



Personal branding for young business professionals: LinkedIn as a boost factor in their professional life

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Abstract

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<p>This thesis studies the concept of personal branding and its role in the professional lives of young business professionals. Specifically, the study investigates the effectiveness of using LinkedIn as a boost factor in personal branding efforts, exploring the factors of networking and professional development. The research involves a quantitative analysis of survey data from a sample of young business professionals and an analysis of another survey intended for recruiters and hiring managers who have experience with young business professionals. Both surveys were conducted on citizens of Mexico, the United States, and Europe, within different age and experience frames.</p> <p>The findings indicate that personal branding is increasingly crucial for young business professionals and that LinkedIn is a valuable platform for building and promoting one's brand, regardless of country. The study identifies key strategies for leveraging LinkedIn to enhance personal branding, including the fundamental aspects that professionals and recruiters consider for a job and the importance of networking with others in the industry to obtain better job opportunities. Overall, the research highlights the potential benefits of personal branding and provides practical insights for young professionals looking to enhance their professional image and career prospects.</p>
Keywords Personal branding, professional development, differentiator, positioning, networking, social network site (SNS).

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1 Introduction

In recent years, the digital world has changed many aspects of life. This change is exemplified by the fact that anyone can open and start their social media profile and attain the importance of having a personal brand in a competitive environment. However, the challenge comes when a candidate needs to stand out from many other candidates seeking the same opportunities as he is.

Similarly, Social Network Sites have increased in popularity because it enables recruiters to spread information about opening positions and the organization to possible candidates. Traditional recruiting methods, such as online job boards or advertisements, often engage only active candidates looking for that information (Prat 2022)

As the demand for the workforce and the use of platforms has grown, the need for a solid personal brand is necessary more than ever to stand out from the rest by using all the means at their disposal and networking with the right people to obtain distinguished positions in the future. An individual's personal brand is a reflection of his or her skills, abilities, and lifestyle (Gehl 2011 & Hearn 2008). Platforms such as LinkedIn allow users to forecast their qualities, interests, and experiences to the rest and create a positive image and positioning of themselves.

This research-based thesis aims to investigate the importance and advantages of using LinkedIn, how this platform can improve LinkedIn, and how this platform can improve the chances of obtaining a job and better positions. For this, we need to study the opportunities this can supply to business professionals, companies, and recruiters to select the most qualified candidates.

1.1 Background

The area on which this research will focus is personal branding and the benefits that its users can obtain from it, prioritizing potential networking and career development. The author decided to study the platform LinkedIn because since it started, many people have joined it and created a big community for professional purposes. In fact, people are the main reason why the app has gained the recognition and success we know nowadays.

Thanks to this platform, how we relate to each other professionally has evolved; it has eased keeping in touch and networking with others; it has also eased and even improved the recruitment process for both parties, the recruiter and the applicant. The recruitment process used to be costly and time-consuming, without ensuring the results of finding a suitable candidate who fits the expectations of the job; due to LinkedIn, many job positions are open through the app, and it is easier to verify the background of an employee or see their references.

On the other hand, it is essential to keep the internationalization and detailed analysis of this research; it has been chosen to compare three different geographic areas: Mexico, the USA, and Europe. Owing to the compromise of the research, two different points of view will be taken into consideration for the conclusions, firstly from the Human Resources area; recruiters have been selected to explain how they use this tool, and conversely, the perspective from young Business graduates who have heard of this social network and may or may not be users of it.

1.2 Research Question

This paper focuses on the advantages young business graduates can take from using LinkedIn in the actual era, specifically regarding their professional opportunities and the potential network they can attain from it. Based on this, the research will be guided by the following research question:

What is the impact of using LinkedIn as a tool for personal branding for young Business professionals while seeking job opportunities?

Investigative Questions:

- IQ1. Which are the characteristics desired by a business professional to obtain a job position?
- IQ2. What is the relevance of LinkedIn in the recruitment process inside the Human Resources area?
- IQ3. What is the impact of LinkedIn on the development of networking of companies and professionals?
- IQ4. What are the benefits of using LinkedIn as a young business graduate for professional development?

Table 1. Overlay Matrix (Author 2023)

Investigative Questions (IQs)	Theoretical Framework ¹	Methods	Data Analysis/ Results
IQ 1. Which are the characteristics desired by a business professional to obtain a job position?	Empirical research	- Qualitative and Quantitative surveys to business professionals and recruiters/hiring managers	-
IQ 2. What is the relevance of LinkedIn in the recruitment process	Comparison between recruitment process in USA, Mexico, and Europe.	- Desktop Research - Qualitative and Quantitative surveys to business professionals	-

inside the Human Resources area?		and recruiters/hiring managers	
IQ 3. What is the impact of LinkedIn on the development of networking of companies and professionals?	Contribution of LinkedIn to recruitment and selection.	- Qualitative and Quantitative surveys to business professionals and recruiters/hiring managers	-
IQ4. What are the benefits of using LinkedIn as a young business graduate for professional development?	Contribution of LinkedIn to recruitment and selection. Empirical Research	- Qualitative and Quantitative surveys to business professionals and recruiters/hiring managers	-

1.3 Demarcation:

The main aim of this paper is to investigate and make a deep analysis of the use of LinkedIn as a tool for Business professionals, focusing mainly on economic-administrative careers, such as International Business, Business Administration, Accounting, Tourism, Marketing, and Logistics, without considering any other field of specialization.

The research will have international coverage, focusing mainly on Mexico as it is where the research will be performed and for the users who will be mainly intended; however, it will also compare the results and theory with the territories of the USA and Europe. From each of the selected demographics, the factors that will be analyzed are going to be the practices each of its population give to this platform, the number of users, and the features they consider relevant to highlight from themselves, later a comparison will be made and an overview with the results of the desktop research and survey answers of the three geographic areas.

The author will not cover any other type of employment platform beside the selected one, such as OCC, Job Teaser, or any other. The fields in which the investigation will focus are recruitment through the platform, professional opportunities for young graduates, networking, and personal branding through the platform, taking aside any other possible obtention of a job outside LinkedIn or other personal branding practices outside the platform.

1.4 International Aspect

As this paper will focus on Business professionals and their potential job opportunities in their home country and outside of it, the estimated percentage of professional growth through the app will be measured based on earlier testimonies and their experiences obtaining an international and local job. On the other hand, the research will compare three geographic areas: Mexico, the USA, and Europe. It is expected to obtain a distinct perspective and results from each of them to compare, contrast and reach conclusions with the given information.

1.5 Benefits

The end product of this research paper aims to supply future International Business students with a significant study and conclusions which prove the benefits and usefulness of using LinkedIn for their professional life, the opportunities they can obtain from them, and an overview of the global environment they will be exposed to. The author will benefit herself by understanding in more depth the influence and best practices of personal branding and self-positioning through an international platform, not only with recruiters and companies but also with coworkers and colleagues.

Motivation

The author is highly committed to this investigation as it will not only help others but also itself included, having a better understanding and reliable information which shows if there is a natural and considerable impact on the use of these tools of communication and the way of promoting themselves, as well as the comparison of both points of view, young graduates and recruiters, which will make this research a valuable and rewarding tool for the author and the readers.

1.6 Risk Matrix

The possible risks the author considered for this research are listed below, with their potential degree of severity, their manageability, and some key solutions for each.

Table 2. Risk Matrix (Author 2022)

Risk Source	Risk	Level of Risk *	Manageability of Risk **	Risk Management Need ***	Risk Management Activities
1	Lack of Information	3	1	3	Look for information on the internet and books

					and ask for testimonials.
2	Not finding Recruiters to interview	1	2	1	Contact previous recruiters, headhunters from the university, and profiles from LinkedIn.
3	Missed International information/perspective	2	1	2	Survey professionals and recruiters from diverse backgrounds.
4	Finding users of LinkedIn to interview	2	1	2	Make an ad offering a reward for answering the questionnaire

* **1 High:** Must be managed to keep the project viable, **2 Intermediate:** Should be managed, **3 Low** Unlikely to arise; does not need to be managed

** **1 Manageable by researcher, 2 Manageable by partner or another accessible party, 3 Not manageable** by 1 or 2 → Abandon project.

*** **1 High priority, 2 Medium priority, 3 Low priority**

All the previously mentioned could affect different aspects and severity, the sake of the investigation; however, any of them should not be taken for granted or underestimated. Their classification relies on the priority in which they should be addressed and the easiness of management of them.

1.7 Key Concepts

The following concepts are considered as key and commonly used terms for the reader to have a better understanding of the paper and the content of it:

Personal Branding: Personal branding is the practice of marketing people and their careers as brands (Henderson 2019). It refers to the continuous practice of developing and preserving a reputation for themselves with the public in general. A personal brand is how each person promotes. It is made up of a unique combination of skills, experience, and personality that a person intends to communicate to the world (Werner 2022).

Professional Development: Professional development is gaining new skills through continuing education and career training after entering the workforce. It can include taking classes or

workshops, attending professional or industry conferences, or earning a certificate to expand your knowledge in your chosen field (Parsons 2022)

Networking: Professional networking is building and maintaining meaningful relationships with other professionals in your industry and other related fields (Indeed Editorial Team 2021). These connections may be valuable and essential to boost someone's career and obtain mutual benefits in exchange for a committed relationship.

Positioning: Strategic process that involves creating an identity/ image of the brand, product, or itself, within the target's minds.

Differentiator: Unique set of benefits that sets you apart from your competition (Furr 2020) It refers to what makes someone stand out and unique from the rest, explains what makes the candidate better, and justifies choosing him from any other.

Social Networking site (SNS): A social networking site is an online platform that allows users to create a public profile and interact with other users (Techopedia 22) Unlike social media, social networking focuses on building a network rather than only communicating.

2 LinkedIn as a tool for business professionals.

The framework chosen for this paper is according to the selected topics and IQs previously settled. The author decided to take the variables of Personal Branding, Professional Development for Business Professionals, and Networking. The earlier mentioned were chosen because networking and personal branding have become essential for professionals seeking to advance their careers in today's increasingly connected world. LinkedIn, a social media platform designed specifically for professionals, has emerged as a powerful tool for achieving these goals.

As a professional networking platform, LinkedIn allows users to showcase their skills and experience and to connect with like-minded individuals and potential clients or employers. With its various features, such as job postings, company pages, and groups, LinkedIn has become an essential tool for businesses and professionals looking to expand their reach and grow their network. In this age of digital communication and remote work, LinkedIn has become even more relevant, providing a platform for professionals to engage with one another and stay connected in a fast-paced, global marketplace. In this context, this topic explores how LinkedIn can be used as a tool for business professionals and how they can leverage its features to advance their careers and achieve their goals.

Overall, this thesis aims to provide insights into how LinkedIn can be used as a tool for business professionals. By analyzing its impact on networking, personal branding, and professional development, this study offers valuable insights into how LinkedIn can help individuals enhance their career prospects and achieve their professional goals.

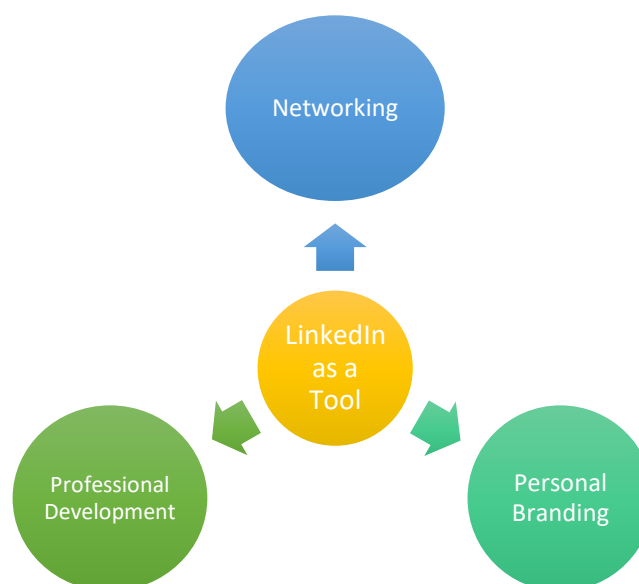
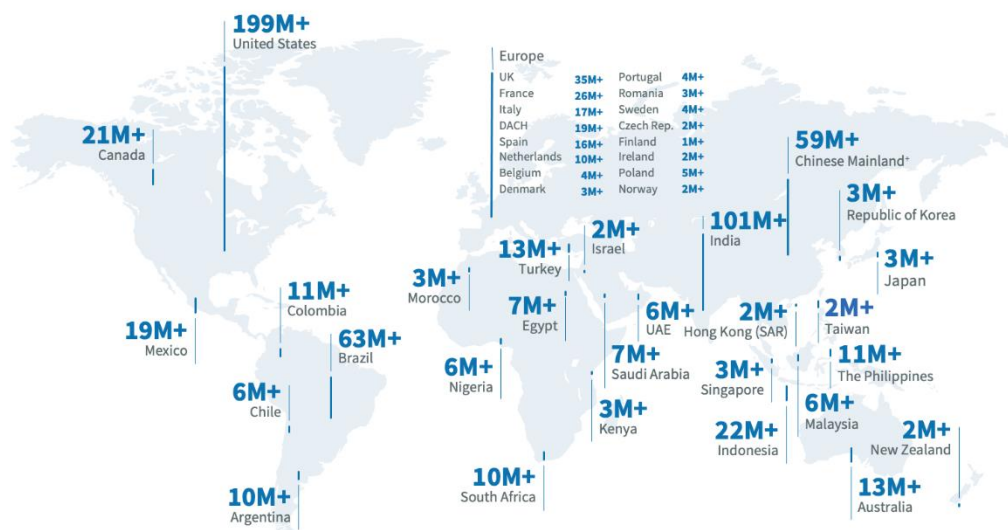


Figure 1. Theoretical Framework (Author 2023)

2.1 What is LinkedIn?

With over 900 million users in more than 200 countries (LinkedIn 2023), LinkedIn is the world's largest professional network which has continued to grow since it was first launched in 2002. This Social Network Site (SNS) aims to enhance professional connections and reach better professional opportunities by creating a personal brand, emphasizing the member's education and employment history.

More than 900 million members in 200 countries and regions worldwide*



*Membership numbers are updated quarterly after Microsoft Earnings. *Numbers reflect InCareer app membership as of December 2021.

Figure 2. LinkedIn. 40 Essential LinkedIn Statistics You Need to Know in 2023. (<https://thesocialshepherd.com/blog/linkedin-statistics#38-linkedin-has-members-in-200-different-countries-and-regions>)

LinkedIn is a user-friendly platform in which the user creates a profile with all his information to make later "connections" (network) with his contacts or people from his same industry; these connections can recommend the user to specific jobs or recruiters and endorse the skills the user listed. The SNS feed shows news from the following pages, organizations, and from the user's connections, in which it is recommended to interact and create bonds, as with a more significant engagement, the higher the chances of having new opportunities from other people.

As another aim of LinkedIn, the platform eases job opportunities by having special sections where recruiters can post jobs with all the reacquired specifications. Conversely, users can apply to them via their profiles, where all their professional information is updated.

The management of the LinkedIn account will depend entirely on the user and how active they are on it. The platform provides many options and filters that can be applied to discovering jobs, such as searching them by title, location, company, and interests. The user will apply through the wanted positions, and the app can send the user notifications when a new position is posted and matches the earlier set criteria.

LinkedIn is the top social media platform for professionals. Within its massive network of professionals, it has become the go-to platform for businesses to establish thought leadership in their industries and find top talents (LinkedIn 2022) However, the accessibility and the tremendous reach LinkedIn has it does not guarantee a strong bond within the possible connections made through the site; online connections are not as reliable as face-to-face interactions, which is why it is recommended that look beyond social interactions and create stronger bonds by meeting in person.

Moreover, the platform has a specific view of where contacts and people can be requested to connect. This is based on both people's mutual friends, interests, and backgrounds. This section aims to network with as many people as possible, who may be relevant to the candidate's professional path, and the app can be used as a tool to learn from them or keep track of what they are doing on their own.

To conclude, the platforms have improved the competitiveness of professional work, where the candidates can prove their knowledge and worth; it is crucial to fully understand it and take advantage of this tool to reach splendid work opportunities and connections with the rest of the world. Social media has eased one's position in the job market by displaying a person's abilities, and it is up to the users to take advantage of it and use the system.

2.1.1 Importance of Personal Branding

About 70% of employers use social media to screen candidates during the hiring process, while 43% use the platforms to check on current employees (Ladner 2020). The use of social media has increased significantly through the years, and with it, the multiple uses that someone can obtain from it; just as Ladner states, nowadays, social media is commonly used for recruiting employees through the image they display from themselves, in other words, their brand.

Therefore, the correct use of personal branding has provided many benefits to the user, such as differentiating from the rest and standing out in a competitive environment. A personal brand allows the user to manage the image they want others to perceive of themselves, showing their skills, strengths, awards, abilities, and, in a few words, what makes them unique.

As for the professional world, the platform that has more relevance and expertise in the topic is LinkedIn, as it is the top professional site for proving one's professional knowledge and skills (McCorkle & McCorkle 2012; Poeppelman & Blacksmith 2014 & Schwabel, 2009b). Mainly because the platform is intended to connect people with potential recruiters, customers, and colleagues that could stand for a future employment advantage or opportunity. However, to achieve this, a solid commitment to frequent interaction with others and an authentic way of proving what the candidate offers.

LinkedIn is a very focused social media platform. Because of that, it has become the place for industry experts to share content, network, and build their personal brands by showcasing their professional identity, expertise, and career achievements, which allows them to differentiate themselves from the rest of their peers.

2.1.2 Which are the expected characteristics of a young business graduate?

In today's competitive business world, young business graduates need to possess specific skills and characteristics that enable them to excel in their careers. As mentioned by Chau (2019), "Prospective employers have always expected business graduates to possess a certain set of skills, such as strategic thinking and problem-solving abilities. Employers seek even more technical ability paired with interpersonal and intrapersonal skills." This subchapter discusses the expected hard and soft skills of a young business graduate in the context of LinkedIn, the most relevant among employers and global statistics have been listed below:

1. **Strong Communication Skills:** A young business graduate should possess excellent communication skills, including verbal and written communication. They should be able to articulate their ideas effectively, communicate with their colleagues and clients, and negotiate deals efficiently.
2. **Critical Thinking and Problem Solving:** Business graduates should have strong analytical skills and be able to identify problems and provide solutions. They should be able to analyze data, identify trends, and make informed decisions based on their findings.
3. **Adaptability:** Young business graduates should be able to adapt to changes in the business environment quickly. They should be able to work well under pressure and be flexible in their Approach to problem-solving.
4. **Leadership Skills:** Business graduates should have strong leadership skills and be able to motivate and inspire their team members. They should be able to delegate tasks effectively, manage their team's performance, and provide guidance when needed.

5. **Networking Skills:** A young business graduate should be able to build relationships with colleagues, clients, and industry professionals. They should be able to network effectively and leverage their connections to advance their careers.
6. **Entrepreneurial Mindset:** Business graduates should have an entrepreneurial mindset and be able to identify opportunities for growth and development. They should be able to take risks and innovate, constantly seeking out new ways to add value to their organization.

As we can notice from the previous set of skills, "soft skills" like adaptability, teamwork, and leadership are in high demand among employers, even more than hard skills. This is because technical skills can be learned on the job or in school, but the soft skills are more challenging to get right," says Sarah Ranchev-Hale, Imperial College Business School's assistant director of careers.

The relevance and importance of soft skills are also linked to the fact that most jobs are now becoming automated, and yet soft skills cannot be replicated by any machine, making them more valuable. In LinkedIn's Global Talent Trends 2019 report, 92% of talent professionals reported that soft skills are equally or more essential to hire than hard skills.



Figure 3. LinkedIn. It's important to hire for: (<https://www.linkedin.com/business/talent/blog/talent-acquisition/soft-skills-are-hard-to-assess-but-these-steps-can-help>)

In conclusion, business graduates should possess various technical and soft skills to succeed in today's competitive job market. Technical skills such as data analysis, financial management, and marketing are essential to understand the workings of a business. However, having excellent soft skills such as communication, problem-solving, and critical thinking is equally important. Soft skills

help individuals interact with others effectively, leading to better collaboration, increased productivity, and improved overall performance. Moreover, soft skills are crucial in building and maintaining relationships with clients, suppliers, and other stakeholders. Thus, a business graduate with a balance of technical and soft skills is likely to excel in their career and significantly impact the organization.

2.2 Networking

In today's highly connected business environment, networking has become essential for professionals in all industries. With the advent of social media platforms and professional networking sites, connecting with potential business partners, clients, and colleagues is easier than ever. By investing time and effort into networking, business professionals can expand their reach, build a solid personal brand, and create valuable connections to help them achieve their goals.

Networking is critical to business success, allowing professionals to build relationships, develop partnerships, and access new opportunities. According to a survey conducted by LinkedIn, 85% of all jobs are filled through networking, demonstrating the importance of these connections for career advancement. (Adler 2016)

Humans rely primarily on their relationships, particularly regarding networking, which can also be called building professional relationships. Building a professional network within someone's industry is to stay current on trends related to their line of work and to have doors open in various settings and with various people. This can be expressed as asking for a favor, receiving a recommendation, or being considered for a potential professional development opportunity.

2.2.1 Importance of Networking through LinkedIn

As said before, LinkedIn has over 900 million members in more than 200 countries and territories worldwide. However, the use that each member gives to their profile can affect it in a wide range of ways, and as a consequence, the scope and benefits they can obtain from the platform will affect their profile as well. The primary users of LinkedIn are college students, adults with a bachelor's degree or advanced degree who are seeking effective networking and hiring positions. On the other hand, 87% of recruiters extensively use LinkedIn. A study found that 122 million people received an interview through LinkedIn (Osman 2022).

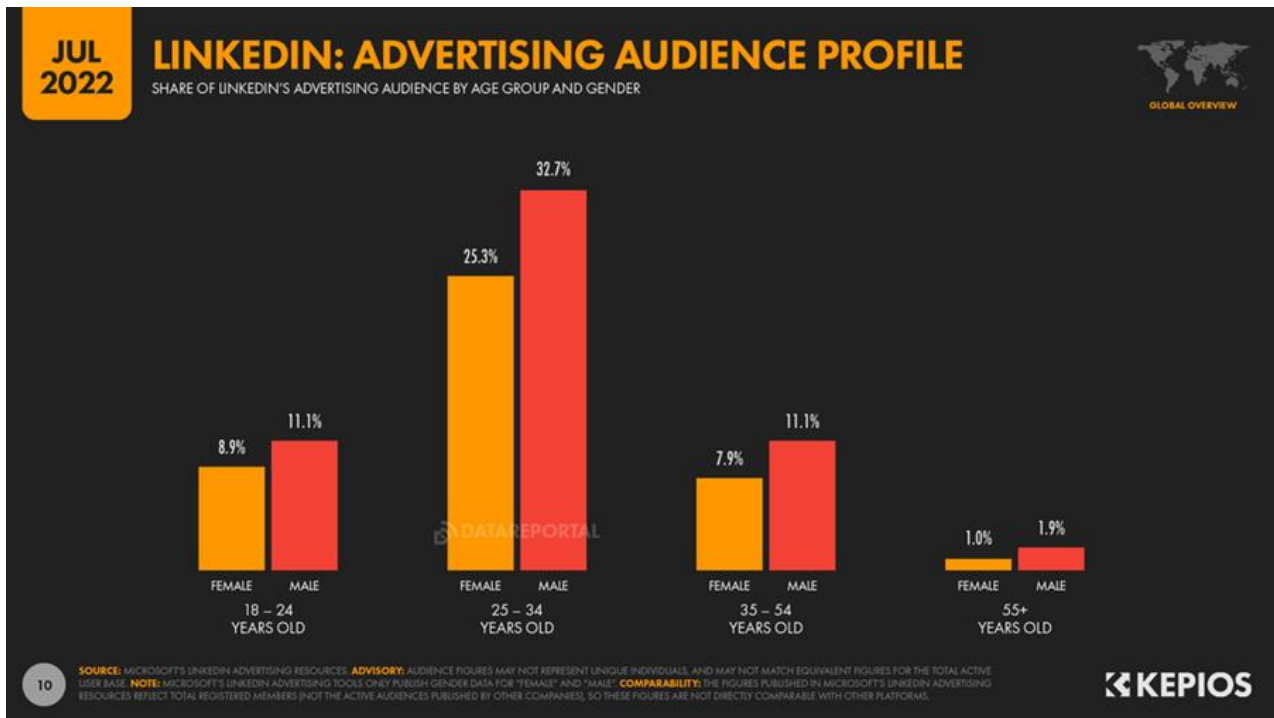


Figure 4. LinkedIn: Advertising Audience Profile (<https://datareportal.com/essential-linkedin-stats-2022>)

Based on the users previously mentioned, LinkedIn is mainly for networking, allowing users to display their qualities, achievements, and job positions while keeping connected with people who have collaborated or with them possible desired companies.

Networking is essential in business for several reasons. First, it allows companies to expand their reach and tap into new markets by connecting with individuals and organizations in various locations or industries. Second, it supplies opportunities for collaboration and partnerships, which can lead to new business opportunities and increased revenue. Third, networking can help businesses stay updated on industry trends, innovations, and best practices, which can be crucial for remaining competitive in today's rapidly changing business environment.

As Ivan Misner, founder of BNI (Business Networking International), mentioned, "Networking is not about just connecting people. It is about connecting people with people, people with ideas, and people with opportunities." Due to previously mentioned, it is why networking is so crucial for a business professional; in the end, each person is a connection who can lead to a life-changing opportunity in, rather a personal or professional aspect.

As LinkedIn co-founder Reid Hoffman states, "The fastest way to change yourself is to hang out with people who are already the way you want to be." Although every person is a possible connection and can bring multiple benefits to someone's network, it is vital to have a solid and connect

with the right people who can later help reach the desired career path. To have a strong bond, it is necessary to maintain these relations and not leave them only to online interaction; bonds are made by being present and interacting outside a social platform. In the long term, this effort will pay off by building credibility, acknowledging someone's work to others, and accessing valuable resources, such as industry insights or valuable practices, which can lead to staying competitive and innovative in the field. Lastly, it will help enhance personal and professional development; networking provides opportunities to learn from others, gain new perspectives, and expand their skill set, which can lead to tremendous success in their careers.

2.3 Professional Development

Professional development is acquiring new skills through ongoing education and job-specific training after entering the workforce. It can involve enrolling in courses or workshops, attending professional or industry conferences, or receiving a certificate to increase knowledge in the chosen area.

LinkedIn offers many opportunities and tools for young business graduates to enhance their professional development. By following best practices, they can leverage the benefits of LinkedIn to build a reliable network, seek job opportunities, access learning resources, and establish themselves as thought leaders in their desired industry. Therefore, young business graduates must use LinkedIn to its full potential to achieve their professional goals.

Emphasizing the job opportunities that LinkedIn can offer young graduates, the recruitment and selection process has migrated from conventional advertisement and face-to-face interviews to online platforms; organizations use these portals to post new job opportunities and select possible candidates. Seventy-one percent of US hiring decision-makers agree that looking at candidate's social media profiles is an effective way to screen applicants, according to a new survey from The Harris Poll commissioned by Express Employment Professionals. (PRWEB 2020)

This method has eased both ways of the channel; firstly, from the Human Resources perspective, the cost is less than any other technique being followed and implemented. Moreover, online recruitment makes the recruiting process shorter and quicker (Subhani, Joseph, Osman, Hasan 2012). Alternatively, this new method has given applicants new opportunities and more visibility of their profile to different companies and job vacancies. It is easier to find new opportunities or stay connected with earlier colleagues from the path they follow in their professional life.

2.3.1 Benefits of using LinkedIn

LinkedIn itself will not solve a person's professional life at once; however, it can be considered a tool for Business students that can offer a wide range of benefits, as long as the user takes the most of it and keeps himself active in the app.

Firstly, the scope of connections that LinkedIn can offer is one of its biggest strengths, as it eases the way of connecting and keeping in touch with professionals from the same field of interest, with whom the user can build strong bonds that later may turn to a solid network who can offer guidance, knowledge, or even professional recommendations. Moreover, LinkedIn provides valuable insights into the interested industry; users can join groups related to their field and stay updated on industry news, trends, and best practices.

In terms of job opportunities, the variety is large; many companies post all their open spots on the platform, or even recruiters look for potential candidates along their connections before making them public. Business professionals can filter according to their field and search for jobs, internships, and other career opportunities; they can also set up job alerts to receive notifications about new job postings in their industry. Furthermore, they can view and study desired company cultures and even reach out to recruiters or hiring managers to express their interest in a position.

Equally important, LinkedIn is a significant boost to building their brand and increasing their presence and visibility in their industry. They can display their skills, experience, knowledge, and achievements to a global audience. Their professional profile must be created to highlight their strengths and accomplishments, which can help them stand out from the competitive pool of candidates on the market nowadays and to potential employers.

LinkedIn provides many benefits for business professionals. From networking and job opportunities to skill development and mentorship, LinkedIn can be an essential tool for business professionals looking to establish themselves in their chosen fields or employees who want to stand out in their industry. By using the platform effectively, business professionals can gain a competitive edge in the job market and build a solid professional network to benefit them throughout their careers.

3 Research Methods

The selected research methods are qualitative and quantitative research. There will be two questionnaires, one intended for young Business graduates and the other designed for recruiters and hiring managers, asking both groups about their opinion, experience, and suggestions for using LinkedIn. Both questionnaires will be provided to respondents from Mexico, the USA, and Europe.

Through both questionnaires, both methods will be included, qualitative questions where the interviewee will give a value of importance to some aspects related to the chosen topics. Likewise, it will also include open-ended questions where the recruiter/graduate will provide their opinion regarding their experience, background, and beliefs of the study case.

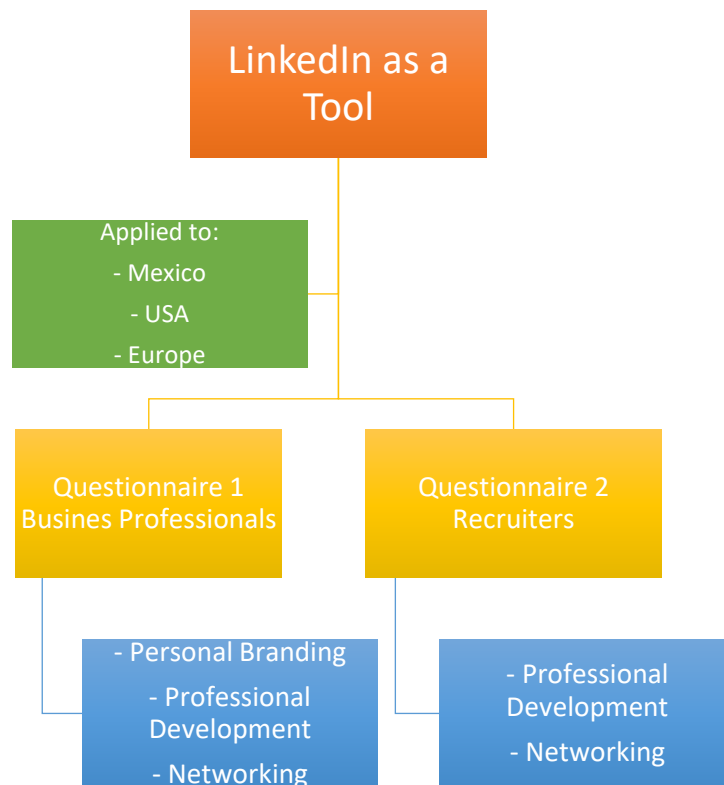


Figure 5. Mapping structure (Author 2022)

3.1 Population and Sample

The author will collect information from the field, interviewing around 60 young business graduates between 20 to 30 years old during the first weeks of April, from the 3rd to the 14th of the previously mentioned month. The majority of the surveyed population will be Mexican, with an approximate percentage of 60%; the rest of the sample will be divided equally between Europeans and Americans, which will serve as a point of comparison with the results obtained from the residents of

Mexico, where the research is being conducted and to which the author has greater access for the same reason. Similarly, to the previous group, the targeted headhunters will reside mainly in Mexico, and the rest of the answers will be collected from resident recruiters from the US and Europe. The sample of this group will be around 50 recruiters and hiring managers with little experience.

The chosen range of ages and demographics was established based on figures 2 and 4 from Chapter 2, where the statistics show that the top country with more users from LinkedIn is the United States, with more than 199 million users, the territory of Europe counts with around 153 million users and Mexico, the leading study country has over 19 million users. In Figure 4, it is illustrated that the primary age group of LinkedIn users is from 20 to 30 years old. All the data previously mentioned was obtained from LinkedIn insights.

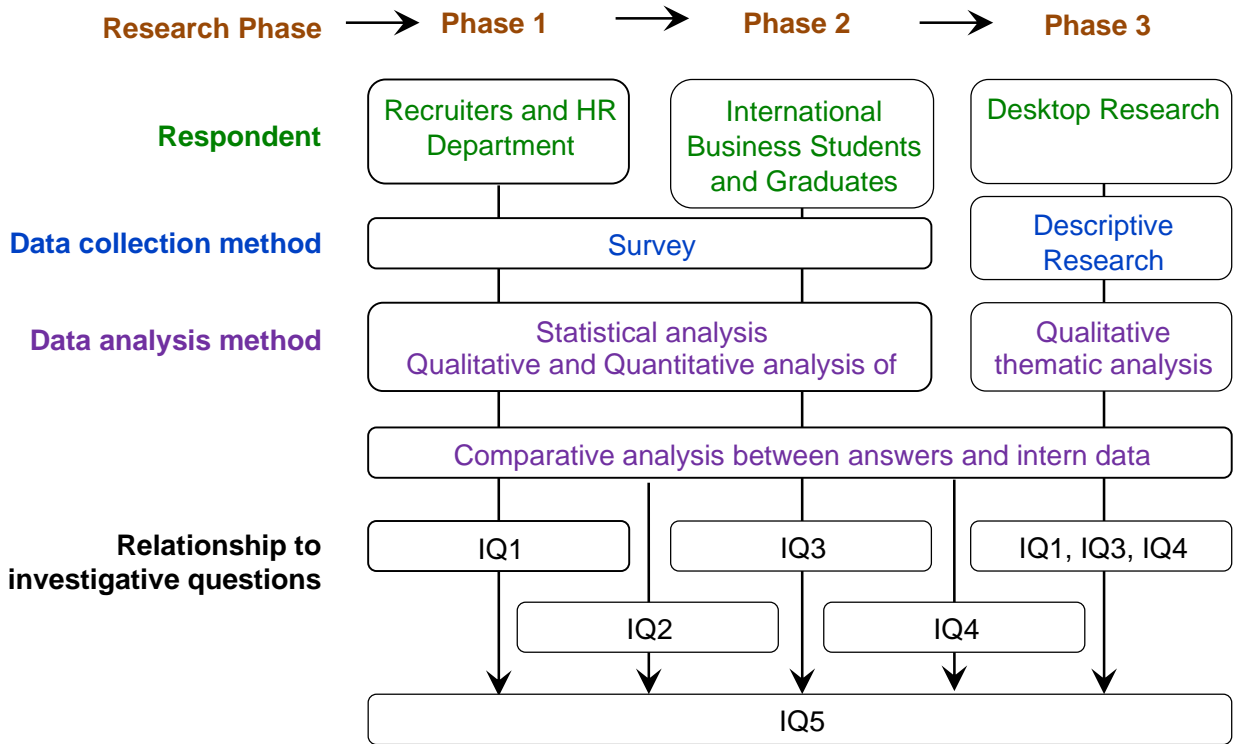


Figure 6. Research Methods Design chart (Author 2023)

3.2 Description of implementation

It is expected to understand how these target groups conduct towards the app, the primary use they give to it, and the relevance the platform has for their professional life. After that, the data will be analyzed, and then come up with a conclusion/result according to the questionnaires and desktop research findings.

One of the most probable risks from the collection of answers was not having the facility of having enough respondents from the USA and Europe, especially from recruiters and hiring managers; this was avoided by searching and reaching out directly to recruiters from LinkedIn, the platform studied, and from the app TikTok.

Table 3. Survey for Business Professionals. (Author 2023)

Investigative Question (IQs)	Theoretical Framework	Survey Questions
IQ 1. Which are the characteristics desired by a business professional to obtain a job position?	2.1.2	BP9, R11, R12, R13, R15
IQ 2. What is the relevance of LinkedIn in the recruitment process inside the Human Resources area?	2 2.1.1	R8, R9, R14, R16, R17
IQ 3. What is the impact of LinkedIn on the development of networking of companies and professionals?	2.2 2.2.1	BP10, BP11, BP12, BP13, BP17, R5, R6, R7, R15
IQ4. What are the benefits of using LinkedIn as a young business graduate for professional development?	2.3 2.3.1	BP6, BP7, BP8, BP14, BP15, BP16, BP17, BP18, BP19, BP20, R7 R10, R18

3.2.1 Approach to young business graduates

As stated before, the target group for this questionnaire was young graduates with any business-related major between the ages of 20 to 30 years old. Obtaining these answers was simple for the author since she falls within this classification, so much of her social group is within the required parameters. Most of the respondents were classmates and work colleagues of the author who reside in Mexico. As for the required percentage of foreign responses, thanks to the fact that the author spent a semester abroad, she was thus able to use her network to get them to respond to the survey and share it with their connections.

3.2.2 Approach to recruiters and hiring managers:

Because recruiters were a more specific niche to which the author did not have easy access, she sent the survey first to contacts known as Mexican recruiters and hiring managers. As for the rest of the responses, international contacts were asked to share them within their network, and the

author sent the following message to American and European recruiters found on LinkedIn and TikTok:

Dear Recruiter / Hiring Manager,

I am a graduate student pursuing my thesis research on the use of LinkedIn as a tool for young business graduates. As a professional in the recruitment and networking industry, your valuable insights can significantly contribute to my study. Your insights and experiences are critical in helping me understand how LinkedIn is being used in the recruitment process and how it is benefiting individuals and businesses.

I would greatly appreciate it if you could spare just 5 minutes of your time to complete a short survey. Your responses will remain confidential and anonymous, and your participation will be immensely valuable to my research.

Please find the survey link attached: <https://link.webpolsurveys.com/S/0C3ED9327AA8A56>.

Thank you for considering my request. Please let me know if you have any questions or concerns.

Best regards,

Jimena Camacho

4 Results

In this chapter, the author aims to explore the use and opinion of LinkedIn among the two previously designed groups, young business professionals and recruiters, to later compare their answers with the theoretical data already gathered so that the research questions of this study can be answered clearly and consistently.

Two surveys were designed and administered to young business professionals and recruiters to achieve this goal. The surveys were created based on the research questions, theoretical data on personal branding, recruiting through LinkedIn, professional networking, and previous research on LinkedIn usage. The first survey aimed to collect data on the frequency and purpose of LinkedIn use, the main profile features, and the types of connections of young business professionals. The second survey aimed to gather data on how recruiters use LinkedIn for candidate sourcing, the importance of different LinkedIn profile elements, and the impact of LinkedIn on their recruitment processes.

The surveys were distributed online through the app "Webropol," and a total of 120 responses were collected from both surveys, 60 for each. Both surveys were answered by young professionals from Mexico, the United States, and Europe; all the respondents were 18 to 35 years old. The data was then analyzed using descriptive statistics and correlation data. Afterward, the results were compared with the theoretical data from the literature review.

The results chapter will present the findings of the surveys and their implications for using LinkedIn in professional networking and recruitment. The chapter will be divided into two sections, one for each survey, and include tables and graphs to illustrate the results. The chapter will also discuss the similarities and differences between the responses of young business professionals and recruiters and compare them with the theoretical data. Finally, the chapter will conclude with the implications of the findings and similarities for using LinkedIn in professional networking, personal branding, and recruitment and suggest directions for future research in this area.

4.1 Results of young business professionals survey

The aim of the first question, "*How old are you?*" was to narrow down and confirm the previously selected target reached by the author, which was between the ages of 20 and 30 years old, which are the ages that a person can typically be considered a young professional. With the results below, we can assure that survey participants meet the age-range requirement and are eligible to obtain accurate and tangible results. The majority of respondents were between 18 to 25 years old,

with 58% overall surveyed, followed by 32% of respondents between 26 to 35 years old. The results from the survey respondents help the author confirm the information noted earlier in Figure 4, which shows that the majority of LinkedIn users in 2022 were between the age range of 25 to 34 years old.

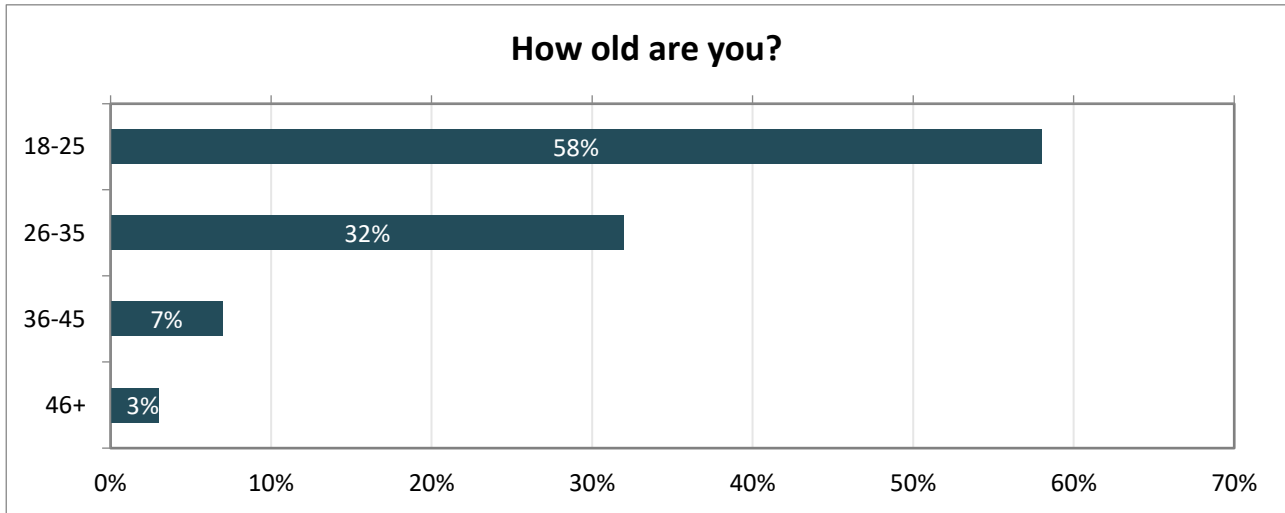


Figure 7. Question number 1, Business professionals survey (Author 2023)

Afterward, with the survey's second question, the main population was focused on Mexico, just as it was mentioned in the demarcation of the research, with 56% of the respondents coming from there. Subsequently, the geographic areas of the United States and Europe have similar percentages, Europe with 17% and the United States with 21%; this percentage represents around 15 surveyed, respectively, which were enough to compare and contrast the following questions: the questionnaire.

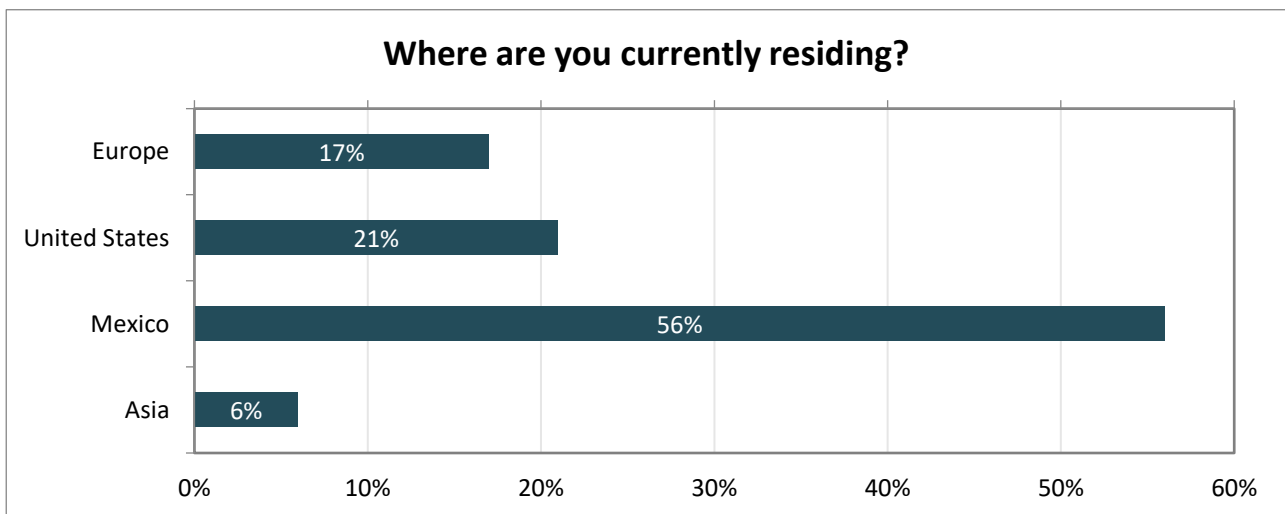


Figure 8. Question number 2, Business professionals survey (Author 2023)

The graph below shows a correlation between the fourth and the sixth question of the survey, which were “*Select your last academic degree*” and “*Do you have a LinkedIn profile?*” this to show if there was a pattern of the level of studies and having a LinkedIn account, based on the results we can conclude that the previous hypothesis is not wholly accurate, as the difference between the three answers is not as significant as it was expected.

However, we can notice a slight difference among the users currently coursing their Bachelor's, as it is the only group where the respondents who do not have an account predominant with 56%. On the contrary, professionals whose last academic degree was a concluded bachelor's degree or master's, and the majority of both groups tend to have a LinkedIn account, which is understandable, taking into consideration that under those phases when people tend to prioritize their professional life instead of their academic responsibilities.

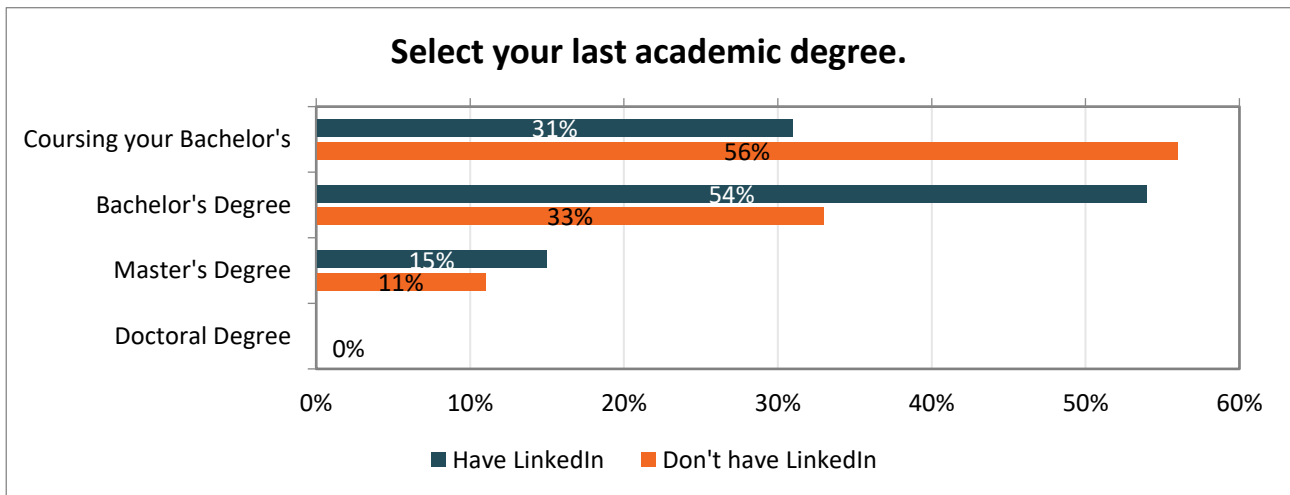


Figure 9. Question number 4/6, Business professionals survey (Author 2023)

Answering one of the main objectives of this research, Figure 10 shows the purposes professionals consider the most relevant and why they use this platform. In the first place, we have "Job searching" with 33%, followed by "Networking" with 26%, and similarly, 20% of the respondents use LinkedIn to "Keep themselves updated on their field." Although only 2% chose the option of "Build your own personal branding," it can be said that the first two uses are related to having a personal brand, as in order to apply to job positions and to network, you first need to establish yourself on the market, and in this case through your LinkedIn profile.

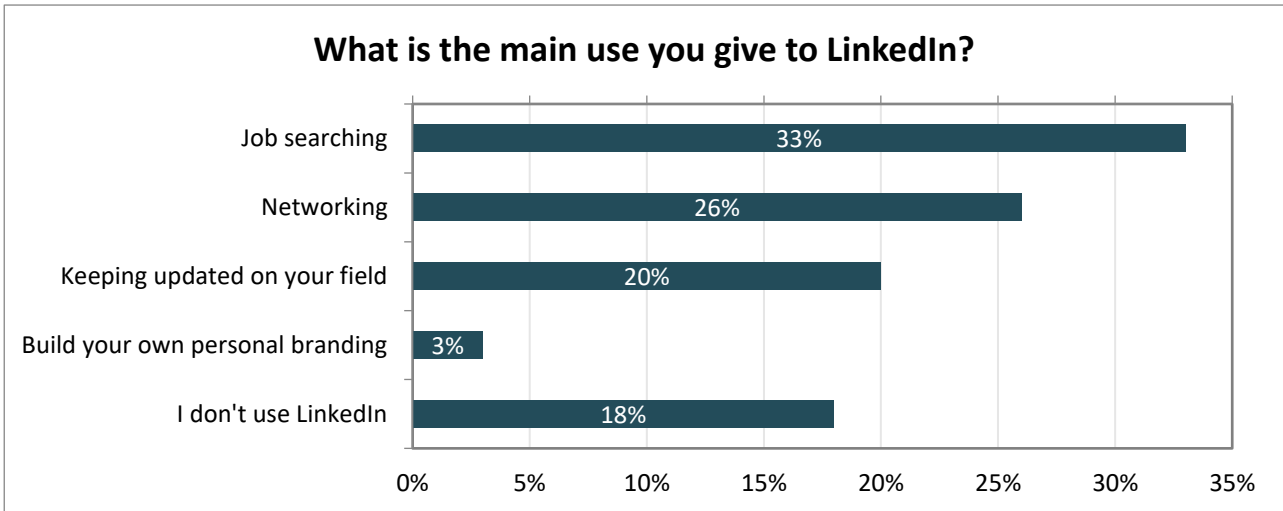


Figure 10. Question number 8, Business professionals survey (Author 2023)

Regarding the information that the participants considered relevant to have on their profiles, Figure 11 illustrates that with a significant difference among the rest, the first feature is the "Professional Experience" with 94% overall the respondents; the following relevant features were likewise considered crucial among the surveyed with 65% and 63% respectively, these being showing their proficient Languages and their Education.

Contrary to the results found in the desktop research, young professionals do not consider showing their soft skills in their profile relevant, as this characteristic is ranked at position number 6 in the list with only 48% of relevance.

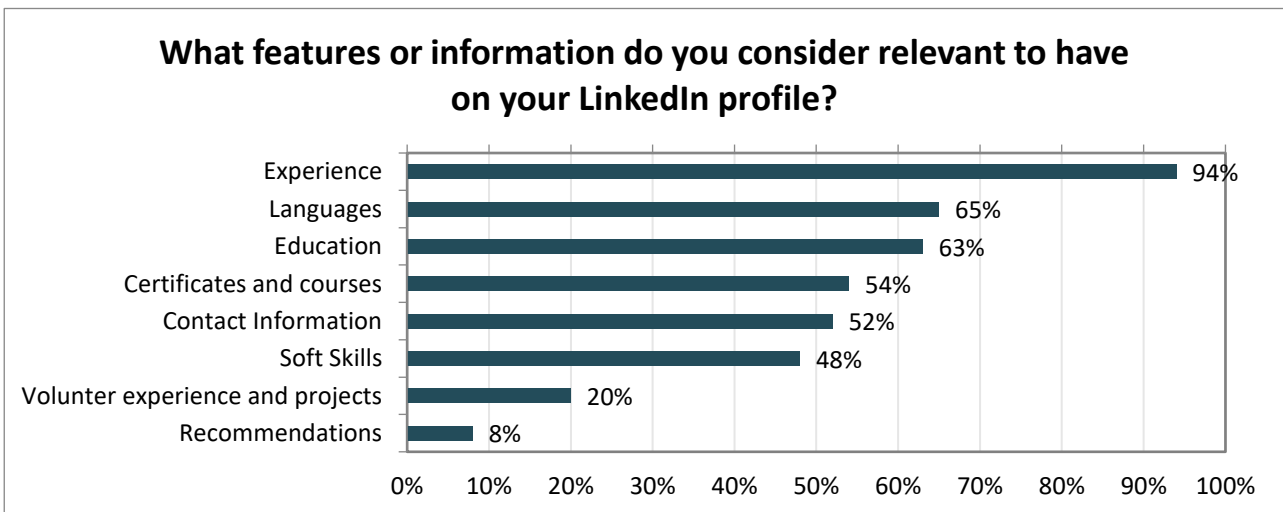


Figure 11. Question number 9, Business professionals survey (Author 2023)

To have a better understanding of the internationalization of this thesis and the comparison between Mexico, the United States, and Europe, the author decided to make correlational figures

where it is easier to visualize and explain the difference between the three selected regions in different aspects related to the use of LinkedIn, which will be discussed in more detail below.

Despite the different backgrounds and distinctive demographic contexts, the three groups reacted similarly to the question, “Do you have international connections?”. However, it would be expected that the users in Europe would have more reach to international contacts than the respondents’ residents of Mexico and the United States; the bar chart shows that all the groups had a similar amount of international connections.

In fact, at the top of the group is the United States, with 72% of users that have international connections, followed by Europe with 67%, and right below with 65% in Mexico. Overall, most LinkedIn counts with international users, which increases the chances of networking and finding job opportunities outside the users' place of origin.

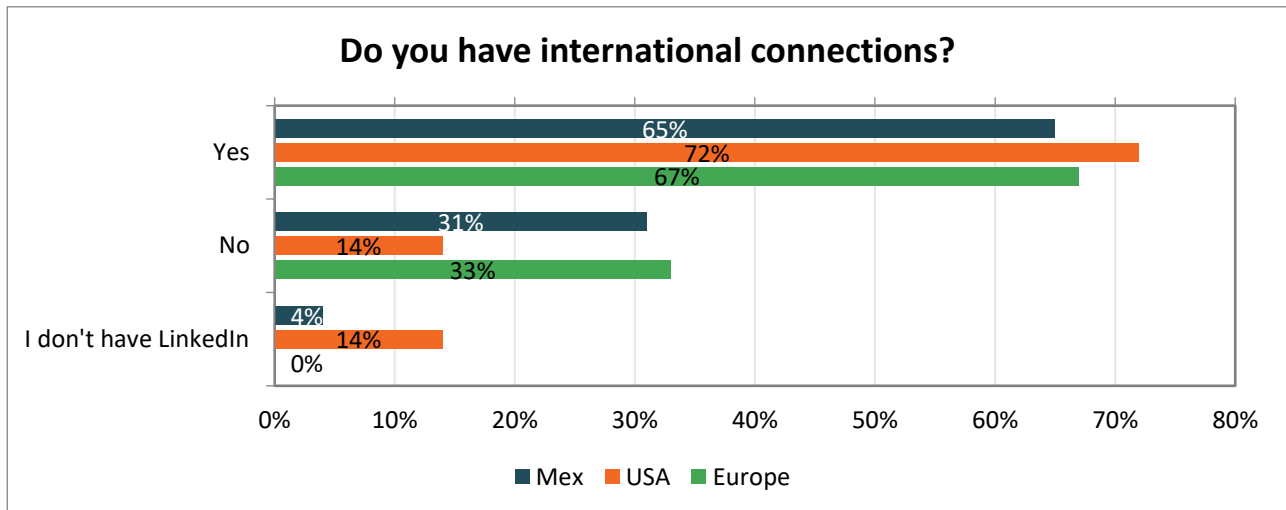


Figure 12. Question number 12, Business professionals survey (Author 2023)

Alternatively, to the previous statistic, under Figure 13, we can see an existent difference between the three demographic zones when applying to international or local jobs. Mexicans are the largest group of the survey that tend to apply to international and Local jobs with 61% of their respondents; this can be due to the lack of opportunities in their country or the available business positions that can be found abroad. Alternatively, Americans also tend to apply to local and international jobs, although on a minor scale than the other groups, with only 43%. Nevertheless, Europeans act similarly to Mexicans, mainly applying to local and international jobs with 57%. However, they are the most outstanding group who choose to apply to local jobs in their country, with 43% of their respondents.

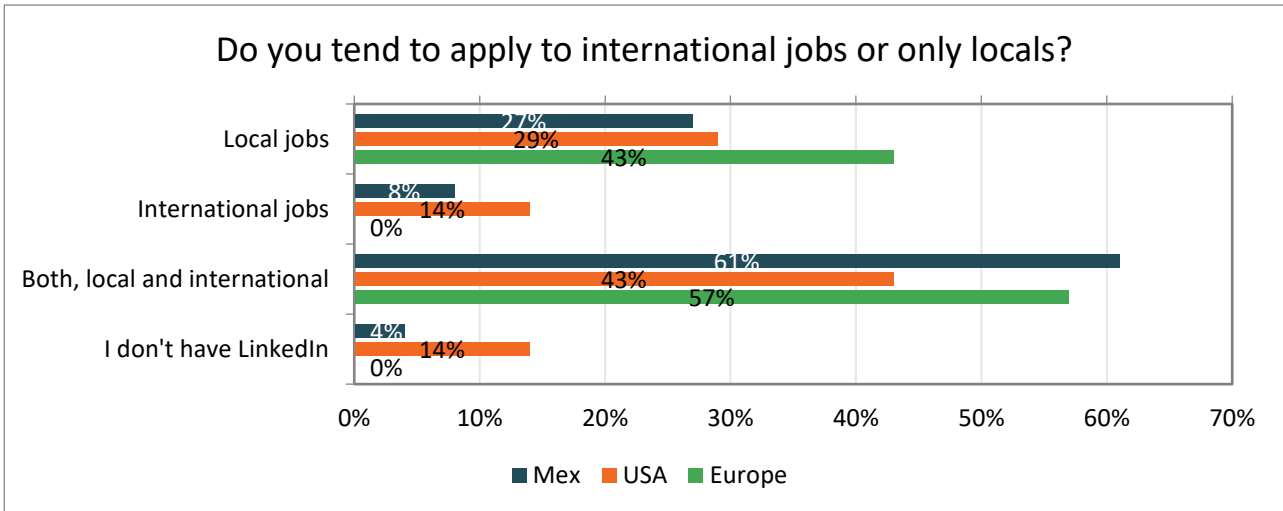


Figure 13. Question number 17, Business professionals survey (Author 2023)

Even though Figure 10 of this research showed that the primary purpose users give to LinkedIn is for job searching, we can see on the graph below that most users have not yet obtained a job through LinkedIn. Only 35% of the surveyed have obtained a job through the platform.

More importantly, we can realize that demographics play an essential role in this question, as most of the respondents that have obtained a job are from the US with 43%, followed by a sharply dropped of 15% corresponding to Mexicans and finally to a 7% of Europeans that have got a job through LinkedIn.

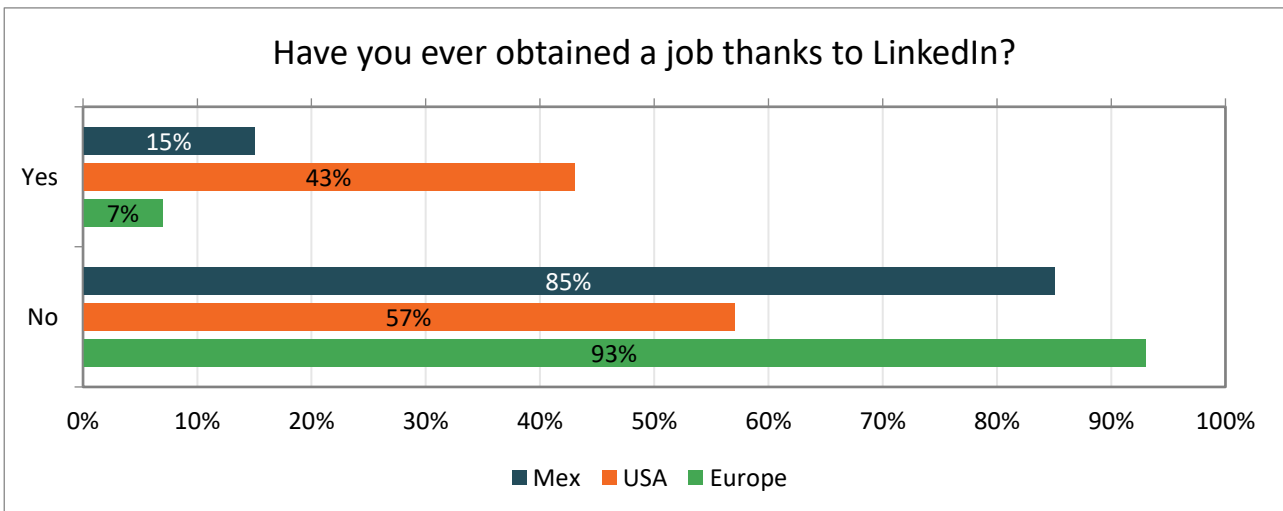


Figure 14. Question number 19, Business professionals survey (Author 2023)

4.2 Results of recruiters and hiring managers surveyed

Similarly to the previous subchapter and for the sake of persevering the internationalization of this study, the author analyzed many of the responses according to the demographic area of the recruiters/hiring managers. Below, figure 17 illustrates the classification of company types, these being "local," "regional," "national," and "International." The author decided to approach recruiters with different backgrounds to have more certainty of the reliability of the results of this thesis, which is why factors such as the size of the company were taken into account.

According to the demographic zones, Europe stands out from the rest of the groups, where more companies are International by 80%. Conversely, the United States show more variety in their results, this corresponding with 60% to international companies and 20% to national and Local companies. In the case of Mexico, we can visualize a similar case to the US. However, we need to consider that most of the survey population were Mexicans, yet it is the group with the minor international companies, with only 38%.

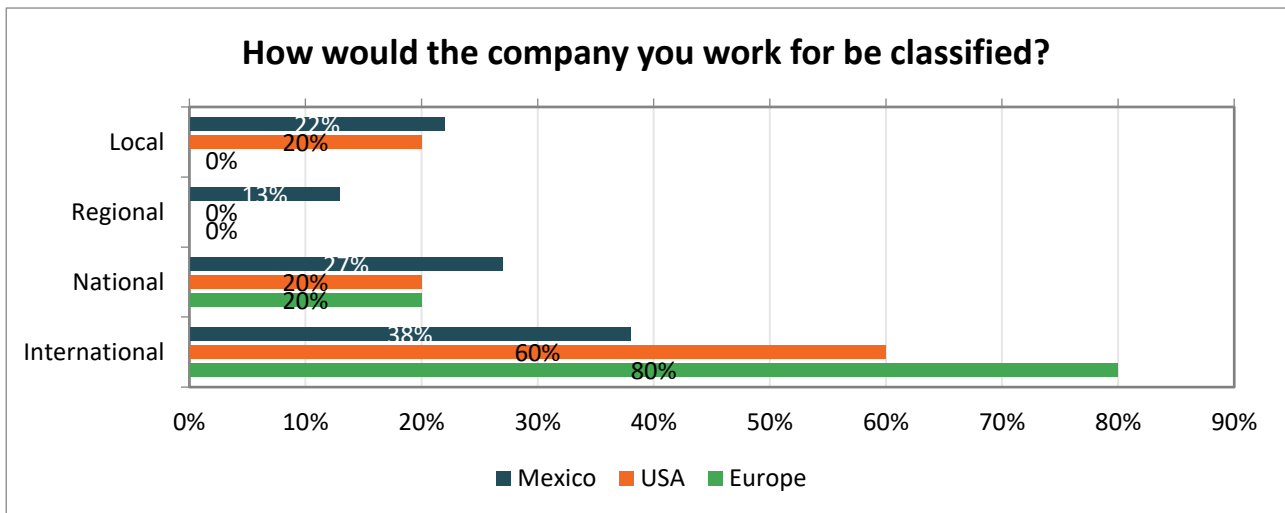


Figure 15. Question 4, Recruiters survey (Author 2023)

For the following graph, Europe is the only zone that thoroughly recommends the use of LinkedIn as a Network tool with a rat of 100%, followed by 60% of the US who also consider LinkedIn the best platform for networking and referring to Mexico, their population is equally divided by 49% and 49% who consider LinkedIn is the best tool for networking and the other half think of it as a tool they would recommend for networking, but not their first option.

This question can also be correlated to Figure 10 of the survey of Business professionals, which shows that networking is the second most common use young professionals give to LinkedIn. Based on these facts and the previously discussed theory, it is understandable why, overall, the respondents consider the platform the primary tool for central networking or a great help for this aim.

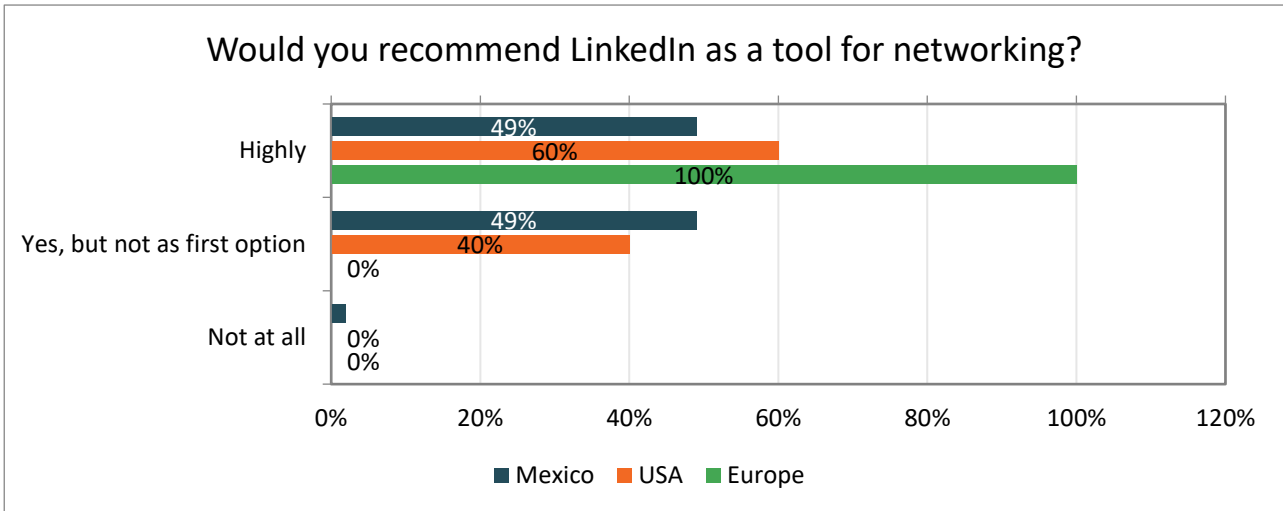


Figure 16. Question 7, Recruiters survey (Author 2023)

Moving forward, the question “Does your company have a LinkedIn profile?” represents how strongly the platform's culture is set on each demographic site. Under Figure 19, both European and American recruiters answered that all the companies they worked for have an active LinkedIn account, regardless of the company size (As previously seen in Figure 17). Alternatively, Mexico represents a considerably low rate of companies that have an active LinkedIn account; this is only 40% overall of them, followed by 33% of recruiters who do have a LinkedIn profile but do not actively use it, and 27% of companies who do not even have a LinkedIn account.

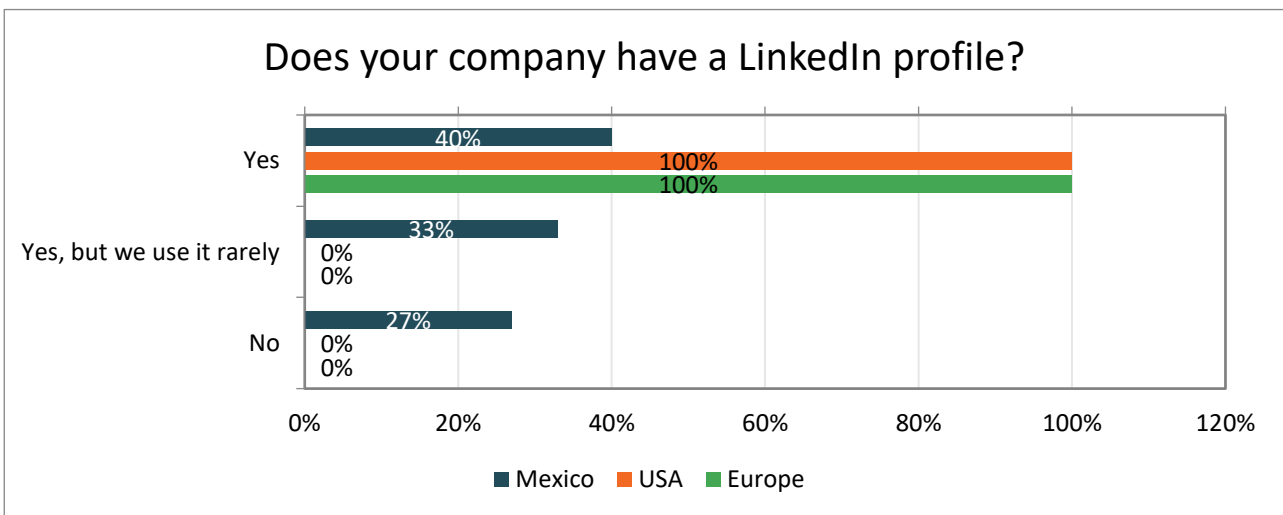


Figure 17. Question 9, Recruiters survey (Author 2023)

The bar chart below illustrates the characteristics recruiters and hiring managers consider relevant to a possible candidate profile. On the first position is "Experience" with 89%, followed by "Soft skills" with a slight decrease of 81%, on the third position of the ranking is "Education" with a 52% rate overall the respondents, and in the fourth position is "Certificates and courses" with 37%.

These results can likewise be compared to the insights of Figure 11 from the features that business professionals find relevant; surprisingly, both results are different, and there is little common ground between the two lists. For instance, what can be rescued as similarities between both groups are the "Experience" that both consider the most important characteristic and the "Education" that both recruiters and professionals place in the third position. However, recruiters and desktop research find "Soft skills" fundamental in a candidate as it is one of their main differentiators' traits, and professionals place them at the bottom of their list of priorities.

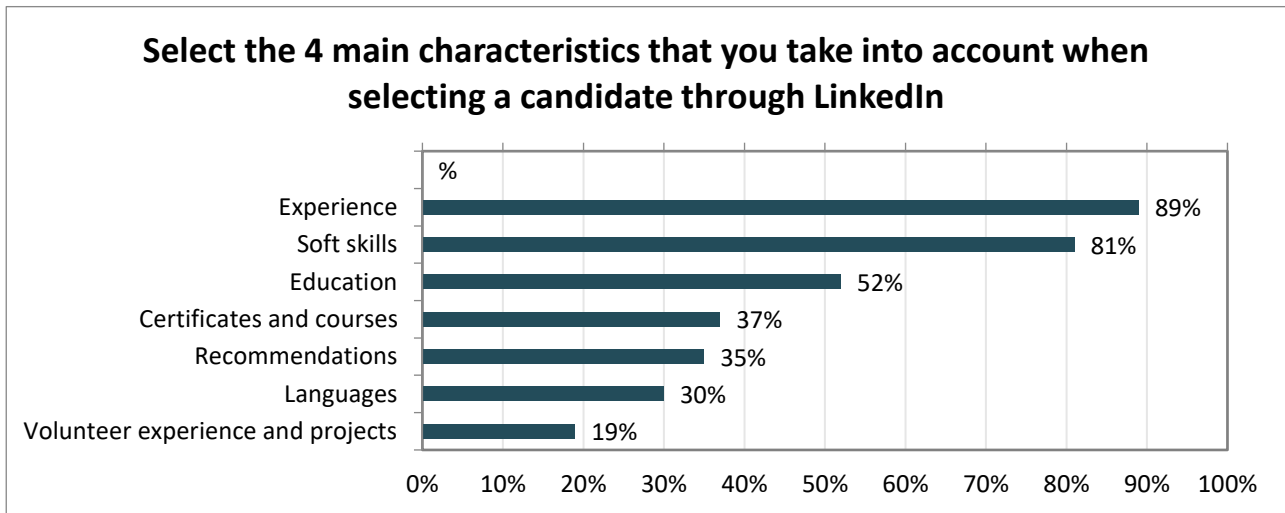


Figure 18. Question 11, Recruiters survey (Author 2023)

Moving along, under Figure 21, we can notice the difference in the tendency to hire students or recent graduates depending on the country. The United States is the country that tends to hire more recent graduates with or without experience, showing an acceptance rate of 60% of all their answers. Likewise, Europe does not tend to care if a graduate has experience or not; however, their acceptance rate is slightly lower than the one from the US, with only 40% of respondents who argue they hire recent graduates frequently and equally 40% who hire them but prefer them to have minimum experience. In the specific case of Mexico, their tendency as the country is to occasionally hire recent graduates, as 55% of respondents selected this option, which is a high difference from the rest of the territories.

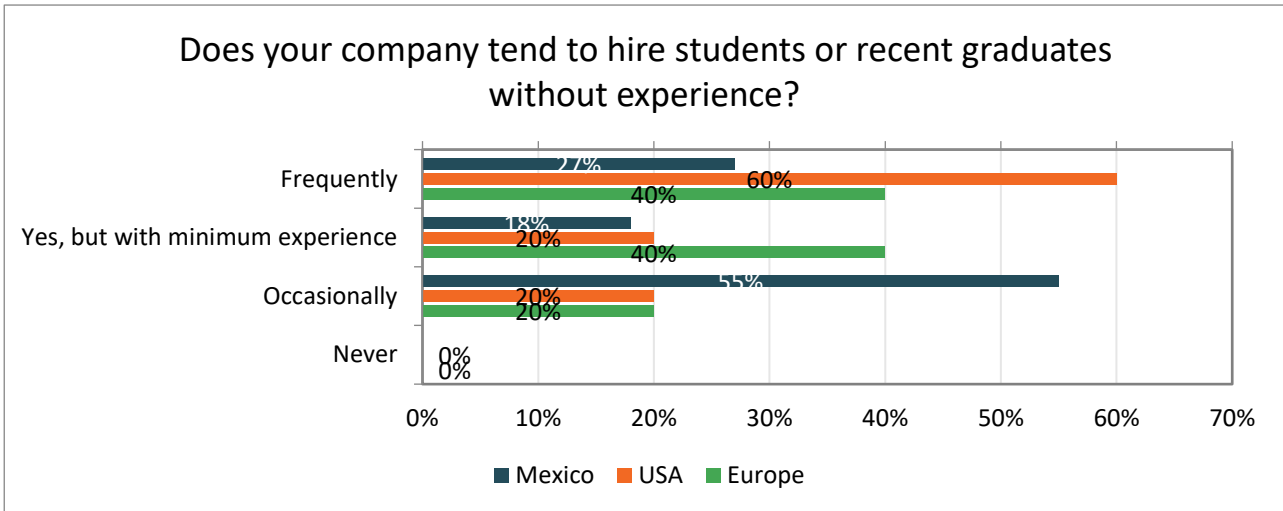


Figure 19. Question 12, Recruiters survey (Author 2023)

Regarding the question "Do you consider international candidates or only local candidates?" opposite answers can be noted for each case. For instance, Europe tends to consider any candidate, whether international or local, with a rate of 80%. On the other hand, Mexico tends to the contrary by preferring only local or national prospects with a 70% rate. The United States tends to rely more on the tendencies of Mexico by considering 60% local candidates and 40% regardless of their origin.

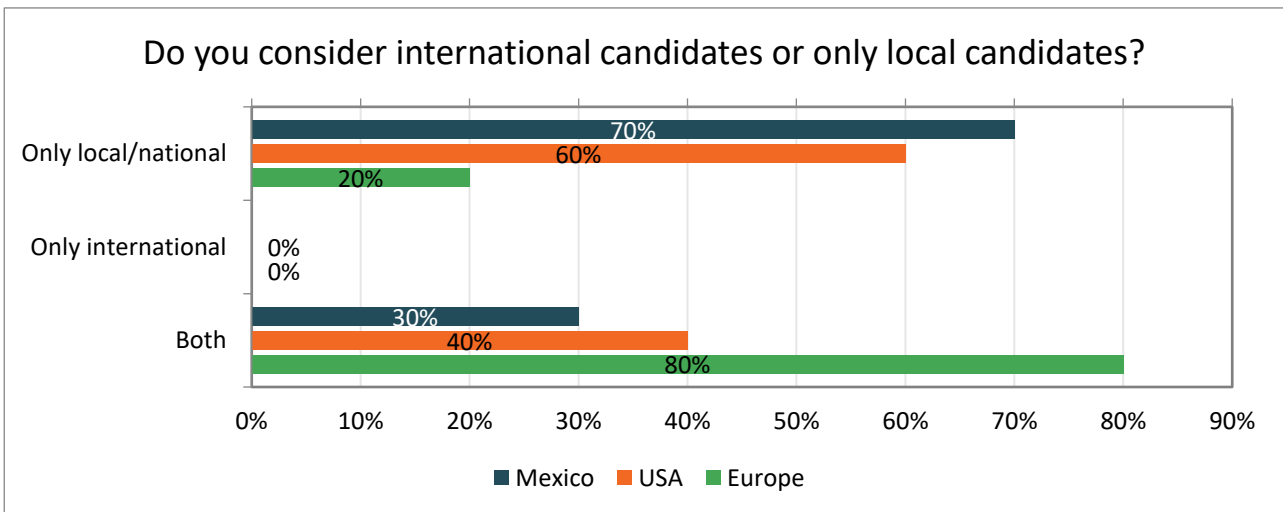


Figure 20. Question 15, Recruiters survey (Author 2023)

5 Conclusions

The final chapter of this thesis will reveal the key findings that have merged from the surveys performed, the desktop research with reliable information, and the analysis conducted between the last two mentioned. In this chapter, the author aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the main topics of the research, these being personal branding, networking, recruitment, and professional development, as well as a critical reflection and suggestions of the implications of the use of LinkedIn as young business graduates and as recruiters. Overall, this thesis aims to significantly contribute to the knowledge in the field of personal branding and networking by answering the investigative questions previously set and the research question through the critical findings that this research has offered the author.

5.1 Discussion

IQ1. Which are the characteristics desired by a business professional to obtain a job position?

As a starting point, the author would like to discuss the desired characteristics of a young business professional from a recruitment point of view, as according to the literature and the surveys answered by specialists, the technical and hard skills will always be elementary for any job, however, as the talent pool is increasing. Many people can learn to perform the same actions; what is currently gaining much traction are the soft skills that people have to offer in the workplace and how aligned they are with the company's values as nowadays the quality at the workplace and interpersonal skills are becoming even more important than any technical skill a candidate has to offer.

On the other hand, what both recruiters and business professionals still find engaging and essential is the candidate's experience; young professionals are recommended to start attaining job experience related to their field as soon as possible; this increases the value and interest in potential prospects. Factors like certificates and languages are always a plus on the profile of a business candidate as it is proof of the interest in staying updated and in constant self-improvement.

IQ2. What is the relevance of LinkedIn in the recruitment process inside the Human Resources area?

Over the past decade, it has been proved that recruitment and selection processes have increasingly migrated to online platforms. This is due to the numerous advantages that online recruitment offers compared to traditional methods. Online recruitment and selection can save time and

resources, allowing employers to reach a wider pool of potential candidates, automate certain aspects of the hiring process, and quickly review applications.

LinkedIn's role in the recruitment process is essential for both sides, candidates and talent acquisition specialists. According to the conducted survey, most of both groups say that LinkedIn is their predetermined Social Network Site when posting an open spot or applying for a job; however, each party has its inconsistencies, since on the human resources side, it has been proven that many companies tend to post their open vacancies on LinkedIn and from there they redirect the prospect to their platform or mean of application for a job, instead of performing the whole process through the platform. Conversely, based on the survey, most users claim that the primary use they give to LinkedIn is job searching; however, only 9% of the respondents have obtained a job through LinkedIn.

The survey also demonstrates that recruiters look for potential candidates through their profiles depending on their position, which is done more frequently in Europe. Based on the previously mentioned and according to the findings, it can be said that although LinkedIn is a massive pillar of online job applications and the recruitment process, the whole process itself is not performed through the app but is only used as a filter to widen their search range and amplify their network to keep contact with future potential candidates that can match the future company needs.

LinkedIn has also had an impact on the way professionals present themselves online. LinkedIn profiles are now considered an essential tool for personal branding, and many recruiters use them to screen candidates before inviting them for an interview.

IQ3. What is the impact of LinkedIn on the development of networking of companies and professionals?

The survey found that each LinkedIn user has about 160 connections, a considerable number compared to traditional networking methods. Moreover, most of these connections have around 25% international connections, highlighting the global nature of the platform. This international aspect of LinkedIn is beneficial for companies looking to expand their business globally, as well as for professionals seeking opportunities in other countries.

Both recruiters and candidates tend to consider international candidates when selecting a prospect and applying to international job positions when looking for a job. This is because LinkedIn allows them to search for candidates from anywhere in the world and provides a platform for international job postings. As a result, companies can find the best talent regardless of their location, and job seekers can access job opportunities worldwide.

LinkedIn has also had an impact on the way professionals present themselves online. LinkedIn profiles are now considered an essential tool for personal branding, and many recruiters use them to screen candidates before inviting them for an interview. As a result, professionals have to ensure that their LinkedIn profile is up-to-date, complete and showcases their skills and experience effectively.

In conclusion, LinkedIn has significantly impacted networking in companies and professionals. Its global reach, ease of use, and ability to connect recruiters and candidates have made it an essential tool for professionals looking to advance their careers and companies looking to expand their business. As more and more professionals and companies join the platform, the impact of LinkedIn on networking will only continue to grow.

IQ4. What are the benefits of using LinkedIn as a young business graduate for professional development?

As a young business graduate, LinkedIn can be an excellent tool for professional development. The platform offers numerous benefits, including networking opportunities, access to industry-specific information, and the ability to showcase skills and experience to potential employers. By leveraging these features, users can enhance their career prospects and advance their professional goals.

One of the primary benefits of LinkedIn is the opportunity to connect with other professionals in the industry. By building a network of contacts, users can gain insights into current trends and best practices and learn about job opportunities and potential mentors. Additionally, LinkedIn lets users showcase their skills and experience to potential employers. Create a detailed profile, highlight their achievements and education, and share relevant articles and posts. This can increase their visibility and attract the attention of recruiters and hiring managers, potentially leading to new job opportunities or partnerships.

Overall, LinkedIn is an invaluable tool for young business graduates looking to grow their careers and expand their professional networks. By taking advantage of the platform's features, users can stay up to date with industry developments, connect with other professionals, and showcase their skills and experience to potential employers, positioning themselves for success in their chosen field.

6 Appreciations

I would like to express my deepest appreciation and gratitude to all those who have supported me, and without whom I would have never been able to complete this research, and without whom I would not have made it through my entire Bachelor's degree, which I can say it has been the most exciting experience.

To my classmates, who have been my constant source of support and motivation throughout all time zone, countries, or stages of our lives. Thanks for the last four years and for all the lifetime experiences and learnings we have made during this journey.

I would like to extend my most profound appreciation to my parents Carina Bárcenas and Javier Camacho, who have been my pillars of strength throughout my academic and life journey; I cannot thank you enough for always encouraging me to do the best I can, always followed by your guidance. Special thanks also to my sisters Natalia and Isabela, my best friend Ana Paula and my grandma Elvia, who have seen me through every single face of this research and helped me with the most minor but most meaningful details.

I also want to dedicate this thesis to the beloved members of my family who passed away recently. Your losses were one of the biggest challenges throughout this research, but your unconditional support and love throughout my entire career helped me to successfully complete this project. This thesis is a tribute to their unwavering love, expertise, and inspiration; I will be eternally grateful for our time together.

In conclusion, I would like to express my sincere appreciation to all those who have helped me along the way. Your support, encouragement, and guidance have been invaluable, and I am grateful for all that you have done for me. Thank you.

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Business professionals survey

LinkedIn for Business Professionals

This thesis survey aims to investigate the effectiveness of LinkedIn as a professional networking platform for business professionals. LinkedIn has become crucial for career development, job searching, and business growth.

Thank you for answering this short 5-minute survey which will help us gather insights from users on the benefits and limitations of LinkedIn.

1. How old are you?

- 18-25
- 26-35
- 36-45
- 46+

2. Where are you currently residing?

- Europe
- United States
- Mexico
- Asia

3. What did you study?

4. Select your last academic degree.

- Coursing your Bachelor's

- Bachelor's Degree
- Master's Degree
- Doctoral Degree

5. Do you have professional experience related to your studies?

- Yes
- No

6. Do you have a LinkedIn profile?

- Yes
- No

7. On a scale of 1 to 10, how active are you on the app?



8. What is the main use you give to LinkedIn?

- Job searching
- Networking
- Keeping updated on your field
- Build your own personal branding
- I don't use LinkedIn

9. What features or information do you consider relevant to have on your LinkedIn profile? Select the 4 that you consider most relevant.

- Contact Information
- Education
- Soft Skills
- Experience

- Recommendations
- Languages
- Volunter experience and projects
- Certificates and courses

10. In terms of networking, how relevant do you consider LinkedIn to be?



11. Approximately how many connections do you have on LinkedIn?



12. Do you have international connections?

- Yes
- No
- I don't have LinkedIn

13. If you do have international connections, what percentage do you consider to correspond to foreign users?



14. Would you consider LinkedIn to help you build your personal brand?

- Yes, it is one of its main uses
- Partially but not completely
- I do not use it for that purpose

15. Would you consider LinkedIn as your main platform while searching for a job?

- Yes
 No

16. Have you ever applied for a job offer through LinkedIn?

- Yes
 No
 I don't have LinkedIn

17. Do you tend to apply to international jobs or only locals?

- Local jobs
 International jobs
 Both, local and international
 I don't have LinkedIn

18. Have you ever gotten a job interview through LinkedIn?

- Yes
 No
 I don't have LinkedIn

19. Have you ever obtained a job thanks to LinkedIn?

- Yes
 No

20. Please describe in few words your experience using LinkedIn for your professional life.

Recruiters Survey

Recruiters Survey

This thesis survey aims to investigate the effectiveness of LinkedIn as a professional networking platform for business professionals. LinkedIn has become crucial for career development, job searching, and business growth.

Thank you for answering this short 5-minute survey which will help us gather insights from users on the benefits and limitations of LinkedIn.

1. For which industry do you work/worked?

2. How long have you been a recruiter?

- 0-1 year
- 2-5 years
- 6-10 years
- +10 years

3. Where are you currently working?

- Mexico
- the United States
- Europe

4. How would the company you work for be classified?

- Local

- Regional
- National
- International

5. On a scale of 1-10, how relevant do you consider Networking



6. How would you rate your company Network?

- Extensive, solid, and constantly growing
- Extensive but not reliable
- Small but solid and reliable
- I have no reliable connections

7. Would you recommend LinkedIn as a tool for networking?

- Highly
- Yes, but not as first option
- Not at all

8. Select the platforms you use or have used to post job vacancies.

- LinkedIn
- Indeed
- OCC
- CornerJob
- Other

9. Does your company have a LinkedIn profile?

- Yes
-

- Yes, but we use it rarely
- No

10. Do you consider LinkedIn to be the best application for professional and career growth for professionals?

- Completely
- Yes, it is very good, but it is not the main one.
- I consider it irrelevant to their professional development.

11. Select the 4 main characteristics that you take into account when selecting a candidate through LinkedIn

-
- Experience
- Education
- Recommendations
- Languages
- Volunteer experience and projects
- Certificates and courses
- Soft skills

12. Does your company tend to hire students or recent graduates without experience?

- Frequently
- Yes, but with minimum experience
- Occasionally
- Never

13. What is the profile you are looking for in an economic-administrative professional?

14. How often do you consider candidates through LinkedIn?

- Never
- Rarely
- Usually
- Frequently
- Always

15. Do you consider international candidates or only local candidates?

- Only local/national
- Only international
- Both

16. During a candidate's recruitment process, do you usually review their LinkedIn profile?

- Always
- Depending on the position
- Rarely
- Never

17. How often do you typically schedule interviews with LinkedIn prospects?

- Every week
- Every month
- Once every semester
- Once a year
- Never

18. On a scale of 1 to 10, select how important you consider it is for a professional to have a LinkedIn profile.

