate to the branding of the company emotionally. The question of the scale and its belonging statements are illustrated in Table 4.

Question in survey: “How do you experience the use of LinkedIn?”

The company I work for is a part of my activities on LinkedIn.
I feel that I am personally connected to my job on LinkedIn.
Who I am on LinkedIn reflects my personality.
Messages from the company I am working for say something about who I am to others on LinkedIn.
When I have a need for services or products, people on LinkedIn are first in mind.
I experience trustworthiness when getting information from a company’s employees through LinkedIn.
I experience trustworthiness from firms that have an active presence on LinkedIn.
I am dependent on LinkedIn as a marketing and sales platform.

Table 4: Scale of Emotional Branding Identification (Park et al., 2010, p.6).

Scale of Sharing Behavior

Regarding the Theory of Planned Behavior, a scale concerning how often an individual posts on LinkedIn is included in the survey. LinkedIn has several possible behaviors, such as liking, commenting, sharing posts, and initiating connections. However, this study is limited to Sharing Behavior due to the preliminary interview’s finding that sharing is the most essential behavior. Table 5 illustrates the frequencies of how often an individual shares their own or others' posts on LinkedIn.

Question: How often do you share your own posts or others posts on LinkedIn?

Every day
3-4 times a week
Once a week
A few times a month
More seldom
Never

Table 5: Scale of Sharing Behavior

Furthermore, a question regarding which content an individual focuses on when sharing on LinkedIn is presented in the survey. The question aims to receive data describing the individual's sharing behavior. Additionally, the question is designed to supplement the Scale of Sharing Behavior. Therefore, the answers to the question are presented in a check-box format. In order to retrieve a certain extent of precise data, it is only possible to choose five focus variables in the survey. The factors are based on the preliminary stage of this study and are retrieved from the interviews conducted prior to developing the survey. Table 6 illustrates the factors that are included in the question regarding content that is focused on sharing on LinkedIn.

Factors Regarding Information Focused on when Sharing on LinkedIn

Question: Which 5 activities does the company focus the most on LinkedIn?

Salespost
Product posts
Share accomplishments and collaborations
Internal culture building
Campaigns
Posts adapted to seasonal trends
Website content
Posts including pictures of face(s)
Posts with video of people
Share the working day
Share personal experiences

Table 6: Information Focused on when Sharing on LinkedIn

Scale of LinkedIn related performance

The last scale presented in the survey measures an individual's experience of LinkedIn related performance. The scale combines statements from a previous study combined with findings from the preliminary stage (Zou et al., 1998). The question for the scale is presented below, with respective statements in Table 7.

Question in the survey: “In the company’s perspective, the usage of LinkedIn is proved to be...”

<i>Statements</i>
Profitable
Generating a high sales volume
Achieving a high growth rate
Strengthening our position in the market
Increasing our market share
Improving our competitiveness <i>(finding from the preliminary study)</i>
Generating customer loyalty <i>(finding from the preliminary study)</i>
A depending marketing and sales platform <i>(finding from the preliminary study)</i>

Table 7: Scale of LinkedIn performance (Zou et al., 1998).

3.2 Data

The data in this study is assembled through a quantitative approach. In order to analyze the data, it is run through cleaning and filtering in the statistical program SPSS. Furthermore, the program is also used for analyzing descriptive statistics. The testing of the research model is based on Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) and Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) using the statistical program AMOS.

3.2.1 Data Selection and Filtering

The survey has intended to engage participants with familiarity and experience using LinkedIn to generate optimal data collection. Therefore, it has been natural to post the survey through the author's private LinkedIn profiles. Additionally, "Næringsforeningen i Kristiansandsregionen" (Kristiansand's local business association) sent the survey to all businesses in the region subscribing to their newsletter. This opportunity was used to be able to receive data from local businesses.

Overall, the targeted respondents for the quantitative data are businesses operating in a B2B segment and have an appearance on LinkedIn. Table 8 illustrates the distribution of how the respondents have entered the survey, whereas 117 have entered through the LinkedIn post.

Received the link through a friend	17
Colleague	15
LinkedIn post	117
Through network	42
Newsletter	11

Table 8: Respondents' entry to the quantitative survey

In total, 209 participants entered the survey. However, fewer are included in the analysis. Seven of the participants have only distributed the survey, with no answers. Additionally, 84 were partially complete, leaving the dataset with 118 fully completed surveys. This does not mean that only 118 of the 209 participants are qualified to be part of the analysis. The partially completed forms with missing data equal to or under 10% have been included in the analysis. The final outcome of qualified participants in the quantitative data is 122.

3.2.2 Descriptive Statistics

In SPSS, descriptive statistics are analyzed to measure the distribution of frequencies in the dataset. The purpose is to organize and summarize the observations of the participants' answers (King et al., 2010, p.3). The assembled dataset for this study is anonymous. However, the survey includes questions regarding demographics referring to the characteristics of a group (Mitchell & Jolley, 2010, p.623).

Description of the Companies

The demographics in this study are related to the company the respondent is working for. In order to achieve an understanding of the demographics in the data, a descriptive statistics analysis is conducted to reflect the participants. The survey includes questions regarding the demographics of the company the participant works for.

The data includes 91.8 percent of Norwegian companies and 8.2 percent of foreign companies, whereas 75.4 percent operate locally and 24.6 percent operate internationally.

Furthermore, the demographics show that a higher proportion of the data are newly established companies, with most participants being established in 2022 (see Appendix D). Lastly, Table 12 illustrates the distribution of the number of employees in the companies.

Is the Company Norwegian?	
Yes	No
91.8%	8.2%

Table 9: Is the Company Norwegian?

Is the Company Local or International?	
Local	International
75.4%	24.6%

Table 10: Is the Company Local or International?

When was the company established?	
0-5 years ago	49
6-10 years ago	28
11 +	101

Table 11: When was the company established?

The number of employees?	
0-3	38
4-10	30
11-50	49
51-100	12
101 +	48

Table 12: The number of employees

Table 13, shows the distribution of the job positions within the respondents. A larger part of the respondents were leaders, further social media marketing, and content producers.

Distribution of positions	
Advisor	11
Business developer	3
CEO	22
CFO/COO/CTO	7
Communication chief	5
Founder	8
Social media marketing and content producers	19
Project leaders	8
HR	3
Sales and marketing Director	15
Other employee	17

Table 13: Distribution of Positions

Furthermore, the companies operate in different industries. The categories presented in the survey are gathered from Statistics Norway for the most common industries (Statistisk sentralbyrå, 2023). Additionally, “Other” is presented to include participants outside these industries.

Industry	
Construction services	6
Health and social services	6
Artisan/craftsman	0
Industry and production	9
IT	13
Office and finance	7
Culture and creative occupations	5
Nature and environment	1
Tourism and food	4
Sales and services	10
Self-employed	10
Security and preparedness	1
Transport and warehouse	4
Education	4
Other	17

Table 14: Distribution of Industries (Statistisk sentralbyrå, 2023)

Lastly, Table 15 illustrates whether the company operates in a B2B or B2C market or both. The instances of B2B and both markets are the most common in the data and can be reflected. Thus LinkedIn is a platform designed for professionals.

Is your company B2B or B2C?		
B2B	B2C	Both
63	9	50

Table 15: Distribution of B2B, B2C, or both markets

3.3 Preliminary Study of the Research Model

As mentioned, the research model is built on constructs relevant from the preliminary stage of the study. To validate the research model, the data collected through the quantitative survey is used. The approaches are Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) in terms of Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to identify significant relations from the scales to the variables in the research model (Gripsrud et al., 2017, pp.379-380). The findings from the CFA are measured in a correlation matrix to test the extent of the relationship between the variables (Johannessen et al., 2016, p.302). Lastly, a test of the variables Chronbach's Alpha is conducted to measure the internal consistency of the model (Mitchell & Jolley, 2010, p.623).

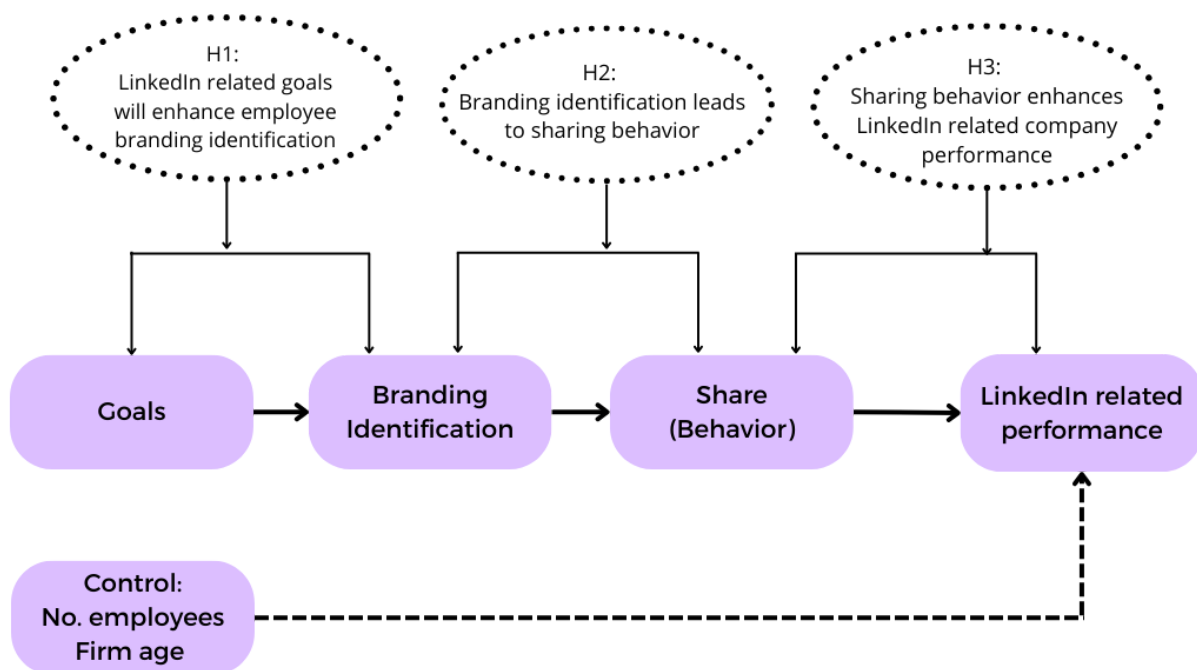


Figure 1: Research Model for the Hypotheses

H1: LinkedIn related goals will enhance employee branding identification

H2: Branding identification leads to Sharing Behavior

H3: Sharing Behavior enhances LinkedIn related company performance

3.3.1 Confirmatory Factor Analysis and Structural Equation Modeling

The CFA is based on SEM using the statistical program AMOS to receive insight of whether the research model fits the data well (Xia & Yang, 2018, p.409). The analysis carries out variables that are of the highest significance on behalf of each other. Furthermore, it gives an indication of which statements are measuring the same underlying factors (Mitchell & Jolley, 2010, p.297). Consequently, the CFA contributes to validate more reliable findings (Gripsrud et al., 2017, pp.379-380). Additionally, the analysis contributes to a data reduction in scale statements for further investigation of the research model (see Appendix E).

Table 16 illustrates the findings of the model fit and includes the following indicators: Chi-square divided by the Degree of Freedom ($\chi^2/(df)$), P-value (P), Tucker –Lewis coefficient index (TLI), Comparative fit index (CFI), and Root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA).

The measurement of Chi-square is a statistical test to determine whether two or more variables are related (Mitchell & Jolley, 2010, p.622). The degree of freedom is an index of a sample size. In a simple experiment, the degree of freedom for an error term will always be two less than the number of participants (Mitchell & Jolley, 2010, p.623). Put together, Chi-square divided by the degree of freedom gives an indication of an overall model fit. The suggested value for the indicator is equal to or below five for a reasonable model fit (Arbuckle, 2005, p.493). Moreover, the level of the indicator increases if the sample size enlarges (Bollen & Long, 1993, p.3). Furthermore, the P-value (P) indicates whether the model fit should be accepted or rejected (Arbuckle, 2005, p.492). Jöreskog, K.G., & Sörbom (2001) suggest that an acceptable model should have a value of P higher or equal to .05.

“TLI and CFI are incremental fit indices that compare the fit of a hypothesized model with a baseline model” (Xia & Yang, 2018, p.409). The recommended value of the indicators varies from previous studies. Bentler & Bonett (1980) recommend that the TLI is above .90 to achieve an approved model fit (Bentler & Bonett, 1980; Xia & Yang, 2018, p.409). Moreover, Hu & Bentler (1999) suggests that both CFI and TLI have values above .95 for acceptance of a good model fit (Hu & Bentler, 1999; Xia & Yang, 2018, p.409).

“RMSEA is an absolute fit index, in that it assesses how far a hypothesized model is from a perfect model” (Xia & Yang, 2018, p.409). Research suggests that the RMSEA value of <.05

indicates a close fit between the hypothesized model compared to an exact fit with an RMSEA value of = .00 (Xia & Yang, 2018, p.409; Bollen & Long, 1993, p.144; Arbuckle, 2005, p.497).

	$\chi^2 / (df)$	P	TLI	CFI	RMSEA
CFA	1.58	.00	.91	.93	.07
Research Model	1.11	.35	.98	.99	.03

Table 16: CFA Model Fit Summary

Table 16 illustrates the outcomes of the model fit by comparing the CFA to an improvement of the research model. The values of $\chi^2 / (df)$ (1.11), P (.30), TLI (.98), CFI (.99), and RMSEA (.03) are all approved for the model fit according to previous statistical research.

Furthermore, the findings of acceptable indicators lead the study to further investigation and analysis of the research model.

3.3.2 Reduction of Scale Statements

The CFA and SEM contribute to further development of the research model. The variables related to goals and branding identification are each consequently divided into two separate variables. More specifically, Goals are divided into two groups; Strategic goals and Sales goals. Additionally, Branding Identification is divided into Personal Branding Identification and Company Related Branding Identification (see Appendix E).

Lastly, the test contributes to a reduction of statements that are non-significant in the quantitative scales. These indicate a weak relation and are consequently removed. However, the findings from the test indicate that certain statements in the scales have a relation to their belonging variables. These statements are qualified for the subsequent analysis of the data.

The rearrangement of statements in the scales are as follows:

Statements belonging to Sales Goals

Sales (company)
Generate customer loyalty
Gather leads
Sales (ambassador)

Table 17: Scale of Sales Goals

Statements belonging to Strategic Goals

Learn from others
Share knowledge/valuable information
Build a network
Build relationship with an existing network

Table 18: Scale of Strategic Goals

Statements belonging to Personal Identification

The company I work for is a part of my activities on LinkedIn.
I feel that I am personally connected to my job on LinkedIn.
I am dependent on LinkedIn as a marketing and sales platform.

Table 19: Scale of Personal Identification (Park et al., 2010, p.6).

Statements belonging to Company Related Identification

Question in the survey: "How do you experience the use of LinkedIn?"

Who I am on LinkedIn reflects my personality.
Messages from the company I am working for say something about who I am to others on LinkedIn.
When I have a need for services or products, people on LinkedIn are first in mind.

Table 20: Scale of Emotional Branding Identification (Park et al., 2010, p.6).

Consequently, the rearrangement of variables and belonging scales contribute to the further development of the research model for the study. The final model includes more specific variables, as illustrated in Figure 2. However, the hypotheses stays the same.

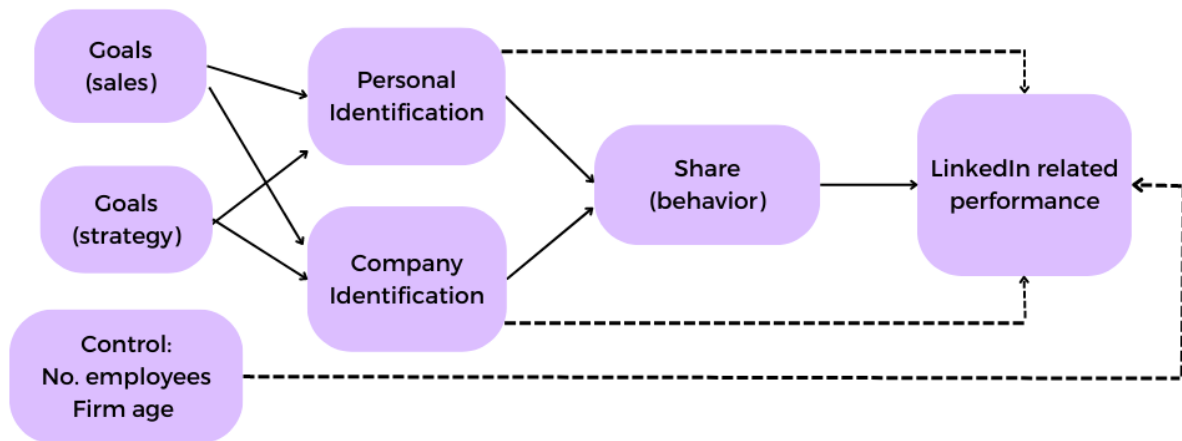


Figure 2: Final Research Model

H1: LinkedIn related goals will enhance employee branding identification

H2: Branding identification leads to Sharing Behavior

H3: Sharing Behavior enhances LinkedIn related company performance

3.3.2 Statistical Validity Tests

In order to test whether the variables fit the final research model, the degree of correlation between the dependent and independent variables are tested (Johannessen et al., 2016, p.302). Furthermore, a test of the variable's Cronbach's Alpha is conducted to receive an indication of the internal consistency of the model (Mitchell & Jolley, 2010, p.623). The tests are conducted in SPSS and include the means and standard deviation of each variable.

Correlation Matrix

The number of a correlation coefficient can vary from -1.00 to +1.00. The coefficient gives an indication of the relationship between two variables. If the number is negative, the relationship between the variables is negative. Oppositely, a positive variable indicates a positive relationship (Johannessen et al., 2016, p.304). In other words, positive correlations indicate that two variables go in the same direction and negative correlations indicate that variables tend to head in opposite directions.

Furthermore, the strength of the relationship depends on the extent the number of the coefficient differs from 0.00. Put differently, a coefficient closer to +1.00 than 0.00 indicates a stronger positive correlation than a positive coefficient closer to 0.00 than +1.00 (Mitchell

& Jolley, 2010, p.623). The correlations of the study are illustrated in columns 1 to 8 in Table 21.

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Goals Sales	5.28	1.17								
2. Goals Strategy	5.67	1.08	.39**							
3. Personal Identification	4.60	1.45	.40**	.41**						
4. Company Related Identification	5.33	1.32	.45**	.65**	.55**					
5. Information Sharing	3.20	1.19	.29**	.29**	.37**	.41**				
6. LinkedIn related performance	4.39	1.24	.55**	.51**	.43**	.47**	.44**			
7. Firm Age	1993.73	1.34	.19*	.14	.01	.21*	.16	.10		
8. No. Employees	2311.14	20063.32	.07	-.11	-.07	-.09	-.03	.08	-.06	

*<.05; **<.01

Table 21: Correlation Matrix

The mean of a variable considers the values of all scores connected to a statement. These are calculated by adding all of the scores and dividing by the number of scores (Mitchell & Jolley, 2010, p.626). Overall, the means are related to the scales belonging to variables in the study. These are ranked from 1 to 7, where the level of 4 defines a neutral opinion to a statement of the scale. Furthermore, 1 defines “strongly disagree” and 7 defines “strongly agree” (see chapter 3.1.3, page 15). In Table 21, all means for all variables are above (4) neutral, except the mean for the variable regarding “Information Sharing” below neutral with the value 3.20.

The standard deviation (SD) is connected to the mean of a variable (Mitchell & Jolley, 2010, p.629). The measure regards the extent an observation deviates from the mean for all observations (Johannessen et al., 2016, p.429). Put differently, if the SD is zero, all observations are consistent and equal to the mean of the data (Mitchell & Jolley, 2010, p.629).

Cohen & Holliday (2001) suggest the following values regarding the level of correlation:

A very low correlation	.00 - .19
A low correlation	.20 - .39
A modest correlation	.40 - .69
A high correlation	.70 - .89
A very high correlation	.90 - 1.00

Table 22: Levels of Correlation (Cohen & Holliday, 2001, p.83; Johannessen et al., 2016, p.305-306)

In Table 21 the strongest correlation is indicated between the variables Goals Strategy and Company Related Identification, with a coefficient value of .65. Furthermore, the test shows a high significance for the variables impact on each other. This is illustrated in Table 21 where all of the values include two stars (**), which indicates a significance level of 99% for the observed variables. The matrix describes the extent one variable is related to another. For instance, Sales Goals relate stronger with Company Related Identification (.45) than Personal Identification (.40). All over, the outcomes from the correlation matrix indicate that correlations are present for all variables included in the research model.

Cronbach's Alpha

Cronbach's Alpha tests the internal consistency of the statements belonging to the final variables in the research model. Internal consistency is the degree to which each statement belonging to a scale correlates with other statements. The level of internal consistency is high if the data belonging to each statement correlates highly with the data belonging to all other statements (Mitchell & Jolley, 2010, p. 625). More precisely, a measure's Cronbach's Alpha should be at least above .70 and is highly considered to be above .80 (Mitchell & Jolley, 2010, p.623).

	Cronbach's Alpha	Number of Statements
Goals Sales	.83	4
Goals Strategy	.87	4
Personal Identification	.74	3
Company Related Identification	.85	3
Information Sharing	-	1
LinkedIn related performance	.92	8

Table 23: Cronbach's Alpha for Final Scales

Table 23 illustrates the measures of Cronbach's Alpha for the variables in the research model. For the variable of "Sharing Behavior," there is no Cronbach's Alpha as a result of only having one statement belonging to each variable. However, "Goals Sales" and "Goals Strategy" each have 4 four statements to their belonging scales. The Cronbach's Alphas are measured at .83 and .87 respectively. Furthermore, the Cronbach's Alpha for "Personal Identification" is .74, and "Company Related Identification" is .85, with three statements each to the belonging scales. Lastly, Cronbach's Alpha for "LinkedIn Related Performance" is .92 with 8 statements belonging to its scale. All over, Cronbach's Alpha measurements for the scales indicate acceptable levels for further investigation of the research model.

3.3.3 Outcomes from Preliminary Study of the Research Model

The statistical tests in the preliminary study of the research model have contributed to the model becoming more precise. Additionally, the tests indicate that both correlation and internal consistency are present for the variables. The final research model is accepted for further investigation and analysis. Based on findings from the preliminary study, a regression analysis is the final statistical approach for measuring the extent of causal relationships in the research model (Mitchell & Jolley, 2010, p.140). The research model analyzed for this study and belonging hypotheses are as follows:

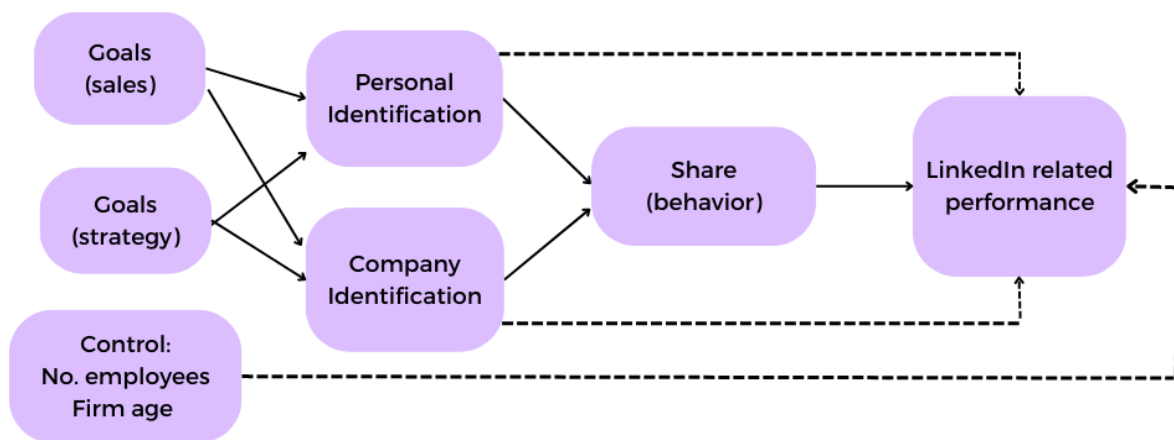


Figure 2: Final Research Model

H1: LinkedIn related goals will enhance employee branding identification

H2: Branding identification leads to Sharing Behavior

H3: Sharing Behavior enhances LinkedIn related company performance

4 Results and Analysis

Prior to this section of the study, a number of statistical tests have been conducted to understand the significance of the variables in the research model. In this chapter, the model is analyzed. The statistical approach is a regression analysis in order to understand the extent of how one variable leads to another in the research model (Mitchell & Jolley, 2010, p.140). Furthermore, the hypotheses are either rejected or accepted as a result of the regression analysis. Lastly, meaningful aspects of the results are explained.

4.1 Regression Analysis of the Research Model

Regression analysis measures the extent of causal relationships. Such analyses can have multiple purposes regarding the prediction of variable's relationships in a dataset (Johannessen et al., 2016, pp.313-318). The equation of regression links one or more inputs of variables to an output variable. The input variables are commonly known as independent variables, and the output variables as dependent variables. Furthermore, the analysis is strongly related to the correlation matrix in Chapter 4.4, Statistical Validity. The technique measures how the mean value of a dependent variable varies in connection to independent variables (Johannessen et al., 2016, p.427).

4.1.1 Dependent and Independent Variables in the Research Model

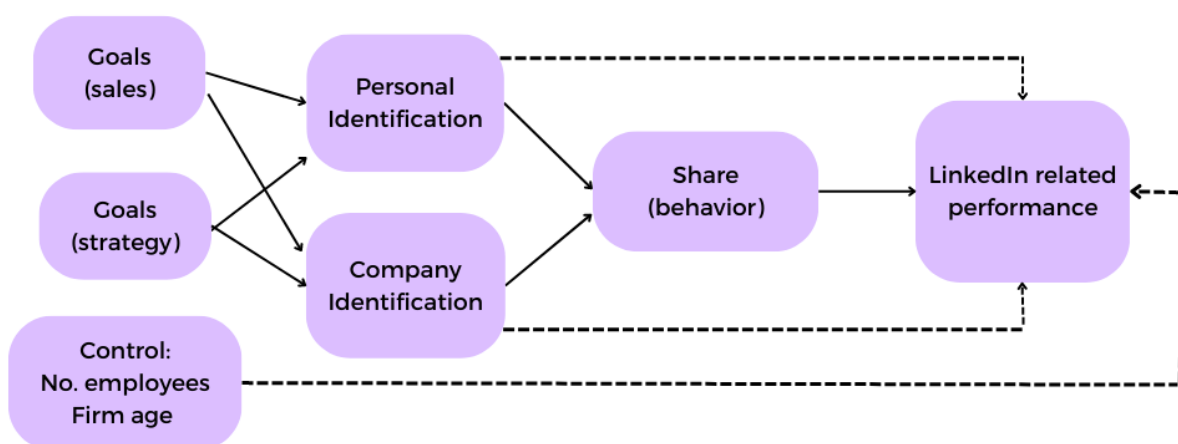


Figure 2: Final Research Model

The model is connected by hypotheses H1, H2, and H3. This means that some of the model's variables are dependent and independent in the complete regression analysis. More precisely, both sales goals and strategic goals are independent variables regarding personal identification and company related identification, whereas the two last mentioned are dependent variables. In the next step, personal identification and company related identification are independent variables considering Sharing Behavior as the dependent variable. Lastly, Sharing Behavior is an independent variable regarding LinkedIn-related performance as the dependent variable. In terms of the hypotheses, the arrangement of independent and dependent variables are as follows:

H1: LinkedIn related goals (*independent variable*) will enhance employee branding identification (*dependent variable*).

H2: Branding identification (*independent variable*) leads to Sharing Behavior (*dependent variable*).

H3: Sharing Behavior (*independent variable*) enhances LinkedIn related company performance (*dependent variable*).

4.1.2 Regression Analysis Results

Table 24 illustrates the variable's R-squared and beta-values from the regression analysis. Additional estimates and indications from the regression analysis are presented in Appendix F. All of the statements mentioned are measured at a significance level of less than .01, which indicates that the statements are 99% confident (Hayes, 2013, p.224).

	PI	CRI	Share	Performance
<i>Direct effects</i>				
Sales Goals	.25**	.21**		
Strategy Goals	.20**	.54**		
Personal Identification (PI)			.29**	
Company Related Identification (CRI)			.25**	
Sharing Behavior (Share)				.29**
R²	14%	43%	21%	47%

* < .05; ** < .01

Table 24: Standardized Estimates of Research Model

The beta-values indicate the strength and direction of a relationship between an independent and dependent variable. More precisely, a positive beta-value indicates a positive relationship while a negative value reflects the opposite. Additionally, in terms of a positive beta, the relationship is stronger when the beta-value is high (Ferrari & Cribari-Neto, 2004, p.799-803). When testing hypotheses, the significance levels of outcomes are commonly evaluated at the .05 or .01 significance level (King et al., 2010, p.186). Furthermore, R-squares are analyzed and presented in the bottom row of Table 24. The R-square is a measurement of the model fit (Hayes, 2013, p.38). The R-square ranges from 0% to 100% and reflects to which extent a variation caused by an independent variable describes the variation to a dependent variable (Johannessen et al., 2016, p.330). The higher percentage of an R-square indicates a stronger relationship (Mitchell & Jolley, 2010, p.239)

A more precise description of Table 24 is as follows:

Sales Goals and Strategy Goals

Sales Goals are measured as an independent variable for the dependent variables Personal Identification (PI) with a beta-value of .25 and Company Related Identification (CRI) with a value of .21. Additionally, Strategy Goals are measured as an independent variable for the dependent variables Personal Identification (PI) with a beta level of .20 and Company Related Identification (CRI) with a level of .54. The betas for all variables are marked with two stars (**), which indicates a significance level of <.01. Lastly, the findings from the R-square indicate that both Sales Goals and Strategy Goals impact Personal Identification by 14% and Company Related Identification by 43%.

Personal Identification and Company Related Identification

Personal Identification is an independent variable for the dependent variable Sharing Behavior with a beta level of .29. Additionally, Company Related Identification is an independent variable for the dependent variable Sharing Behavior with a beta level of .25. The betas for all variables are marked with two stars (**), which indicates a significance level of <.01. Lastly, the findings from the R-square indicate that both Personal Identification and Company Related Identification impact Sharing Behavior by 21%.

Sharing Behavior

The beta-value for Sharing Behavior as an independent variable for the dependent variable LinkedIn Related Performance is .29 with two stars (**) indicating a significance level of <.01. Lastly, the findings from the R-square indicate that Sharing Behavior impacts LinkedIn Related Performance (described as only “Performance” in Table 24) by 47%.

4.1.3 Testing the Hypotheses

Table 24 includes the beta-values for the variables belonging to the final model. Although not all beta-values are high, all of the estimates are 99% confident. Additionally, it is extremely rare to achieve a perfect positive relationship between variables. In fact, such incidents may cause skepticism and false alarms (Mitchell & Jolley, 2010, p.242). Thus, researchers are more likely to obtain data that does not have extreme values of measurements (Cohen & Holliday, 2001, p.88). Additionally, the beta-values are at the construct level, describing the variables that are based on scales. The findings from the regression analysis show a present significance of relationships between the variables in the model. Thus, all hypotheses are supported.

H1: LinkedIn related goals will enhance employee branding identification.

- *Supported*

(Personal Identification $R^2=14\%$, Company Related Identification $R^2=43\%$).

H2: Branding identification leads to Sharing Behavior.

- *Supported ($R^2=21\%$).*

H3: Sharing Behavior enhances LinkedIn related company performance.

- *Supported ($R^2=47\%$).*

4.1.4 The Benefit of Sharing on LinkedIn

A main finding in the analysis is that Sharing Behavior is a reliant variable connecting the flow of the model ($R^2=47\%$). Moreover, the model explains how a company and personal identification only impact goals through LinkedIn sharing. In other words, the shared content is meaningful regarding this study's purpose. The survey was designed to determine which five post contents were the most focused on when publishing on LinkedIn. The distribution of the content is illustrated in Table 25. The data shows that the highest pressure is reliant on sharing accomplishments and cooperation, with a percentage of 81. The focus variables for this specific question were generated from preliminary interviews.

Distribution of content focused on when publishing on LinkedIn	
Sales post	40 %
Product post	52 %
Share accomplishments and collaborations	81 %
Internal culture building	28 %
Campaigns	29 %
Posts adapted to seasonal trends	14 %
Website content	43 %
Posts including pictures of face(s)	54 %
Posts with video of people	39 %
Share the working day	51 %
Share personal experiences	53 %

Table 25: Distribution of content focused on when publishing on LinkedIn

5 Discussion

The thesis aims to answer the research question, “How can B2B SMEs benefit through emotional branding using LinkedIn?”. In this section, the research findings are discussed in a broader context. The research methods and model provide us with findings that will be discussed in a critical matter by including previous studies. Even though we can argue the study to be thorough, several aspects must be discussed considering the scope. Conclusively, we suggest limitations and implicate suggestions for further research.

Given that the Theory of Planned Behavior and Emotional Branding is considered under-investigated concerning LinkedIn, we may be too early in the race to run a quantitative approach for the thesis topic. However, the preliminary stage of the study can contribute to more thoroughness and relevance to the research model of the study. The interviewees are acknowledged as LinkedIn experts and have been working actively with the platform for their respective companies. The findings from the preliminary interviews are implemented in the survey to gather relevant data. Therefore, one can argue that the study has mixed-method characteristics. Furthermore, the data received from the quantitative study is tested through a Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) to specify the research model, in Chapter 3.3 Preliminary Study of the Research Model. The CFA aims to gain quality to the regression analysis. The approaches of CFA, correlation matrix, and Cronbach’s Alpha strengthen the study to a certain extent. However, we recommend that the readers of this thesis proceed with caution regarding the outcomes and results due to the study's limitations.

The research model is highly reliant on the preliminary stage of the study. However, it also draws similarities to research by Maxwell & Knox (2009), Santiago (2020), and Mora Cortez et al. (2023). The study by Maxwell & Knox (2009) and Santiago (2020) describes how brand attractiveness influences an employee's loyalty, satisfaction, and dedication. In other words, these will reflect the employee's identification related to the company, which is found to influence the company's performance (Maxwell & Knox, 2009; Santiago, 2020, p.66). The aspect of identification leading to performance is implemented in the thesis research model. Additionally, Mora Cortez et al. (2023) research regarding firm performance on LinkedIn also impacts the research model for this thesis. Their research studies the frequency of sharing behavior on LinkedIn and how the number of followers and website visits enhance sales revenues for a company. Moreover, the positive sales revenue, social posts, and new

followers positively influenced engagement (Mora Cortez et al., 2023, p.2). The research by Mora Cortez et al. (2023), combined with findings in the preliminary interviews and theory regarding Sharing Behavior, indicates that the sharing variable is relevant to the thesis research model.

The statistical tests and analysis of the research model rely on the variables “Sales Goals”, “Strategy Goals”, “Personal Identification”, “Company Related Identification”, “Sharing Behavior” and “LinkedIn Related Performance”. Even though emotional branding is not directly described as a variable in the research model, previous studies explain that it carries strong relations to personal identification, company related identification and sharing behavior. This is reflected through the articles by Biro (2016) and Holmes (2015), and the study by Bhattacharya and Sen (2003). Biro (2016) portrays how employees' profiles receive eight times more engagement on LinkedIn posts compared to company profiles. Holmes (2015) argues that the use of ambassadors within the company creates brand credibility. Further, Bhattacharya and Sen (2003) state that individuals often go beyond their personal identity to develop a social identity.

The findings in our study show that goals stronger describe company related identification ($R^2=43\%$) compared to personal identification ($R^2=14\%$). This indicates support of Bhattacharya and Sen (2003) finding people reach beyond their personal identity. Additionally, it reflects Laugomer (2022) and Biro (2016) stating that ambassadors have a more extended reach compared to companies. Further, personal identification and company related identification are found to have an impact on sharing behavior by 21%. This may reflect the relation between emotional branding and the Theory of Planned Behavior. The relation is especially found in the studies by Ajzen (1988;1991), where emotions and attitudes affect behavior. Lastly, sharing behavior stands out in our findings with a 47% impact on LinkedIn related Performance. The finding supports Mora Cortez et al. (2022) study stating that firms who continuously post on LinkedIn receive twice the amount of customer engagement. Additionally, it supports Mora Cortez et al. (2023) findings regarding posts having an impact on firm performance. In consideration of the research question for our study, the finding of sharing behavior reflects strongest how B2B SMEs can benefit through emotional branding using LinkedIn.

Furthermore, the findings regarding the research model and supported hypotheses are based on a regression analysis. The indicators of R-square and beta-values are not at the highest values possible. However, the hypotheses are supported given the rareness of achieving perfectly positive relationships between variables (Cohen & Holliday, 2001, p.88). Additionally, highly significant results may cause false alarms (Mitchell & Jolley, 2010, p.242). The analysis results indicate that positive relationships are significantly present in the quantitative data. Even though the analysis outcomes indicate significant values, these are not considered established statements. However, the findings supplement research findings from the thesis' theory section and contribute to supporting findings that LinkedIn related performance is based on behavior which is enhanced by identification and goals. Moreover, the values indicate that the field of study may be worth investigating further in future studies.

In terms of social science, the perspective of time has been mentioned as an aspect regarding the relevance of findings (Johannessen et al., 2016, pp. 25-29). Along with societal changes, individuals' perceptions may accordingly be different from one time to another. Therefore, time can influence the validity of the study. This can also be reflected in terms of strategizing on LinkedIn. A mention in the preliminary interviews say that LinkedIn is based on an algorithm constantly changing. Even though the algorithm is not the main focus of this study, it is worth mentioning as an example that may cause difficulties in research that has a purpose of being long-lived. A more relevant argument for this study may be that emotions are not consistent, intensely personal, and unstable (Johannessen et al., 2016, p.27). Thus, it may be a matter of time until a reader of this thesis should use a more critical eye.

5.1 Limitations

Branding, the Theory of Planned Behavior, and emotional branding according to Social Media usage are comprehensive topics. Therefore, relevant studies and factors to emotional branding on LinkedIn might have been excluded to keep the research sharp and relevant due to findings from preliminary studies. Moreover, there are likely several theories that may be relevant to this study. A variable that limits the scope of the study is the time restriction. The research for this study is based on a 100% workload for five months. A common resistor for students is the time it takes to receive an optimal amount of data. Although the quantitative survey was published early in the semester, only 122 of the 209 participants were accepted for the statistical tests and data analysis.

As mentioned, social science is time limited as society changes over time. Since the beginning of LinkedIn, the platform has already been redefined as more extended due to users sharing more knowledge, experiences and providing sales. Therefore, this study is limited and potentially outdated in a short amount of time. Further, social science and qualitative data might be limited due to people's behavior and mood at the specific moment of their response. Humans and feelings are complex, and the study could have had a more profound finding if a more thorough investigation was used in the qualitative study. Our preliminary interviewees are within three different segments. This research might limit according to the occupation of the respondents. Also, the questionnaire did not exclude people not working with the marketing and business strategy. Therefore, some of the respondents in the questionnaire might not know precisely how the business uses LinkedIn as a strategy within the company.

Since the survey is posted on our own LinkedIn profiles, there may be a chance that certain participants are colleagues and share the same experiences. On the other hand, the survey could potentially have reached beyond our network, as people were helpful by sharing the survey on their own personal profiles. However, most of the participants are likely local. The 122 acceptable participants are limited to describing a more significant population. This research does not include or discover potential networks built over time or the sales happening without LinkedIn use. There is a chance that some of the outcome is not affected by LinkedIn. A leading question is whether the findings reflect the society as a whole.

5.2 Implications for future research

Due to our fascination with LinkedIn as a platform and its business use, we have several possible angles for future research. Our research focuses on the employees' point of view and how they perceive the brand. In further studies, it is possible to research the customer or partners' point of view as these stakeholders are highly affected by a brand's image and branding. Also, our study emphasized emotional branding, however, barely mentioning functional branding. A study elaborating on the functional vs. emotional branding on such platforms will be interesting for businesses to understand in order for them to know where to put their effort. Another suggestion is to research the factors describing sharing compared to our research model. Is there any Sharing Behavior that provides SMEs with a more significant outcome? Our interest lies in personality types and personal identification. A matter to investigate is the different personality types on LinkedIn. Is there a correlation between the people publishing and creating positive outcomes for the company? Lastly, Chat GPT is an exciting angle to investigate as we have experienced tendencies of posts including Chat GPT. Is there a difference between human writing or such a platform as Chat GPT in terms of emotional branding? Hopefully, some of these implications will be investigated in future studies.

6 Conclusion

Our study aims to answer the research question: “*How can B2B SMEs benefit through emotional branding using LinkedIn?*”. This study was provided by a qualitative and quantitative research. Due to the lack of knowledge regarding this topic, the method approach included a preliminary study to build a realistic theory section, research model, and hypotheses. The basis of these interviews were additionally used to create a quantitative survey which was posted on LinkedIn. 122 respondents were further used to test our research model before using regression analysis to validate our hypotheses. The results show a positive correlation between Goals, Personal Identification, Company related Identification, Sharing Behavior, and Performance. Moreover, the strongest relation depends on sharing behavior which indicates a beneficial factor for SMEs when using LinkedIn.

The research fills a potential gap regarding the Branding value on LinkedIn for SMEs. By using the aspects of emotional branding and the Theory of Planned Behavior, the contribution of the research can be helpful for Small and Medium Enterprises and Entrepreneurs who need to create a competitive advantage at a low cost.

As employees are found to be trustworthy ambassadors for the company, the possibility of creating a sharing culture within the company can possibly create Company Performance outcomes. However, this study is a social study, and the relevance of the results can be time limited. Further, some of the findings can be used for future studies and create a baseline for the company branding.

7 References

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8 Appendix

Appendix A: Interview Guide for the Preliminary Stage of the Study

Demographics

- Name
- Job description
- Length of employment
- Company
- Industry
- Date of establishment
- Number of employees
- Business size in the industry
- Business product/service

How the company works with social channels?

- Which channels do you use on social media?
- Who is in charge of the company's social media, and for what purposes?
- How incorporated are social media in your business strategies?

LinkedIn

- Why does the business use LinkedIn?
- How incorporated is LinkedIn in your business processes?
- What is the business' LinkedIn strategy, do you have a structured process and measurement for that platform alone? - KPI?
- Are employees encouraged to be engaged in LinkedIn, post, and interact as part of their job?
- Do you experience case where the employees are doing it voluntarily outside the job?

Network and social media

- Do you intentionally do anything to keep a relationship between your B2B segment on LinkedIn?
- Do you connect with other businesses on LinkedIn and why?

Outcome section

- What kind of benefit do you intend to gain by using LinkedIn?
- Did you get any unexpected fallouts?
- Are there any disadvantages for a company to use LinkedIn?
- Does it impact the positioning in the market and how?

Appendix B: Summary of Interviews from the Preliminary Stage

In the preliminary study, three companies were interviewed, hereafter referred to as Company A, Company B, and Company C. All three companies operate in the B2B market and use LinkedIn actively in their marketing strategies.

Company A

Company A, established in 2019, operates with five employees. As the face of the company, the CEO uses LinkedIn actively from the company profile. The potential of reaching out to relevant business customers is higher when posting from a private profile. However, employees are not encouraged to use LinkedIn for their job but tend to use it in their spare time to be present and keep track of their network. The company is already experiencing high demand and limited capacity and believes reaching out to more potential customers will negatively influence its reputation.

Company A refers to LinkedIn as a place to mingle with a professional network. The strategy and usage of the platform are floating, as the market is constantly changing. However, the CEO builds the brand by focusing on the company's strategic mission rather than vision when sharing information on the platform. The purpose of prioritizing the mission statement is for the long run of branding and generating trustworthiness. The company is in a beginner phase on the platform and prioritizes building up the company before engaging employees to be ambassadors on LinkedIn.

LinkedIn has been an optimal platform for Company A compared to other digital platforms. The representative compares B2B businesses on Instagram with people who go to the cinema to talk. In other words, the conversation will be limited. However, LinkedIn outcomes are challenging to measure directly. The company does not measure KPI as it is considered a short-term strategy. Instead of KPI, it is more interesting to measure people's feelings, but also more complex. The representative mentioned that receiving feedback that someone has learned something from the company is more valuable than having hundreds of likes on a post.

Furthermore, the company finds giving information about a niche segment valuable to become an expert on the platform. As a result, the company might be on top of mind when potential customers need their services. Further company A experience that posts with a personal context reach further than posts with a professional context. In other words, the more feelings touched the more reach of the post. Consequently, the CEO draws parallels between feelings and business and ensures that these are relevant to each other when sharing posts.

Company B

Company B was established in 2008 and operates today with 160 employees. The company has one year's experience being actively engaged on LinkedIn. The strategy builds on a team of five employees that work in separate departments. The employees use their profiles to post on behalf of the company and as a part of the mandatory work tasks. The reason for committing to LinkedIn was due to a lack of budget regarding marketing costs and an experience of unsuccessful and expensive traditional marketing of products and services. The market department responsible for the LinkedIn business profile demanded input from other departments for the company's communication material. Thus, creating a diverse LinkedIn team with diverse expertise was essential.

The company engages all employees to use LinkedIn within their working hours. A LinkedIn course is a part of the onboarding program. The employees practice LinkedIn by engaging in posts that their colleagues write. Examples of engagement are commenting, liking, and reposting colleagues' posts. These actions influence the probability of making the posts more visible and generating a more extended reach concerning LinkedIn's algorithm. Additionally, pressing "read more" on a post can be valuable for boosting the algorithm.

The company has increased its brand regarding its products and services and the business's visibility as an attractive employer. Company B uses neither TikTok nor Instagram, as the B2B segment operates on LinkedIn. However, they refer to the website where they provide necessary and valuable information.

Continuity on LinkedIn has been experienced as a necessity for Company B. The five-person team posts one to two times weekly. This activity has not only generated sales and agreements with new customers, but it has also positively affected the company's reputation

with existing customers. After one year of practicing LinkedIn, the company's accomplishments were examined externally. The results showed that the usage and engagement on LinkedIn had directly increased the company's customer satisfaction, brand, and customer loyalty. An unexpected internal outcome has been that the employer's usage of LinkedIn has positively affected communication within the company.

Company B has experienced the benefits of employees posting 1-2 times a week and ensuring continuity on the platform. The continuity ensures the company keeps track of the algorithm of LinkedIn. Additionally, it is essential to be available to answer comments during the first hours of a shared post to boost the algorithm. The company profile has at least one post per month. In other words, the focus is on private profiles with organic material, as they experience reaching out to a bigger audience through them. According to company B, the experiences are more than eight times larger.

In terms of keeping track of engagement from other professionals, it is essential to focus on quality rather than quantity. Not only applicable to the posts but also to the received engagement from other professionals on LinkedIn. The company's number of followers was included as a factor to measure KPI. These were unexpectedly irrelevant. However, the number of engagements on posts is more relevant in this case. Overall, the company has experienced enhanced competence in topics that interest them. They have also received a much more precise position towards new customers, existing customers, and potential employees, thanks to LinkedIn.

Company C

Company C was established in 2021 and operates today with six employees. Since its establishment, the company has intentionally not used a single penny on branding. LinkedIn has been the platform to create visibility and build a strong brand for the company and its employees. The platform's usage is critical to the company's marketing strategy for the B2B segment. Additionally, all marketing has been organic, and the company's CEO states that all its customers have come to them through LinkedIn.

Since the company only uses LinkedIn as a digital platform, besides its website, they use various interaction strategies through profiles and experience a high reach. The experience of a high reach is referred to statistics that only four percent of LinkedIn users use the platform

actively. Additionally, only five percent of LinkedIn users are in a "buying mode" when using the platform. The remaining 95% receive a bad experience when being offered products or services on the platform. Therefore, none of the posts published are sales oriented but focused on content that can appeal to the 95%. Thus, the employees share personal posts and convey helpful information without selling. Personality is not necessarily vulnerability; it can also be humor. The goal is to create relevant content with personality or make personal content relevant.

Another strategic action is to share posts during the day. The company assumes the most engagement is from Tuesday to Thursday, between 08:00 AM and 12:00 AM. Therefore, the employees post during work hours. Considering the algorithm of LinkedIn, they engage in their own and others' posts for the first two hours to put a basis for the reach. In terms of engaging in other profiles, the strategy is to engage with relevant actors in their target group. The company aims to show they have the competence and ability to help others and build trust. Consequently, they do not connect with anyone on LinkedIn and instead focus on letting genuine interests connect with them.

Company C has a company profile on LinkedIn. The profile intends to be a journal of the company's accomplishments. The CEO refers to LinkedIn algorithm studies, whereas private profile content reaches longer than company profiles. Thus, their focus is mainly based on private profiles. Additionally, the CEO believes that the people who follow the company profile are actors who are genuinely interested in the company's operations and posts.

Overall, the company experienced that it took six months to build its name on LinkedIn. Today, the demand for their services is high, and the company is experiencing growth. Additionally, there is a tendency that customers are not asking for the price of the company's services. This experience is based on the assumption that the customers trust the company's employees through the knowledge shown through their branding. A last aspect worth mentioning is that not all customers are necessarily followers of the company on LinkedIn. Synergies such as "word of mouth" may have affected the interest. Additionally, feedback has given the company an understanding of the potential of having a silent audience that is not engaging on LinkedIn but prefers to engage in person.

Appendix C: Interview Guide for the Quantitative Survey

Using the 7-point scale below, please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements by putting the numbers of your choice in the boxes provided.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Slightly disagree
- Neutral
- Slightly agree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

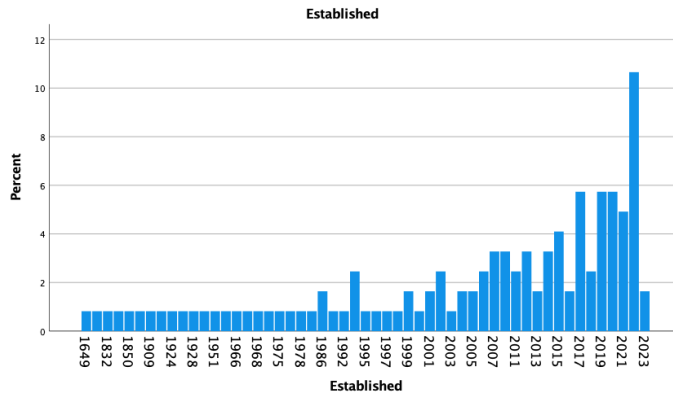
Question	Answer
1. How did you get the link to the survey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Friend ● Colleague ● LinkedIn post ● Business relations / network ● Newsletter
2. Industry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Construction services ● Health and social services ● Artisan/craftsman ● Industry and production ● IT ● Office and finance ● Consulting business ● Culture and creative occupations ● Nature and environment ● Tourism and food ● Sales and services ● Self-employed ● Security and preparedness ● Transport and warehouse ● Education Other
3. Is the company Norwegian?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Yes ● No
4. Is the company local or international?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Local ● International
5. When was the company established	(Write the year, ex. 2017)
6. Number of employees	(Write with numbers)
7. Is your company B2B or B2C?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● B2B ● B2C ● Both
<p><i>The following questions are related to how the company you are working for uses LinkedIn. Answer the questions in terms of how you experience the company's presence on LinkedIn.</i></p>	

8. Which profiles do the company use on LinkedIn?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Company profile ● Personal profile ● Both ● None of the above
9. LinkedIn included in the company's: (7 point Likert-scale)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Company processes ● Marketing strategy ● Market department ● Personal marketing from the employees
10. Who is responsible for posting on LinkedIn? (it is possible to check several boxes)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Leader ● Communication responsible ● HR ● Senior advisor ● Business developer ● Sales ● Combination of departments ● The founder ● Ambassadors ● External consultant/agency
11. Are employees using LinkedIn voluntarily outside the job?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Yes ● No
12. What are the goals regarding the COMPANY when using LinkedIn? (7 point Likert-scale)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Create awareness and trustworthiness ● Positioning in the market ● Being a preferable employer ● Sales ● Generate customer loyalty
13. What are the goals regarding the AMBASSADORS/private profiles? (7 point Likert-scale)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Gather leads ● Learn from others ● Sales ● Share knowledge/valuable information ● Build a network - connect with new contacts ● Building relationships - build further with an existing network ● Build culture internally
14. Which 5 activities does the company focus the most on LinkedIn?(only 5)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Salesposts ● Product posts ● Share accomplishments and collaborations ● Internal culture building ● Campaigns ● Posts adapted to seasonal trends ● Website content ● Posts including pictures of face(s) ● Posts with video of people ● Share the working day ● Share personal experiences
<p><i>The following questions are related to how the company and yourself as a private person uses LinkedIn. Answer the questions in terms of how you experience the company and your own presence on LinkedIn. (LinkedIn outcomes)</i></p>	

<p>15. Using LinkedIn is proved to be: (7 point Likert-scale)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Profitable ● Generating a high volume of sales ● Achieving a high growth rate ● Improves competitiveness ● Has strengthened our position in the market ● Has increases our market share ● The company is dependent on LinkedIn as a marketing and sales platform ● Generate customer loyalty
<p>16. How do you experience LinkedIn? (7 point Likert-scale)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● When I have a need for services or products, people on LinkedIn are first in mind ● Who i am on LinkedIn reflects my personality ● The company i work for is a part of my activities on LinkedIn ● I feel that I am personally connected to my job on LinkedIn ● Messages from the company I am working for says something about who I am to others on LinkedIn ● I experience trustworthiness when getting information from a company's employees through LinkedIn ● I experience trustworthiness from firms that have an active presence on LinkedIn ● I am dependent on LinkedIn as a marketing and sales platform
<p><i>This part is about you. Answer the questions as well as you can.</i></p>	
<p>17. Gender</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Female ● Male ● Undefined
<p>18. Years of experience</p>	<p>(write with numbers)</p>
<p>19. Job title</p>	<p>The participant writes the title (in Norwegian)</p>
<p>20. How often do you share your own posts or others posts?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Every day ● 3 - 4 times a week ● Once a week ● A few times a month ● More seldome ● Never
<p>21. How do you experience the statements below? (7 point Likert-scale)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● No matter who I'm talking to, I'm always a good listener ● I am always courteous even to people who are disagreeable ● I have never taken advantage of anyone ● My job role qualifies me to answer questions about export sales and marketing in the company ● I am confident that my answers reflect the company's situation
<p>22. Are you an ambassador on LinkedIn for the company?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Yes ● No

Appendix D: Descriptive statistics

Years of establishment



Appendix E: Preliminary Study of the Research Model

Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)

Model Fit Summary

Model	NPAR	CMIN	DF	P	CMIN/DF
Default model	94	323.043	205	.000	1.576
Saturated model	299	.000	0		
Independence model	23	2073.751	276	.000	7.514

Baseline Comparisons

Model	NFI Delta1	RFI rho1	IFI Delta2	TLI rho2	CFI
Default model	.844	.790	.937	.912	.934
Saturated model	1.000		1.000		1.000
Independence model	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000

RMSEA

Model	RMSEA	LO 90	HI 90	PCLOSE
Default model	.069	.054	.083	.019
Independence model	.232	.223	.241	.000

Estimates (Group number 1 - Default model)

Scalar Estimates (Group number 1 - Default model)

Maximum Likelihood Estimates

Regression Weights: (Group number 1 - Default model)

			Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P	Label
PROOF1	<---	Perf	1.000				
PROOF2	<---	Perf	1.024	.085	12.101	***	
PROOF3	<---	Perf	1.152	.104	11.027	***	
PROOF4	<---	Perf	1.139	.103	11.035	***	
PROOF5	<---	Perf	.896	.097	9.231	***	
PROOF6	<---	Perf	.878	.113	7.775	***	
PROOF7	<---	Perf	1.135	.143	7.950	***	
AG3	<---	G_sales	1.000				
AG1	<---	G_sales	.736	.085	8.638	***	
CG4	<---	G_sales	.862	.087	9.905	***	
AG6	<---	G_Int	1.335	.172	7.756	***	
AG5	<---	G_Int	1.276	.167	7.655	***	
AG4	<---	G_Int	1.037	.130	7.948	***	
AG2	<---	G_Int	1.000				
OUTCOME1_1	<---	P_iden	1.000				
OUTCOME2_1	<---	P_iden	.957	.142	6.743	***	
OUTCOME8_1	<---	P_iden	.852	.142	6.001	***	
OUTCOME3_1	<---	C_iden	1.000				
OUTCOME4_1	<---	C_iden	1.227	.109	11.252	***	
OUTCOME5_1	<---	C_iden	.751	.090	8.336	***	
CG5	<---	G_sales	.578	.090	6.414	***	
PROOF8	<---	Perf	.913	.104	8.807	***	

Standardized Regression Weights: (Group number 1 - Default model)

			Estimate
PROOF1	<---	Perf	.793
PROOF2	<---	Perf	.830
PROOF3	<---	Perf	.877
PROOF4	<---	Perf	.878
PROOF5	<---	Perf	.772
PROOF6	<---	Perf	.732
PROOF7	<---	Perf	.680
AG3	<---	G_sales	.938
AG1	<---	G_sales	.697
CG4	<---	G_sales	.773
AG6	<---	G_Int	.965
AG5	<---	G_Int	.917
AG4	<---	G_Int	.632
AG2	<---	G_Int	.602
OUTCOME1_1	<---	P_iden	.762
OUTCOME2_1	<---	P_iden	.727
OUTCOME8_1	<---	P_iden	.625
OUTCOME3_1	<---	C_iden	.837
OUTCOME4_1	<---	C_iden	.889
OUTCOME5_1	<---	C_iden	.698
CG5	<---	G_sales	.640
PROOF8	<---	Perf	.739

Model Fit Summary

Model	NPAR	CMIN	DF	P	CMIN/DF
Model 1	33	12.214	11	.348	1.110
Model Number 2	29	16.193	15	.369	1.080
Saturated model	44	.000	0		
Independence model	8	264.122	36	.000	7.337

Baseline Comparisons

Model	NFI Delta1	RFI rho1	IFI Delta2	TLI rho2	CFI
Model 1	.954	.849	.995	.983	.995
Model Number 2	.939	.853	.995	.987	.995
Saturated model	1.000		1.000		1.000
Independence model	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000

RMSEA

Model	RMSEA	LO 90	HI 90	PCLOSE
Model 1	.030	.000	.103	.594
Model Number 2	.026	.000	.092	.653
Independence model	.229	.203	.255	.000

Appendix F: Regression Analysis

Estimates (Group number 1 - Model 1)

Scalar Estimates (Group number 1 - Model 1)

Maximum Likelihood Estimates

Regression Weights: (Group number 1 - Model 1)

	Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P	Label
Per_Iden <--- G_Sale	.299	.061	4.881	***	W1
Com_Iden <--- G_Sale	.231	.058	4.018	***	W2
Per_Iden <--- G_Intern	.253	.063	4.031	***	W3
Com_Iden <--- G_Intern	.640	.083	7.726	***	W4
Share_1 <--- Com_Iden	.231	.058	4.018	***	W2
Share_1 <--- Per_Iden	.253	.063	4.031	***	W3
Perform <--- Per_Iden	.082	.070	1.179	.239	W5
Perform <--- Com_Iden	-.017	.092	-.189	.850	W6
Perform <--- G_Sale	.344	.081	4.271	***	W7
Perform <--- G_Intern	.330	.099	3.319	***	W8
Perform <--- Employees	.000	.000	1.414	.157	W9
Perform <--- Established	-.001	.002	-.665	.506	W10
Perform <--- Share_1	.299	.061	4.881	***	W1

Standardized Regression Weights: (Group number 1 - Model 1)

	Estimate
Per_Iden <--- G_Sale	.253
Com_Iden <--- G_Sale	.212
Per_Iden <--- G_Intern	.197
Com_Iden <--- G_Intern	.541
Share_1 <--- Com_Iden	.245
Share_1 <--- Per_Iden	.292
Perform <--- Per_Iden	.092
Perform <--- Com_Iden	-.018

Perform	<---	G_Sale	.326
Perform	<---	G_Intern	.288
Perform	<---	Employees	.095
Perform	<---	Established	-.045
Perform	<---	Share_1	.292

R^2

Com_Iden	.427
Per_Iden	.141
Share_1	.214
Perform	.474