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The role of Social Selling in improving Lead Generation in a B2B organization

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The Role of Social Selling in Improving Lead Generation in a B2B Organization

The study aims to investigate how social selling can be a useful strategy to generate warm sales leads. With the increase in digitization, there is a significant change in buying behavior and social selling has become an important business development strategy. Social selling leverages the capabilities of social and digital platforms to understand, connect with, and proactively engage influencers, prospective customers, and existing clients at crucial stages throughout their buying journey.

The study aims to answer the question " What is the role of social selling in improving lead generation in a B2B organization?." It aims to investigate the role of personal branding of the salesperson developed through relationship building with the ideal customers during the study. The study also provides insights into the different types of social media content created and how it engages prospects and builds rapport and trust with them.

The study applies the inductive research approach that evaluates observations/tests, theory, and patterns. The performance data of different content is collected through a Social media platform i.e. LinkedIn and the idea to create more social media content is collected through a survey questionnaire through Webropol by collecting responses from 72 ideal customers with whom relationships were developed during the study period.

The results from the study period were very promising and serves as a motivation to continue social selling as part of the sales strategy.

keywords: Social selling, Digital platform, LinkedIn, Sales lead generation

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List of abbreviations (or) symbols

AIDA	Attention, Interest, Desire and Action
B2B	Business to Business
B2C	Business to Customer
BQL	Business qualified leads
CRM	Customer Relationship Management
H2H	human-to-human
KPI's	key performance indicators
MQL	Marketing qualified leads
SAAS	Software as a service
SWOT	Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats

1 Introduction

1.1 Background and Commissioner

Digital technologies along with the rise of the internet have changed the business landscape. The way businesses operate and attract customers has undergone significant transformation. This makes a strong case for businesses to continuously adapt to the increasing pace of digitization and devise strategies that align with the customers' buying behaviors. The traditional sales model of business-to-business (B2B) selling focusing on methods like cold calling, building personal relationships through Face-to-face meetings, and attending trade shows has become less favorable. Customers now prefer doing online research about the products and services they want to buy and gathering all the information beforehand.

In the present times, the rise of social media has significantly changed how businesses engage with their customers. Social media offers an ecosystem for direct and indirect conversations around existing products and services. The expansion of the online digital horizon offers more extensive opportunities for businesses to reach their ideal customers and make an ideal case for social selling (Ancillai, Terho, Cardinali & Pascucci, 2019,1.). Social selling provides valuable customer insights, enabling businesses to tailor their sales pitches to meet the specific needs of buyers (Itani, Agnihotri & Dingus, 2017, 70.). Considering the above facts, this study aims to examine and apply the Social Selling concept to the sales process of the company RealGame Business Simulation which is the commissioner of this thesis.

RealGame Business Simulation is a Finnish Software as a Service (SAAS) company that provides innovative experiential learning pedagogical simulation tools for educators. The simulation tools are used to teach business concepts and theories to students in Higher Management Education institutes. RealGame business simulations replicate real-world scenarios and challenge students to apply the theoretical knowledge learned in class in a safe virtual business

environment. RealGame business simulations is a pedagogical tool allowing students to develop business acumen through experiential learning by learning hard and soft skills needed for real-world business problems. RealGame business simulations have the majority of its customer base in Finland and a few from Norway and Sweden. In 2022, the Chief Executive Officer Dr. Timo Lainema, and the team decided to expand RealGame business to Southern Europe and other international markets and created a need to utilize the social selling strategies.

RealGame Business Simulation made use of the traditional strategy of cold calling/ emailing, and face-to-face meetings during educational conferences, to reach out to their prospects. This strategy was very time-consuming and yielded not-so-favorable sales outcomes in terms of lead generation. RealGame company was almost absent from social media platforms and never made any significant use of LinkedIn platform for prospecting purposes. During the study period, the LinkedIn profile was activated and prospect outreach strategies were devised.

The ideal customers for RealGame are Educators mainly at the level of Lecturers and Professors from Higher Education Business schools. The Unique selling point for RealGame is that educators make continuous efforts to devise new pedagogical tools to increase student engagement in class and with the development of technology, simulations have come up as an alternative pedagogical tool for student-centered learning. Simulations are a pedagogical technique that allows students to learn through experience by exposing them to virtual worlds that reflect reality. Students are exposed to concrete experiences which increases motivation and learning through strong engagements (Mafla-Cobo, Peña-Orozco & Lasso-Cardona, 2020). Simulations are widely acknowledged as highly effective pedagogical tools for nurturing both soft and hard managerial skills while mitigating the risks and costs linked to real-world decision-making (Garizurieta, Muñoz-Martínez, Otero & González-Benítez, 2018).

1.2 Objective of the study

The thesis would focus mainly on social selling through LinkedIn as the majority of the RealGame prospects reside on this social media platform. The thesis is an attempt to answer the research question " What is the role of social selling in improving lead generation in a B2B organization?". The author would build a personal brand for himself by providing relevant content about the use of simulations in higher education, creating and testing different types of LinkedIn Content, and finding the best possible content strategies that influence and engage prospects. The author also aims to establish LinkedIn connections with ideal customers and become a go-to expert for the prospects whenever they are ready to buy and implement simulations in their courses.

The thesis aims to investigate the sub-questions as described below:

> a) Can the personal brand of a salesperson influence prospects buying decisions?
>
> b) Can social selling reduce sales lead time by creating more warm leads?
>
> c) What type of LinkedIn content creates more customer engagements?

The scope of the thesis would include the performance analysis of different content created on LinkedIn through data on impressions and engagements. The results of data from content analysis would be clubbed together with the company's Customer Relationship Management data to verify the outcome of the social selling strategy.

For this study, 6 months of data was collected from January 2023 to June 2023. The quantitative data of content performance about customer impressions and engagements was collected directly from the LinkedIn platform, sales lead data from the HubSpot Customer Relationship Management platform, and visitor behavior on the RealGame website from the Google Analytics platform. This data was analyzed to understand ideal customers' behaviors and warm them

enough with RealGame product insights to make them interested in the product. Additional, quantitative data was generated through the use of a survey questionnaire created on Webropol. This questionnaire was created with the collaboration and agreement of the Commissioner and supervisor of this thesis. The survey questionnaire was responded to by 72 prospects. The survey data was analyzed to gather more information on the pain points of educators during the implementation of new simulation tools into their courses. This data would serve as a basis for creating more content for future social media outreach.

2 Social Selling Theory

2.1 Concept of Social Selling

Social selling is a relatively new concept in the sales industry, and there is no universally accepted standard definition. Social selling has been defined by academicians and social selling experts from the commercial field and their definitions of this concept are very similar. Agnihotri, Kothandaraman, Kashyap & Singh (2012, p. 341) describe social selling as a professional selling approach "predicated on the strength of social media allies within a social enterprise". Ancillai, Terho, Cardinali & Pascucci (2019, p.1) defines social selling as "emphasizing seller's use of social interaction-enhancing platforms for content-creation and networking". Minsky & Quesenberry (2016 as cited in Ancillai et al. 2019, p.2) define social selling as the "strategy of including social media in the salesperson's toolbox for the purposes of researching, prospecting, networking and building relationships by sharing content and answering questions".

Ancillai et al. (2019, p. 2) underscored that social selling in the B2B realm is situated within the domain of digital marketing, focusing on personalized sales efforts. From an academic perspective, social selling entails sales professionals applying digital marketing principles, particularly content marketing, on social media platforms (Haenlein & Kaplan, 2012, p. 61). Social selling harnesses the power of social media platforms to connect with, engage, and gain insights into ideal customers throughout their buyer journeys, ultimately nurturing enduring business relationships (Moncrief & Marshall, 2005, p. 18). Social selling is a long-term game and its overall value creation unfolds over time. The major influence of social selling can only be measured long term although it may give short-term gains as well (Mahlamäki, Ojala & Myllykangas, 2016; Murphy & Sashi, 2018).

Social selling practitioners from the commerce field define social selling as managing online communities (Hughes & Reynolds, 2016, p.10). This is grounded in the assumption that buyers are prone to engage in online

conversations about brands, products, and services to seek insights and solutions for their work-related challenges. Online communities establish an environment where buyers openly discuss their issues, and sellers offer solutions that are beneficial to the buyers. Hughes & Reynolds (2016, pp.14-15) emphasize that all companies and sellers must build an online ecosystem of communities, which makes it easier for the buyers to approach the sellers whenever they are ready to buy. Shanks (2016, p. 4) defined social selling as comprising of three intersecting pillars i.e. referral selling, trigger selling, and insights selling.

Figure 1. Social Selling (adapted from Shanks, 2016, p. 4)

Trigger-based selling Comprises of internal and external events occurring within the buyer's sphere, through which digital information can flow from the buyer to the seller, fostering more context-rich conversations between them (Shanks, 2016, p. 4).

Referral-based selling is a notion based on the fact that people buy from people. Here, buyers rely on referrals from existing users of the products and services. Hence, sellers need to build good relationships through social media channels to build deeper connections with the buyers (Shanks, 2016, p. 4).

Insights-based selling is rooted in the idea that buyers select products and services from companies whose sellers offer significant value and insights throughout their purchasing journey. These insights allow buyers to make more informed decisions about the products and services of the company (Shanks, 2016, p. 4).

2.2 The Social Selling Process

The social selling concept supports the idea that sellers should actively participate in shaping the buyer's journey, making themselves available at the right moments. The primary goal of social selling is to cultivate trustworthy relationships that can eventually lead to sales over time. According to Shanks (2016), the process of networking and relationship-building should be seamlessly integrated into the sales process and a company's Customer Relationship Management (CRM) software. Shanks (2016) underscores that CRM software essentially comprises a collection of contacts and any interactions with these contacts on social media platforms should be regarded as relationship maintenance. It is recommended that companies merge these facets of CRM and social media to create a harmonious synergy.

Social selling involves several inter-twined steps like the building of a personal brand, growing of buyers' networks, building relationships through regular social media engagements, providing insights through valuable content, listening to various signals from the buyers, and making an offer whenever buyers feel ready (Inks, Avila & Talbert, 2019; Arli, Bauer & Palmatier, 2018).

2.3 Evolution of Social Selling in B2B

The advent of digitization has transformed the fundamental approach to sales in both Business to Business (B2B) and Business to Customer (B2C) sectors. Buyers now exhibit a preference for procuring products and services through online channels (Rippé, Weisfeld-Spolter, Dubinsky, Arndt & Thakkar, 2016), and the internet has significantly simplified the process of seeking information regarding products and services at any given time (Mantrala & Albers, 2012, p. 542; Rubanovitsch, 2018, pp. 27-29). "People buy from people" and Human to Human (H2H) has become the new approach and embraces the idea of creating trust among themselves rather than businesses selling their products and services to other businesses (Pääkkönen, 2017, p.11).

Business to Business (B2B) models have continuously evolved since the 1900's. Psychological models like AIDA which stands for Attention, Interest, Desire, and Action were first proposed in 1950 and aimed to influence buyers' behavior during their buyer journey. The AIDA model has been integrated into various sales approaches which include solution-based selling, SPIN selling, value-based selling, customer-based selling, and strategy-based selling. Pääkkönen (2017) highlights that social selling is rooted in the AIDA model, aiming to engage customers by piquing their interest, shaping their desires, and motivating them to take action, and everything happens online.
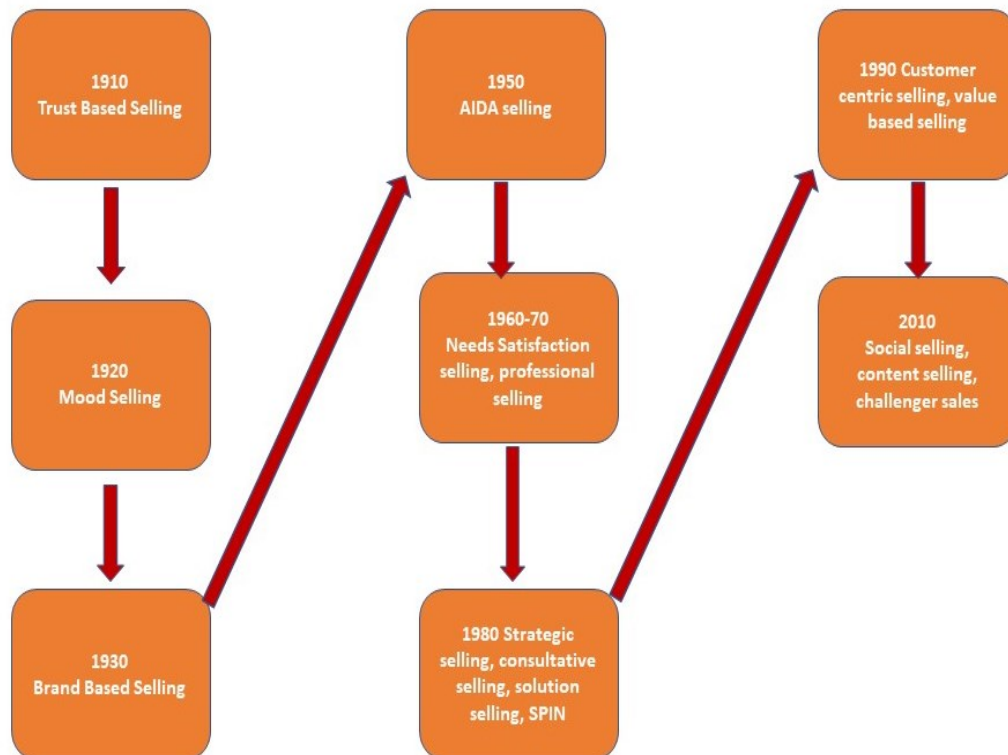
Figure 2. Evolution of Business to Business Sales (Adapted from Pääkkönen, 2017, p.12)

2.4 Social Selling through LinkedIn

LinkedIn is a social media platform used by professionals to connect with people with interest in their fields. As of June 2023, LinkedIn boasts over 930 million members across 200 countries, making it the largest global professional network (LinkedIn website, 2023). Majority of the people use LinkedIn for job hunting but it currently serves as more than a job portal. LinkedIn offers vast opportunities for sales by offering features and paid tools that could be used for prospecting, networking, building long-term customer relationships, and sharing deep insights that provide a solution to a problem the connections may be experiencing (Moncrief & Marshall, 2005, p. 18; Pääkkönen, 2017, p. 63).

LinkedIn provides a wide array of engagement options for sellers to connect with potential buyers. The platform's algorithm selectively distributes content to users who are likely to engage with posts, thereby creating an impression. The users can express their opinions about a post by clicking, liking, sharing, and commenting (Cortez & Dastidar, 2022, p. 2). The Sellers can reach a superior level of engagement with the buyers by becoming 1st-degree connections or followers, which is the ultimate goal of social selling. Besides this, LinkedIn also provides tools like LinkedIn Sales Navigator or Business Premium subscriptions which have features suitable for performing sales-related functions.

2.5 Building of Personal Brand

As per Rampersad (2008, p. 34), "Personal brand refers to the expectation, perception a person create on the mind of others when they hear their name". Personal brand creates an identity for a person in a manner how they want the world to perceive them. Social Selling focuses on building a strong personal brand on the social media platform. The main idea is to develop thought leadership on a particular subject and become a go-to person when faced with that particular problem. Tarnovskaya (2017, p. 29) and Ancillai et al. (2019, p. 8), and several other researchers have echoed similar findings, demonstrating that sales professionals utilize social media to establish their credibility, thus, effectively shortening the journey from the initial contact request to potential customers. Social selling does not involve just establishing connections for an assertive sales approach, instead it revolves around building a reputation of a subject matter expert which is trusted by the prospects. Over a period of time, the prospects naturally turn to the sellers whom they perceive as the subject matter experts.

As per Pääkkönen (2017, p. 87) a personal brand psychologically makes a person more interesting and trustworthy than the companies and creates the right kind of emotional response which is trusted by people (Deckers & Lacy (2012, p. 43). Besides a person on average has 10 times more followers than the company who could vouch for their credibility. A seller who can become a

thought leader brings him competitive advantage and creates demand. A strong personal brand on LinkedIn should start with a compelling profile as it gives a first impression of the personal brand to the world. As per Hughes & Reynolds (2016, pp. 29-30), an effective social media profile should encompass a well-defined position, and expertly crafted customer-centric messaging that resonates with prospects with a clear call to action.

The main purpose of creating a personal brand is to gain inbound sales traffic which means that the buyers contact the sellers intending to buy their product and services instead of the other way around (Hughes & Reynolds, 2016, p. 75). Social selling can help to create strong personal brands which in turn generate better quality leads, shorten sales cycles, and help in higher closing ratios. Ancillai et al. (2019, pp. 8-9) discovered that social selling is more effective when approaching qualified leads and prospects compared to traditional selling.

2.6 Prospecting and customer relationships through LinkedIn

The salesperson's main target and responsibility is to acquire new customers and cater to existing ones. Companies need to define their ideal customers which makes it easier for a salesperson to perform their work duties. There are various prospecting tools available on LinkedIn social media platforms. LinkedIn offers a LinkedIn sales navigator prospecting tool that allows prospects search by making use of their job titles, company affiliations, and industry associations. There are different tactics to find prospects on LinkedIn and the most effective method is Boolean search, which enables prospect searching using keywords AND, OR, NOT operators along with the geographic region and industry affiliations (Shanks, 2016, pp. 72-75).

Once the prospects have been reached and connected with, it is important for sellers to initiate and maintain relationships through networking with personal contacts on social media platforms like LinkedIn and initiating regular dialogues at relevant customer buying journey touchpoints. As per Shanks (2016), the

most important strategic action on social media platforms is building relationships. Buyers prefer to connect with sellers who provide valuable insights and can solve their problems, connections that act as educators first and not just random sales guys and order takers (Shanks, 2016, p. 87). The whole relationship building must happen not only with the buyer but also with other influencers around them. Shanks (2016, p. 73) defines this process as socially surrounding the buyers with influencers. It is important to know all players are responsible for the buying process or are most likely to influence the buyer. It is important to build relationships with the people working in departments, divisions, and organizations who have influence on the buying committee and any thought leaders or industry experts, partners, or competitors who may be worthwhile to be added to the networks (Shanks, 2016, p.73).
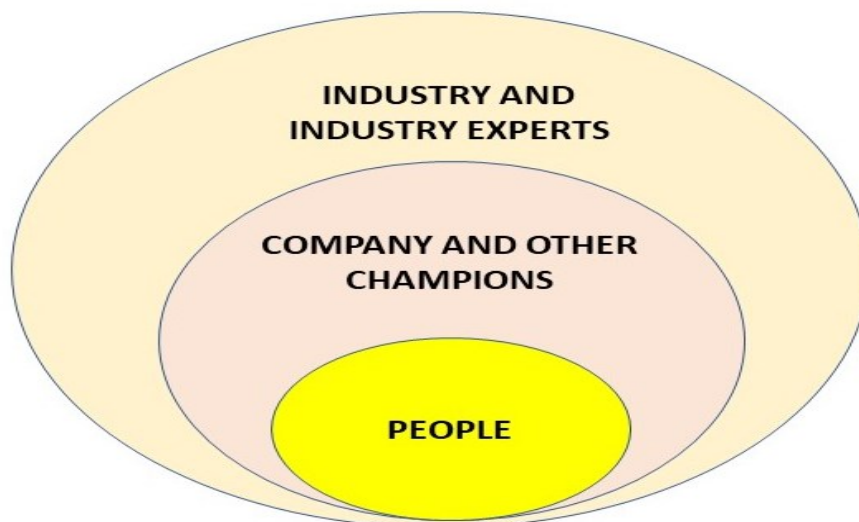
Figure 3. Socially surrounding a buyer (adapted from Shanks, 2016, p. 73)

Engaging with prospects in online networks through relevant content is a crucial facet of social selling. It acts as a conduit to influence prospects and foster interactions with sellers. Ancillai et al. (2019) emphasize that the content's relevance lies in offering valuable insights that align with the prospect's interests, objectives, and daily challenges, going beyond the scope of sales communication. The content should establish common grounds for future relationships by engaging stakeholders. Any successful engagement depends

on the value the seller provides through their content. The content should focus more on solving the business problems that attract the attention of the buyers. The aim of cultivating relationships on the LinkedIn platform is to establish a mutual understanding of the buyer's challenges. Sellers should focus on answering how they can assist the buyer rather than what they can sell. All content shared on LinkedIn should provide value and guide the buyer along the sales funnel, with the ultimate goal of taking the conversation offline. Social selling predominantly involves attuning to signals from individual prospects, industries, markets, and competitors to identify windows of opportunity for initiating social engagement. According to Hughes & Reynolds (2016, pp. 87-88), these signals can be categorized as organizational or leadership changes, market shifts (e.g., competition, acquisitions), external factors (such as legislation or regulatory alterations), strategic or tactical adjustments, and significant events (such as awards, sponsorships, incidents, or accidents).

2.7 Social Selling Strategy and Deliverables

Businesses should aim to develop a concise Social Selling strategy and integrate it into their sales process. A strategy would take into account the Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT analysis) a business is most likely to experience. Rationally, the individual social selling approach should support daily sales activities and broader business objectives (Ancillai et al., 2019). It is important to create a daily routine for social selling just as any other sales activity. As per Belew (2014, p. 113) there are 3 kinds of social selling strategies like personal branding which takes into account the personal goals of an individual to become an influencer in their field, the second part is an extension of personal branding where a salesperson utilizes their personal brand for prospecting with a handy selling plan, the third strategy is company based strategy where companies develop strategies to retain customers through improve customer relationships.

Belew (2014) emphasized that companies should clearly define their social selling strategy, which can be measured, and provide guidelines for their

employees with defined expected outcomes. As per Pääkkönen (2017), "social selling is a long term strategy which must be integrated into the comprehensive sales strategy to yield long term effectiveness". Shanks (2016) suggests setting aside just 60 minutes each day for your social selling activities.

The social selling strategy should have clear goals and metrics. As per Ancillai et al. (2019, p.7), it is difficult to achieve concrete benefits in the short term and managers should have a long-term vision for social selling. The key performance indicators (KPIs) and other metrics should align with the nature of the purpose of the social selling activities performed by the sales personnel.

Hughes & Reynolds (2016) emphasize that salespeople must establish and communicate insights to showcase their expertise and understanding of their specific business domain. This fosters the development of relationships with customers. The whole concept revolves around initiating the formation of communities on social platforms, allowing for the sharing of valuable information and insights with connections and followers. Every salesperson must understand their target market by actively listening, engaging, and interacting with their audience.

It is important to measure key performance indicators (KPIs) or metrics set up to get an idea of the success of the efforts made in social selling. The whole idea of social selling is to improve customer engagement. From the sales personnel's perspective, the success of social selling can be measured by the amount of content created and shared, customer engagement in terms of impressions, likes, comments, and sharing of their content by prospects, and their network growth during the period. As per Shanks (2016, pp. 39-42) the success of social selling can be measured by 3 indicators i.e. leading, current, and lagging.

Leading indicators would gauge the extent to which a sales personnel has adopted social selling in their daily routine. Current indicators assess social selling through marketing automation, LinkedIn prospecting tools, Customer Relationship Management (CRM) software tools and employee advocacy which

helps in leads generation. The lagging indicator would measure the sales pipeline and how training and coaching of sales personnel could lead to the digitization of the whole organization. Social selling will only become a success if the whole organization has embraced the strategy.

As per Hughes and Reynolds (2016, pp. 111-116), the social selling metrics can be defined as below:

Training metrics: it takes into account the time spent on training sales teams to become experts in implementing social selling strategies like sharing content and insights on social media platforms. It also measures the average time spent on sales personnel to train them to become proficient in social selling. Management should be involved by providing social selling certification to their employees which shows their active participation in the organizational strategy.

Tactical metrics: these metrics are used to measure the frequency of daily posts, comments, likes, network growth, and shares on social media channels by the employees. Assessing the effectiveness of these actions is crucial, as they can yield valuable insights about prospects.

Sales Funnel metrics: this measures how the organization's social selling activities impact the sales funnel. They assist in quantifying the results of the social selling program, which can be seen in the form of increased sales leads, expanded pipeline, and generated revenue. Sales funnel metrics encompass the quantity and source of leads, the value of signed contracts, pipeline and revenue figures, and the average duration of the sales cycle, providing insights into the time required to close deals. These are all vital sales funnel metrics.

2.8 Summarizing the literature

Social selling theory emphasizes on building a personal brand on social media platforms, focusing on communication between buyers and sellers to create value for them, building social capital through interaction, engagement building relationships with buyers, and measuring the interaction through the use of

Customer Relationship Management software. In this digital world, the social selling concept can be used in all parts of the sales funnel from prospecting to closing deals.

The study chooses a combination of research models provided by Shanks (2016), Inks, Avila & Talbert (2019), Arli, Bauer & Palmatier (2018), Pääkkönen (2017) and Cortez & Dastidar (2022) which covers important aspects for this study. These concepts would apply to the study as they contribute directly to the study of research sub-questions in a manner as described below:

Importance of Personal Branding on social media:

Pääkkönen (2017) emphasizes the psychological impact of personal branding, making a salesperson more interesting and trustworthy than companies. Pääkkönen (2017) introduces the "People buy from people" concept, promoting a Human to Human (H2H) approach. This reflects the paradigm shift towards creating trust at a personal level rather than relying solely on business-to-business transactions.

LinkedIn Tools and Prospect-Finding Tactics on LinkedIn:

The mention of LinkedIn Sales Navigator and Business Premium subscriptions by Shanks (2016) emphasizes the importance of utilizing platform-specific tools for direct sales functions. This aligns with the understanding that different social media platforms offer unique features and tools tailored for effective social selling. Shanks (2016) also introduces tactics for prospect finding on LinkedIn, with Boolean search identified as an effective method. This reinforces the need for a systematic approach to identifying and engaging potential leads on social platforms.

Integration into Sales Process and CRM Software:

Shanks (2016) emphasizes the integration of networking and relationship-building seamlessly into the sales process and CRM software. This aligns with the growing importance of holistic approaches to customer interactions,

ensuring that social selling is not a standalone activity but an integral part of the overall sales strategy.

Regular Social Media Engagements and Valuable Content:

The insights from Inks, Avila & Talbert (2019) and Arli, Bauer & Palmatier (2018) stress the significance of regular social media engagements, providing valuable content, and listening to buyer signals. This suggests that a salesperson's active presence on social media, coupled with the delivery of relevant and insightful content, contributes to relationship-building and positions them strategically in the buyer's journey.

User Engagement on Social Media:

Cortez & Dastidar (2022) highlight the various ways users express their opinions on social media, such as clicking, liking, sharing, and commenting. Understanding and leveraging these engagement metrics are crucial in evaluating the effectiveness of social selling efforts.

In conclusion, these research models were considered due to their comprehensive coverage of social selling dynamics, encompassing the integration of social selling into the sales process, the importance of content and engagement, the H2H approach, platform-specific tools, the role of personal branding, and effective prospect-finding tactics. Together, they provide a robust framework for exploring the role of social selling in B2B organizations and its impact on lead generation and customer engagement. All these social selling models contribute significantly to the research questions of this study.

3 Research Methdology

3.1 Research Design

The chapter introduces the reader to the methodology applied to the study and how the data was collected and analyzed. For this study, a total of 40 LinkedIn posts were created and analyzed. The performance data for the content in the form of impressions and engagement metrics were collected directly from the LinkedIn platform through their LinkedIn creator mode database. LinkedIn has the basic feature of content analytics which provides various Key Performance Indicators (KPI) for the content posted on the profile. These LinkedIn KPIs that were monitored for each content were post impressions, engagements (reactions, comments, reposts), and demographics of viewers (company, industry, job titles, locations, etc).

Another set of primary data was collected from a structured questionnaire using the survey method. The questionnaire of 21 questions (Appindix 2) was carefully designed in Webropol software between (20th Aug- to 31st Aug 2023) by selecting 90 educators from North America, Africa, Europe, and Asia, The survey was responded by a total of 72 educators. The data collected through the questionnaire was efficient as the link was shared on LinkedIn with potential buyers who became connections on LinkedIn during the social selling period through LinkedIn messaging. The questionnaire was approved by the commissioner and supervisor of this thesis. The research design for this study is shown in Figure 4.

Quantitative Data 1	Quantitative Data 2

LinkedIn Posts (Jan 23 to June 23)
• Total LinkedIn Posts : 40
  a). Personal Posts: 12
  b). Professional Posts: 28
    - LinkedIn Polls: 2
    - Carousal Posts: 9
    - Video Posts : 2
    - Post with Insights: 12
    - Promoting Educators work: 3
	Questionnaire Survey (20th Aug- 31st Aug 23)
	
	Survey created Through Webropol
	
	Total Survey Questions : 21
	
	Survey responses = 72 Ideal Customers

Figure 4. Research Design and Methodology adopted

3.2 Data Collection Methods

As per Bloomfield & Fisher (2019, pp. 27- 30), a research question can be analyzed through an inductive research approach or a deductive research approach. The main difference between these approaches is that a deductive research approach allows the data collected can be used for the evaluation of propositions and hypotheses associated with existing theories. Whereas the inductive research approach allows the data collected to be used for underlying themes and conceptual frameworks. The inductive approach does not test hypotheses and evaluates observations/tests, theory, and pattern. This study uses an inductive approach and the data was collected using quantitative methods.

The quantitative methods employ objective measurement by making use of numerical data collection through polls, surveys (online or offline), or questionnaires. As per Sileyew (2019, pp.1-12), quantitative methods allow for testing casual relationships, obtain averages, identify patterns, and generalize results. In this thesis, the author adopted a quantitative method consisting of numerical data to achieve research objectives. An inductive approach was

applied to test the theory against the numerical research data available digitally through the Linkedin platform.

3.3 Data Analysis

There are two types of data in the thesis. Quantitative data on LinkedIn content performance in terms of engagements and impressions is directly collected from the LinkedIn platform. The data is combined with other numerical data on lead generation from the company Customer Relationship Management (CRM) software i.e. Hubspot and conclusions are derived. The other primary data in the form of a questionnaire is acquired through convenience sampling techniques (non-probability sampling) to obtain new insights. Stratton (2021) emphasizes the use of convenience sampling in cases where the participants are available as a database, internet site, or customer list. This sampling technique was adopted as it was convenient to select the respondents among the author's LinkedIn connections who are also future customers. All respondents for this questionnaire were educators from higher education institutions who had become 1st degree connections with the author on LinkedIn.

Ethical issues

The study has maintained ethical standards while collecting and interpreting research data. The personal data of respondents is kept anonymous and research integrity is maintained by disclosing the accurate research findings to relevant and respective readers (Snyder, 2019). The data on LinkedIn content performance is downloaded and presented in graphical format as available from the LinkedIn data analytics tool. Also, the data from the survey questionnaire was downloaded from Webropol directly and presented in the form available through digital tools. No data manipulation was done and it is presented the way as available. The study has ensured that the data collection and interpretation is most reliable and valid indicating the accuracy of the study to find out new insights (Dannels, 2018, pp. 402-416).

4 Results of the Social Selling Experiment

4.1 New LinkedIn Followers

The author was active on LinkedIn daily. The LinkedIn engagement consisted of different steps like connecting with prospects through personalized messaging, creating content regularly i.e. once/twice a week, and engaging with prospects' content through likes, comments, etc. The aim was to connect with them, build rapport, and maintain a long-lasting relationship.

Once the prospect has become a 1st degree LinkedIn connection, it becomes easy to navigate through their LinkedIn activities. Getting connected provides important insights into the problem and pain points of the prospect as part of social listening.

At the beginning of the study period, the author had a total of 721 connections on LinkedIn. This rose to around 4100 connections during the study period as shown in Figure 5.
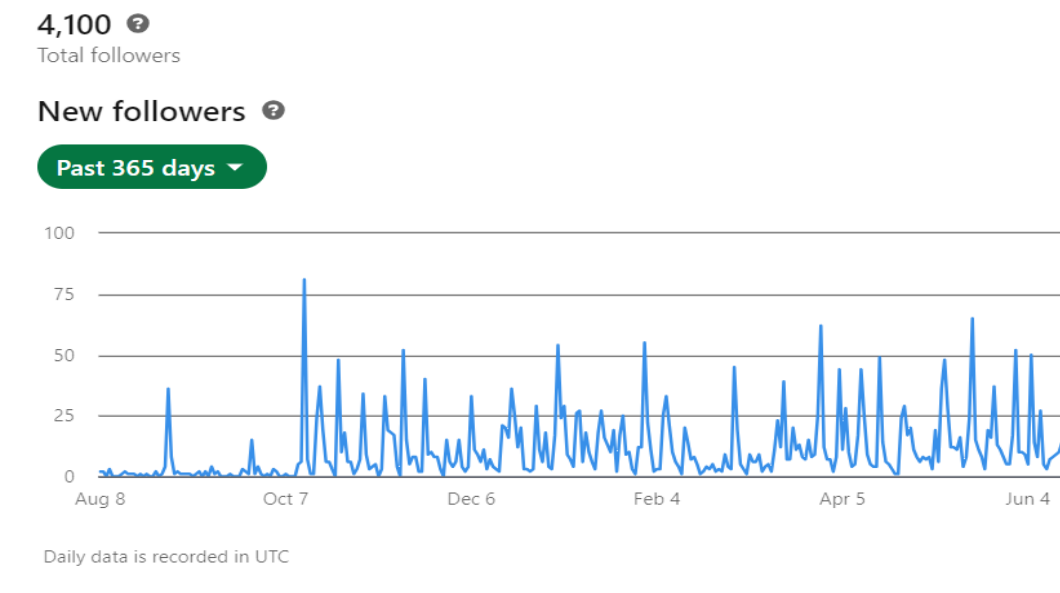

Figure 5. Increase in LinkedIn connections during the study period (source: LinkedIn Data Analytics)

During the study period, approx. 28.3 % of the total followers of 4100 consisted of Professors, lecturers, and Professor of Management (refer to Figure 6, page 27) who are the ideal customers for RealGame Business Simulation. All of these 28.3% are the first-degree connections of the author, which gives them direct access to the content created by the author regularly and also allows the author to engage with the content created by them. Besides the content, the LinkedIn chat feature allowed for direct communication among the connections and helped build relationships over LinkedIn. Based on the content posted by the prospects, direct communication was initiated with them through LinkedIn chat which allowed for initiation of warm relationships and further pitching of the RealGame Business Simulation product to them.

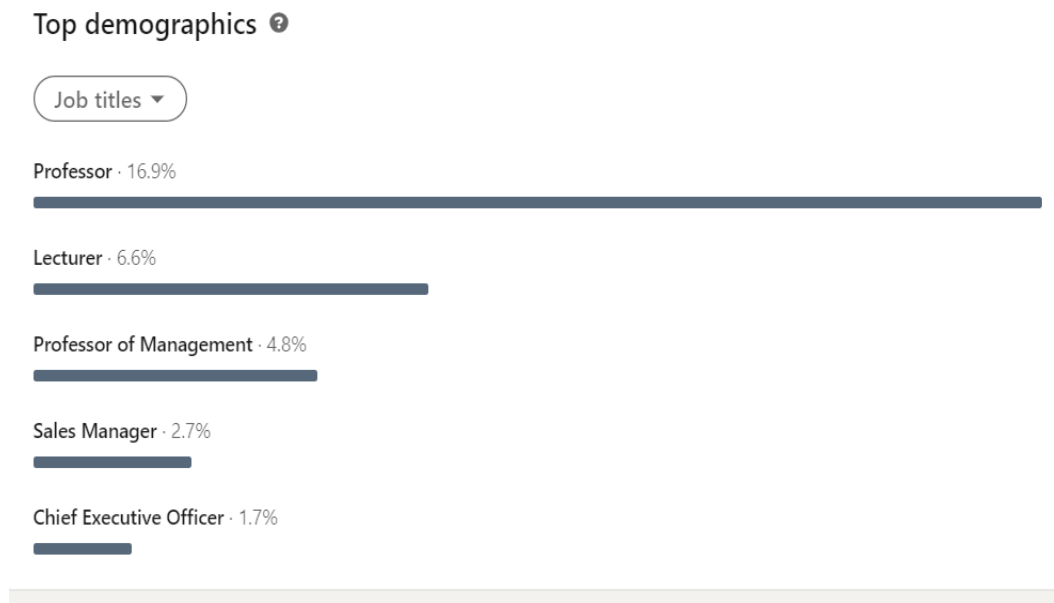Figure 6. Demographic break-up of LinkedIn connections

4.2 Results from Linkedin Content Posts

A total of 40 LinkedIn posts (12 personal and 28 professional) were created during the study period. The author created different types of LinkedIn posts every week. These posts can be characterized as personal and professional. The personal posts highlighted the achievements, opinions, and other issues

the author considers important to share with the connections. On the other hand, the professional posts consisted of problems and possible solutions that are important to the ideal customers. These were further characterized into direct LinkedIn posts, polls, carousal posts with messages, and video posts with messages. The overall idea was to provide value and initiate a dialogue with the ideal customers to know their opinions and provide solutions to the problems they consider important.
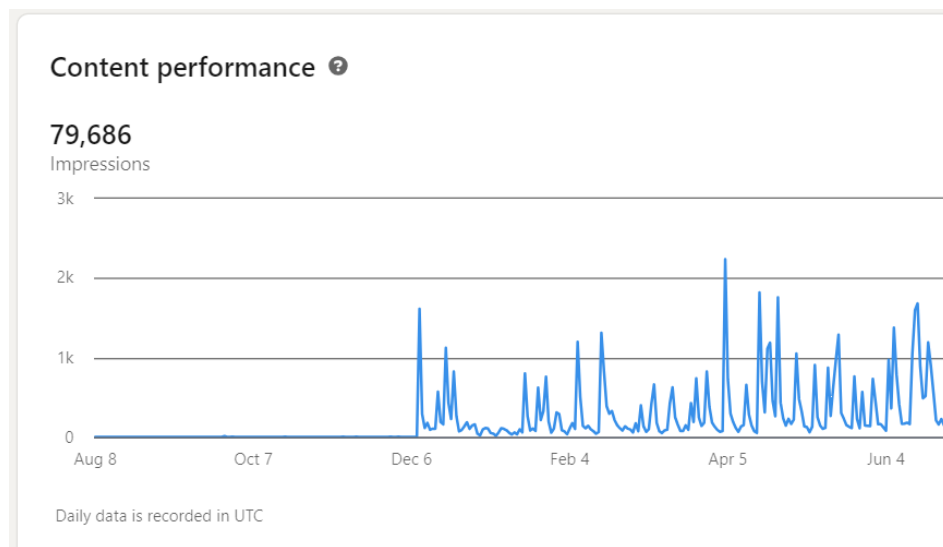

Figure 7. LinkedIn Content performance during the study period

A total of 79686 impressions and 929 engagements were registered for these 40 posts on LinkedIn (refer to Figure 7 & Figure 8, page 28).
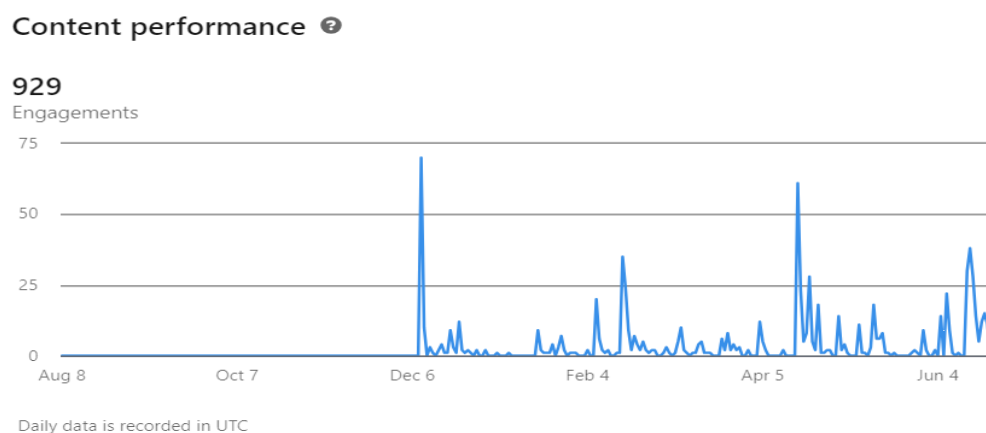

Figure 8. LinkedIn engagements with Ideal Customers during the study period

4.3 Findings in relation to Research Questions

a) Can the personal brand of a salesperson influence prospects' buying decisions?

During the social selling experiment, the author's LinkedIn connections and followers rose from 721 to 4100 which is a massive increase of approx 568 % in 6 months. Out of the 4100 connections, 28.3% were the targeted ideal customers. These results suggest that the author was able to create a personal brand for himself that the ideal customers could trust. The results were analyzed to verify if the personal brand created by the author was able to influence the buyer's buying decision. There were several posts created by the author where the ideal customers wanted more information on the product sold by the author's company and made direct comments on the posts as well as contacted through personal messages over LinkedIn.

Two examples of comments by ideal customers on the authors' LinkedIn content are presented below:

"Pl (please) share more information on supply chain Simulation games on my email". (Prospect 1).

"Hello, can we have a demo please?." (Prospect 2).

Results from the comments on the posts and several other messages on LinkedIn chat answer our first sub-research question "Can the personal brand of a salesperson influence prospects buying decisions? " the answer to this question is "YES".

b) Can social selling reduce sales lead time by creating more warm leads?

To answer this research question, the author analyzed the data results from the company's Customer Relationship Management (Hubspot CRM) system during the study period. Before the start of the social selling campaign, the lead time to bring the prospects to the product demo varied between 3-6 months. During the social selling experiment, a total of 37 product demos were booked with the

ideal customers fully through effort on LinkedIn (refer to Figure 9, page 30). So the average lead time for bringing the prospects to product demo during the study period was as below:

Equation 1. Average Lead time = Total weeks / Total demos

Applying the above equation i.e 24/37= 0.6 i.e approx 4.2 days

This is a significant improvement from the previous scenario and answers our second sub-research question "Can social selling reduce sales lead time by creating more warm leads? " and the answer to this question is "YES". The study has shown through data that Social selling significantly improves the Sales pipeline and reduces the overall time and effort to attract prospects.
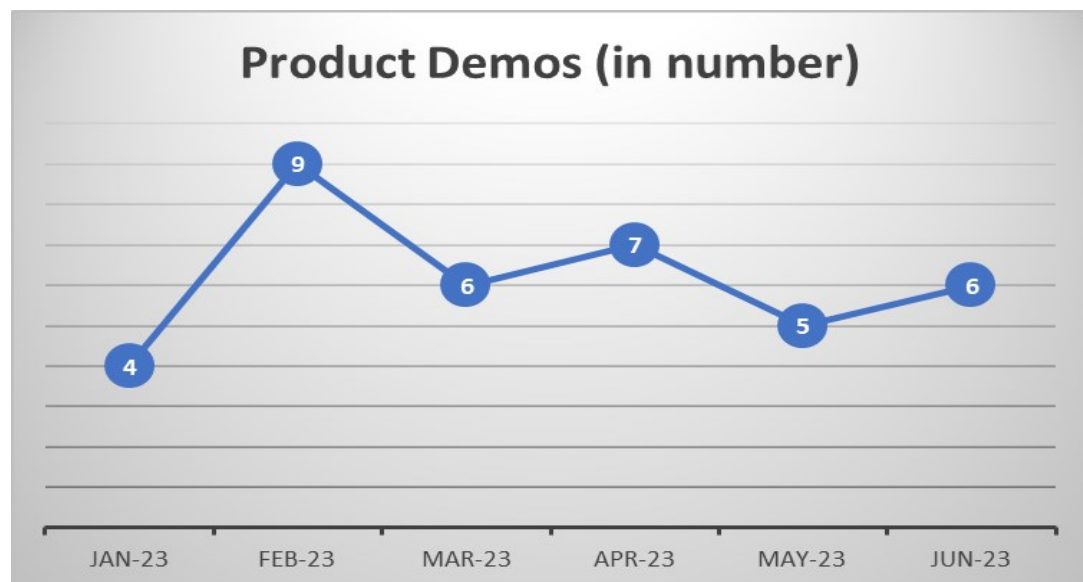

Figure 9. Product demos generated through LinkedIn during the study period

c) What type of LinkedIn content creates more customer engagements?

During the study period, a total of 40 LinkedIn posts were created (12 Personal and 28 Professional). The performance data was collected from the LinkedIn content creator tool. The comprehensive data on content performance is shown in Appendix 1.

 During the study period, it was found that the content related to personal achievements and perspectives got more impressions and engagement from LinkedIn connections. However, on closer scrutiny of the numerical data from LinkedIn, it showed that both regular connections and ideal customers jointly viewed and engaged with the personal content resulting in high impressions and engagements. This is a crucial step towards building a personal brand as all connections are human and content on personal achievement foster more personal relationship and creates an image that can be trusted by the connections.

On the other hand, professional content has a higher number of impressions and engagements majorly from the Ideal customers as that content was created by keeping them in mind. It mostly provided value to the ideal customers. The high number of product demos booked during the study period supports that the professional content on LinkedIn did help to provide an alternative solution to the pain points of the ideal customers i.e. educators from higher educational institutes (refer Figure 10, page 31 & Figure 11, page 32).
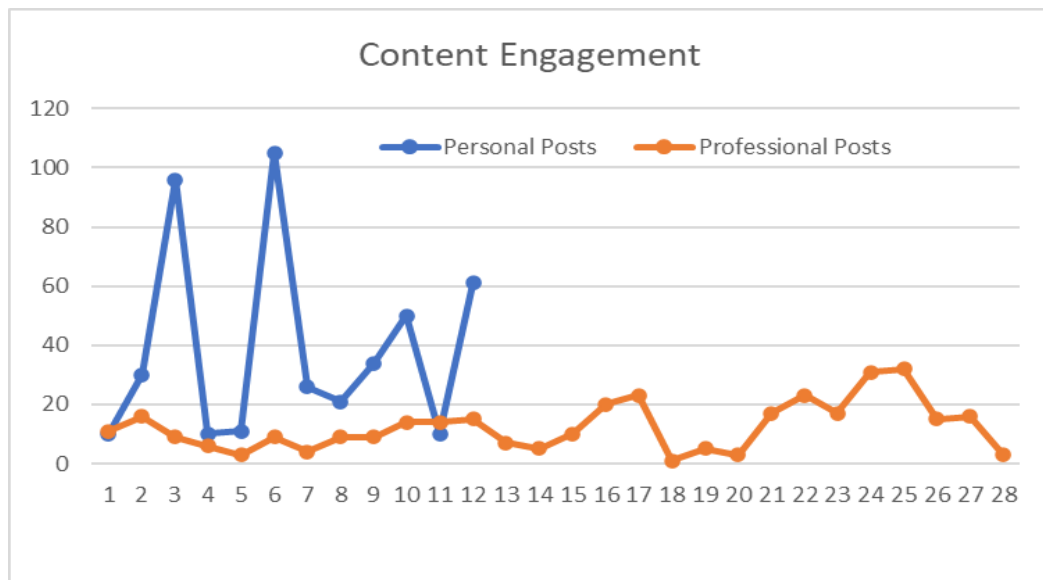
Figure 10. Content engagement during the study period
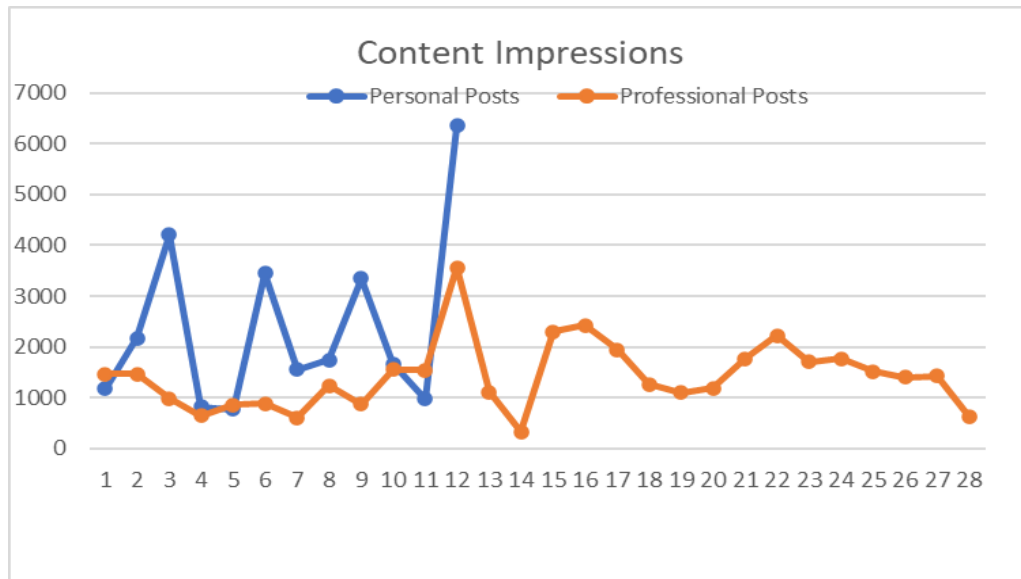
Figure 11. Content Impressions during the study period

The professional content created on Linkedin was further broken down and characterized into LinkedIn polls, Carousal Posts, posts with insights, LinkedIn video posts, and promoting Educators works. From Figure 12 (page 33) and Figure 13 (page 34), there was a mixed result from different types of content created on LinkedIn. A total of 3 posts were made promoting the work of RealGame ideal customer i.e. educators in this case. The engagements were the highest for such posts because these educators were known figures and individually had a large number of personal connections on LinkedIn. This content generated a compounded effect through likes and shares by their connections.

Overall during the study period, LinkedIn carousal posts had higher engagements and impressions (Refer to Figure 12, page 33 & Figure 13, page 34). Generally, LinkedIn's carousal feature allows for the sharing of multiple images, documents, or video formats in a single post. This feature allows them to capture the attention of the readers and make the posts stand out in crowded LinkedIn feeds. Carousel posts are the best form of content as they allow readers to swipe through the content consume more content and amplify the visibility to a wider range of audience.

LinkedIn Polls has decent engagements and impressions but they were the most effective in providing insights into the pain points of the ideal customers. LinkedIn Polls are the best feature for data collection for marketing purposes and in generating ideas for creating more content on LinkedIn. The only important fact to keep in mind while conducting a poll is that it should be relevant to the targeted audience. For this study, data also support that in the long term, regular LinkedIn posts with insights have consistent impressions and engagements.
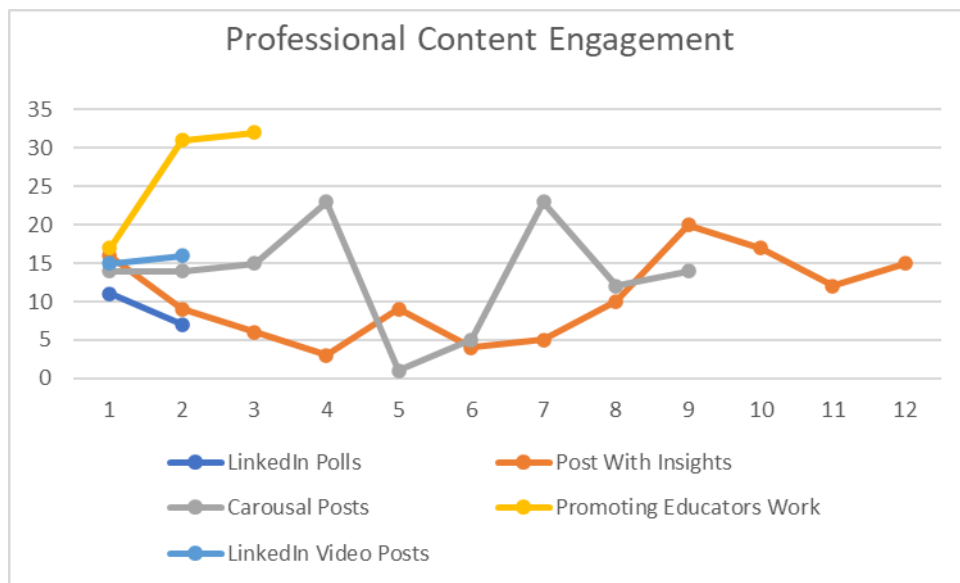
Figure 12. Customer engagements from different types of Professional content
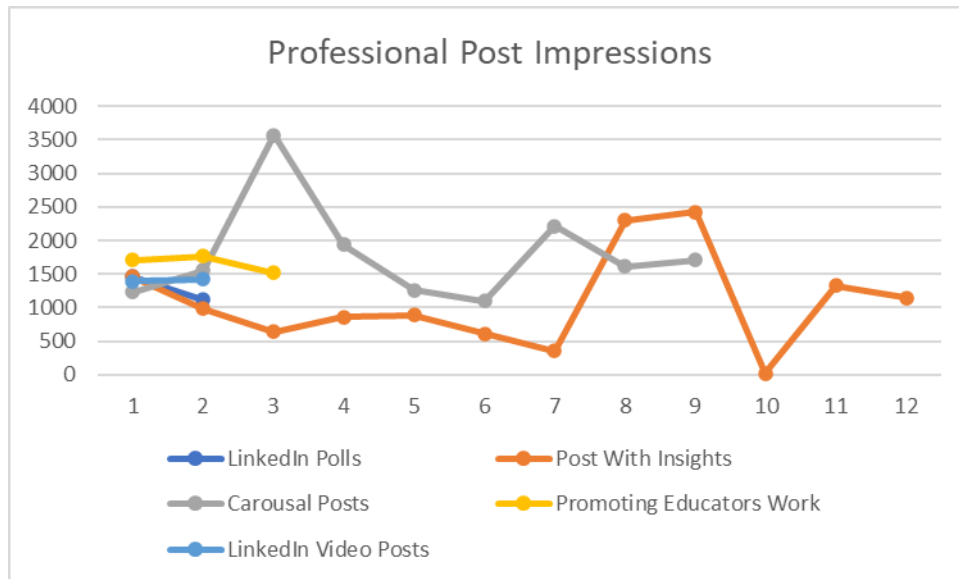
Figure 13. Content Impressions from different types of Professional content

Now coming to the main research question " What is the role of social selling in improving lead generation in a B2B organization?". The study attempted to answer this multifaceted research question through various aspects of social selling strategies like building a personal brand of a salesperson on social media platform i.e LinkedIn, building and nurturing personal relationships with potential buyers, creating and sharing content that resonates with the target customers, monitoring and analyzing content performance data ensuring that the content stays relevant to the changing market dynamics.

From the results achieved for the three sub-research questions discussed above, it can be implied that social selling in a B2B organization is integral to modern sales practices. It involves not only building individual and organizational credibility but also strategically leveraging social media to connect with potential clients, reduce sales lead time, and create meaningful engagements that contribute to a more dynamic and effective sales process. As businesses navigate the digital landscape, the adoption of social selling emerges as a strategic imperative for B2B organizations aiming to stay competitive and relevant in today's evolving marketplace.

4.4 Future Content Ideas for Social Selling

During the study period, around 28 professional LinkedIn postings were created to educate the ideal customers and provide insights on how best RealGame products could address their pain points. To generate more future ideas for social selling, a questionnaire survey (Appendix 2) consisting of 21 questions was conducted.

The ideal customers i.e educator's response to the survey questionnaire provides a lot of interesting insights into their pain points and ideas for creating future content as part of the social selling strategy. For the scope of this thesis, the results from the 2 questions are used to demonstrate the kind of content that could be created in the coming months to educate the ideal customers.

As mentioned in Chapter 1, several researchers have emphasized the importance of simulations as a new pedagogical tool in higher education. To promote the benefits of simulations as a new pedagogical tool, it is important to know the existing tools used by educators. The educators' response to the question " What teaching methodologies do you currently use in your academic courses ?" is shown below. The questions allowed for the selection of multiple options and showed that educators use several methods to engage students. The number of respondents out of 72 who chose a particular option is described by N.
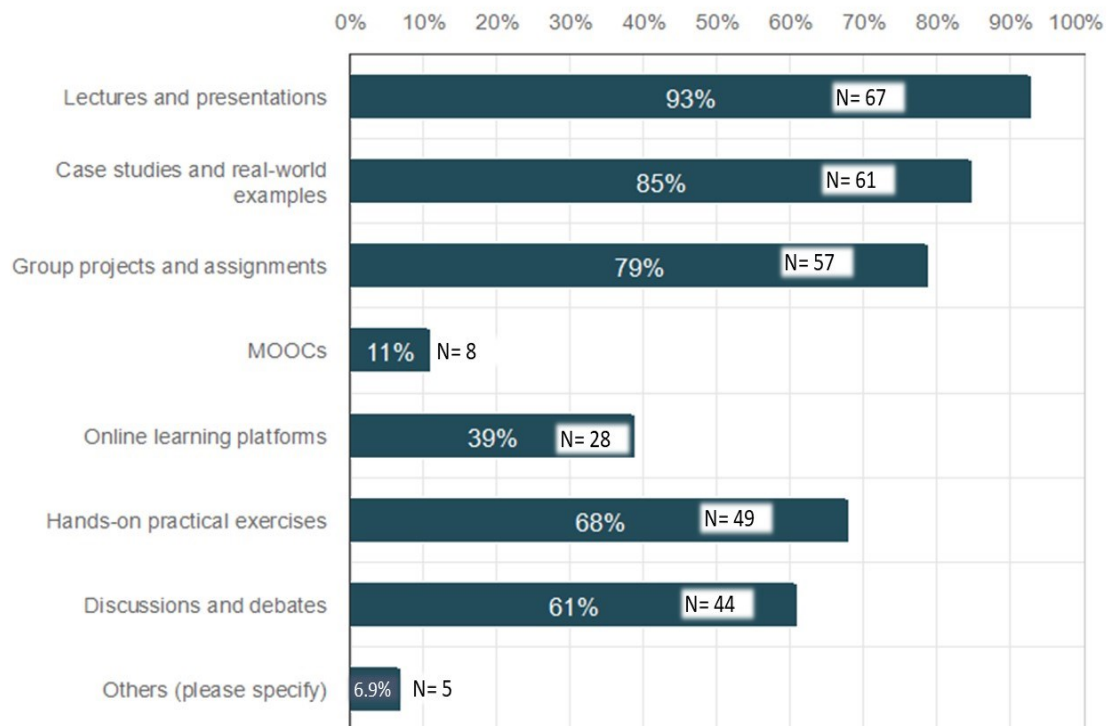
Figure 14. Various methods used by Ideal Customers in their courses to engage students

Based on the insights above, several content ideas could be created to educate ideal customers on how simulations would fare better in comparison to the existing methods used by educators. Future content for prospect outreach could be created by comparing the benefits of the above methods with simulations. Several research articles on the use and benefits of simulations are available which could be used to create content. Besides this, RealGame has several customers in Finland, who used the same methods before simulations. The feedback from the existing customer's pre/post simulations could be utilized as a baseline for creating more impact, as the feedback comes directly from educators using simulation to nonusers who are educators themselves.

Among the respondents to the questionnaire, there are several educators using simulations. The survey had an open question to educators using simulations i.e. " In your opinion, which are the topics/themes/phenomena where

simulations would outperform the traditional teaching and learning methods?".
The several insights to this question are as tabled below:

Table 1. Topics where simulations outperform traditional methods

Responses
Supply Chain Planning, forecasting, change management
Complex topics require a deeper understanding and visualization.
Routing, Production planning, Warehouse management
Areas in which it is valuable for students to experience an aspect of learning, where the point needs to be driven home by experience and emotions, not just cognitive theory.
Simulations are good for teaching dynamic phenomena, and contrasting perspectives.
Buyer-supplier simulation, Usage of IT platforms for education in real-life jobs, Multiple stakeholder decision-making
Topics where systems thinking is relevant hence interconnections and interdependencies must be taken into consideration
Complex problem solving, requiring dynamic decisions or including random dynamics
When learning objectives relate to understanding complex phenomena, design tasks, or experiential learning, multi-stakeholder participation
Supply Chain Operational Decision Making, Inventory Planning, Risk Management

Table 1 above provides several insights on ideas to create future content. As the topics are considered important by the ideal customers, the content would receive more engagement, if it shows how best Realgame simulations could address the subject matter. Most of the respondents to this question are using a competitor product, so if the content could address how best RealGame simulation could help with these topics, then there could be a possibility of having them as customers in the future.

The survey also has responses to other survey questions which provide very valuable insights for future content creation and continue with the implementation of social selling strategy in RealGame Business Simulations.

4.5 Reliability and Validity of the Study

The assessment of research quality and trustworthiness involves two crucial dimensions: reliability and validity. These dimensions hold significance across various research studies. Reliability denotes the stability of research findings upon replication and ensures consistency in results. Validity, on the other hand, demands that collected data faithfully mirrors the researched phenomenon (Veal & Darcy, 2014).

Reliability specifically pertains to the repeatability of measured results and aims to eliminate chance influences. The quality of research reliability is affirmed when results remain consistent under the same circumstances upon replication. However, estimating reliability in social sciences is challenging, and replication doesn't always guarantee reliability due to the dynamic nature of human behavior. References to literature and previous research become pertinent in the replication process (Veal & Darcy, 2014).

Validity marks the appropriateness and accuracy of the research target group, researching relevant questions that are crucial for meaningful research. The collected data must precisely reflect the researched phenomenon. Lack of validity renders research worthless, as it deviates from the intended study. Internal validity assesses whether results or variable differences are influenced by intended factors, while external validity considers the generalizability of results beyond the research sample (Veal & Darcy, 2014). In questionnaire-based data collection, meticulous questionnaire design is paramount to ensuring validity. The careful formulation of questions ensures that collected data accurately mirrors the studied phenomenon, emphasizing the importance of precision in questionnaire design (Veal & Darcy, 2014).

For this study, the reliability and validity of the data is considered throughout the entire research process including research design, data collection and handling, data analysis, and interpretation of results. This study made use of data from the LinkedIn platform, Hubspot CRM, and survey questionnaire. The data from the LinkedIn platform and Hubspot were used in the original form obtained from

these platforms. The survey questionnaire was meticulously prepared with common options for all the respondents to choose from and under different sections with separate themes. Some open-ended questions were also created and the responses to them were kept optional and not mandatory. The respondents to the survey were educators from higher education institutions.

The research methods i.e. quantitative chosen were suitable for the study and produced results that can be used by the case company for its future sales processes. The results from the study produced new knowledge on the use of the LinkedIn platform and increased the know-how of the author for future use in the case of company operations.

4.6 Limitations of the study

The current research study is limited only to one Social Media Channel i.e. LinkedIn. Although LinkedIn is a valuable platform for professional networking, this study has a restricted social selling outreach with the potential of missing out on prospects who are not active or less active on LinkedIn. Further, LinkedIn itself changes its algorithms and features over time affecting the visibility and effectiveness of the content created as part of its social selling strategy. Therefore the impressions and enagegments created by a particular content during the study period may no longer yield similar results in the future. Hence, it is important that the Sales personnel, utilizing a social selling strategy may have to keep testing with different content and adapt their social selling strategy continuously.

Social selling on LinkedIn can be time-consuming. Building and maintaining relationships, engaging with content, and sending personalized messages require a significant investment of time and effort. LinkedIn also has limited access to integrations and does not seamlessly integrate with Customer Relationship Management software like Hubspot resulting in inefficiencies in tracking and managing interactions with a large base of prospects. Further, the author accepts that relying solely on LinkedIn can make your social selling

efforts vulnerable to changes in the platform's policies, rules, or any potential outages that may disrupt overall sales activities. Hence, the author recommends readers diversify their social selling approach and use multiple channels to expand outreach, improve personalization, and adapt to changing market conditions more effectively.

5. Conclusions

5.1 Synthesis of the findings

This study attempted to answer the major question "What is the role of social selling in improving lead generation in a B2B organization?". The study addresses this main research question by breaking it down into the three aspects of social selling i.e. establishing a personal brand of salesperson, creating professional content which resonates with the buyers, and generating warm leads by engaging buyers with the content by addressing their pain points.

In this study, building a personal brand of the salesperson has been a key concept of the social selling strategy. Personal branding of a salesperson can be established by strategically integrating networking on social media, using platform-specific tools (Shanks, 2016), H2H approach (Pääkkönen, 2017), and readers engagements by creating valuable content on social media (Inks, Avila & Talbert, 2019) and evaluating social selling effectiveness by measuring engagement metrics (Cortez & Dastidar, 2022). The author applied these theories on Linkedin which resulted in increasing the number of connections to 4100 during this study period. This proves that these theories are very relevant to establishing a personal brand on social media platforms.

As per Ancillai et al.(2019) buyers have access to online information which helps them to evaluate the solution that solves their problem. It is pertinent that the relevant sales content should be created around the pain points of the buyers. The content should provide valuable insights that creates buyers engagements through likes, comments, and open discussions on the social media platform. This helps in creating a community of informed ideal customers and influences them at the early stages of their buyer journeys. During this study, 37 demo requests were received from the ideal customers through messages on LinkedIn. All these requests were warm in nature and the theories

given by Inks, Avila & Talbert (2019) and Cortez & Dastidar (2022) applied were very relevant to this study.

Social selling is very dependent on the type of content created on social media platforms. To evaluate the effectiveness of the content it is important to measure the engagement metrics of the content (Cortez & Dastidar, 2022). The content should be improved and adapted as per the measured performance. To develop the best social selling strategy, different content should be tested regularly and a data-driven and result-oriented social selling strategy should be adopted. The application of this theory resulted in creating content that engages buyers and gives insights into what type of probable solution they are searching for their pain points. Application of this theory to the study suggested that a mix of text and video content creates more buyer engagement. The author would apply this content strategy to all future social media posts on LinkedIn.

5.2 Recommendations and Managerial Implications

The study has wide implications for professionals in leadership positions. The favorable result from this study implies that managers should prioritize the seamless integration of social selling into overall sales processes and CRM software. This would involve fostering a culture that values regular social media engagement and the creation of valuable content, essential for effective relationship-building. Managers should encourage a "People buy from people" mindset among sales teams reinforcing the importance of building personal connections and trust, contributing to a more individualized and relational approach rather than a transactional one. Monitoring social media engagement metrics becomes a crucial aspect of strategy evaluation, providing valuable insights to adapt and refine social selling approaches. Equipping sales teams with platform-specific tools, such as LinkedIn Sales Navigator, ensures the effective utilization of unique features for direct sales functions. Recognizing and supporting the cultivation of personal branding for salespersons further enhances their appeal and credibility. Additionally, providing training on

systematic prospect-finding tactics, including the use of Boolean search on platforms like LinkedIn, helps identify and engage potential leads strategically. By interconnecting these strategies, managers can create a comprehensive framework that maximizes the impact of social selling on lead generation and customer engagement in the evolving B2B sales landscape.

On a personal level for a sales personnel, the important learning is to establish themselves as an expert or go-to person in their field. This would require them to create content ideas that provide valuable insights to their prospects. All this content creation cannot happen in isolation. The content should provide insights and at the same time should resonate with the professional brand value of their business. This would need them to work in cohesion with the marketing department. Marketing creates content relevant to ideal customers and sales can customize the same content to meet the buyers' personas. A strong cohesion between marketing and sales would drive better results for the business. Before the start of the study, RealGame was at level 0 of the social selling strategy defined by Shanks(2016, pp.1-6), and during the study period, it reached level 2. In the long term, RealGame would make efforts to transition to Level 5 of the social selling strategy.

5.3 Future Research Ideas

For the future study, it is recommended that the effectiveness of the social selling strategy could be explored through other social media channels like Facebook, X (former Twitter) or industry-specific networks. It could be interesting to assess whether different social media platforms yield distinct results or if a multi-channel approach would enhance the overall social selling performance.

Another subject for future study could be to investigate how emerging technologies like artificial intelligence, chatbots or virtual reality can be integrated into a social selling strategy as part of the sales process. This could be investigated whether these technologies could provide additional data

insights or could automate certain sales processes or enhance the overall customer/ prospects experience.

Another interesting topic could be to compare social selling practices on a particular or multiple social media channels across different regions and cultures. It would be interesting to explore how cultural nuances impact the effectiveness of social selling strategies and what adaptation approaches could be beneficial.

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Appendix 1

Type of Content Posts on LinkedIn

Content	Content Type	Published	Impressions	Likes/Comments/ Votes	Engagement
As an educator what are the pedagogical tools used by you to link Supply chain theories to actual business scenarios?	Linkedin Poll	11.01.2023	1462	6 likes, 5 votes	11
How RealGame Business Simulations added value and provided new experiences /learnings?	Post with Insights	18.01.2023	1461	14 likes, 2 reposts	16
Themed based study through RealGame simulatins	Post with graphical insights	24.01.2023	988	8 likes, 1 repost	9
How did RealGame Start	Regular Post	25.01.2023	641	6 likes	6
Indian Republic day wishes	Personal Post	26.01.2023	1170	10 likes	10

Appendix 1

What is Business Simulations	Post with blog articles	01.02.2023	862	3 likes	3
Post on Turkish Earthquake	Personal post	03.02.2023	2174	29 likes , 1 repost	30
Blood donation mile stone post	Personal post	07.02.2023	4213	90 likes, 6 comments	96
RealGame simulation for creating mental models	Post with insights	14.02.2023	887	8 likes, 1 repost	9
Holi celebration wishes	Personal post	16.02.2023	823	10 likes	10
International Womens day Wishes	Personal post	18.02.2023	772	11 likes	11
Webinar Invitaion Form	Post	20.02.2023	609	4 likes	4
Business concepts students learn with RealGame	Post with carousal insights	24.02.2023	1234	9 likes	9
Why soft skills are important in Management education?	Post with blog article	01.03.2023	869	9 likes	9

Appendix 1

Supply chain concepts through simulation	Post with carousal insights	06.03.2023	1554	14 likes	14
What pedagogical tools used in classroom to increase student engagement?	Linkedin Poll	13.02.2023	1535	5 likes, 9 polls	14
10 students skills for Supply chain education	Post with carousal insights	21.03.2023	3567	14 likes, 1 repost	15
What are the major concerns of not using simulation games?	Linkedin Poll	28.03.2023	1115	3 likes, 4 votes	7
Digital teaching and learning	Post with landing page	30.03.2023	326		5
Job promotion post	Personal post	02.04.2023	3445	91 likes, 14 comments	105
Educators challenges for using digital tools	Post with insights	10.04.2023	2299	8 likes, 2 comments	10
EID wishes	Personal post	15.04.2023	1546	25 likes, 1 repost	26

Appendix 1

Can relagme create better mental models	Post with insights	21.04.2023	2425	18 likes, 1 repost, 1 comment	20
Vappu Wishes	Personal post	27.04.2023	1741	21 likes	21
Supply chain concepts through simulations	Post with carousal insights	02.05.2023	1940	21 likes, 2 comments	23
Project Management Certification exam	Personal Post	07.05.2023	3348	30 likes, 4 comments	34
Mastering Supplier relationship with Realgame	Post with carousal insights	13.05.2023	1264	1 like	1
Reasons for not incorporating simulation in classes?	LinkedIn Poll	18.05.2023	1095	5 polls	5
KPI's from RealGame simulations	Post with carousal insights	24.05.2023	1180	3 likes	3
Different simulation in SCM education	Post with carousal insights	31.05.2023	1766	17 likes	17
Hidden costs in SCM	Post with carousal	06.06.2023	2200	15 likes, 6 comments, 2	23

Appendix 1

	insights			reposts	
Company News	Post with insights	08.06.2023	1707	17 likes	17
Attending NOFOMA conference	Personal Post	14.06.2023	1671	45 likes, 3 comments, 2 reposts	50
Reshoring concepts and research	Post promotin other educator research	15.06.2023	1768	29 likes, 1 comment, 1 repost	31
Experiential learning with realgame	Post promotin other educator research	16.06.2023	1520	29 likes, 1 comment, 2 reposts	32
Unravelling failure retribution in supplier relationship	Post promotin other educator research	17.06.2023	1395	14 likes, 1 repost	15
Insights on Realgame	Post with video insights	23.06.2023	1421	12 likes, 1 comment, 3 repost , 329 unique video views, 51 minutes view-time	16
International Yoga Day	Personal Post	24.06.2023	969	10 likes	10
Unlocking SCM scenarios with RealGame	Post with video insights	28.06.2023	623	3 likes, 121 unique viewers, 19 minutes view-time	3

Appendix 1

Appeal to Linkedin Community	Perosnal post on behalf of other person	01.07.2023	6357	56 likes,4 comments, 1 repost	61

Appendix 2

Quantitative Survey Questionnaire

Section 1

1. What subjects do you primarily teach?

    - International Business Management

    - Sales and Marketing

    - Supply Chain Management

    - Social Sciences

    - STEM

    - Accounting and Finance / Management

2. Which teaching methodologies do you currently use in your academic courses?

    - Lectures and presentations

    - Case studies and real-world examples

    - Group projects and assignments

    - Discussions and debates

    - Hands-on practical exercises

    - Online learning platforms

    - MOOCs

    - Other – please specify:

3. How often do you modify your course content or teaching methods to accommodate changes in students' academic schedules?

    - Very often

    - Occasionally

    - Rarely

    - Almost never

4. In case the course content is modified or changed, to what extent do parts of courses get changed yearly?

    - normally just minor changes

- The body remains the same, but some parts are re-planned

- total rewrite

- bigger changes every 2-3 years

5. On average, how many students are typically enrolled in your courses?

- Less than 50

- 50 - 100

- 100 - 200

- More than 200

6. How comfortable do you feel in integrating technology into your teaching methods?

- Very comfortable

- Comfortable

- Neutral

- Uncomfortable

- Very uncomfortable

7. Have you experimented with or like to experiment with innovative teaching methods, such as gamification or interactive simulations, in your courses?

- Yes

- Not yet, but I am seriously considering

- Not yet and probably will not

- No

- Never heard

Section:2 If yes / you are considering the use of simulation games

8. What type of gamification or interactive simulations do you use to teach the theory and concepts of your courses?

- Online Virtual simulations

- Single player clock driven simulation games

- Multi-player clock Player-driven simulation games
- flashcard games
- Any other (please specify)

9. In your opinion, how effective are simulations or simulation games in enhancing students' understanding of complex theories and concepts?

- Very effective
- Somewhat effective
- Neutral
- Somewhat ineffective
- Ineffective

10. In your opinion, which are the topics/themes/phenomenon where simulation outperform more traditional teaching and learning methods? (open-ended)

11. What specific learning outputs do you aim to achieve through simulations? (open-ended)

12. When using simulation or simulation games, do you typically pay for the platform or software on a per-student basis or as a lump sum for the entire course?

- Per student
- Lump sum for the course
- I only use free simulation games

13. If you pay for simulation platforms or software on a per-student basis, what is the average annual cost per student? (Please select the range that best reflects your experience)

- Less than €10
- €10 - €25
- €26 - €50
- €51 - €75
- More than €75
- Not applicable (if paid as a lump sum)
- I do not know as the payment is taken care of by university management

14. If you pay for simulation platforms or software on a lump sum basis, please provide an estimate of the annual cost for the entire course. (open-ended)

For educators who answered No (Have you experimented or like to experiment with innovative teaching methods, such as gamification or interactive simulations?**).**

Section : 3 if no

15. If you have not used simulation or simulation games in your teaching, please indicate the factors influencing your decision.

- I do not have enough knowledge on using simulation games / I do not have time enough to learn about simulation games

- I do not feel technologically competent enough

- Lack of appropriate simulation options for the topics I teach

- Concerns about students' ability to grasp the technology.

- Limited class time for incorporating simulations.

- Uncertainty about how to assess students' performance.

16. If you were to incorporate simulation games into your academic courses, how would you envision them complementing your current teaching methodologies?

- Enhancing conceptual understanding

- Encouraging collaborative learning and teamwork

- Providing real-world application opportunities

- Fostering critical thinking skills

- Other (please specify): _

17. If you were to use simulation or simulation games, would you typically pay for the platform or software on a per-student basis or as a lump sum for the entire course?

- Per student

- Lump sum for the course

18. If you were to pay for simulation platforms or software that provides you with ready students pre-reading materials, pre-simulation assignments, 3 times 2-3 hours of

simulation gaming, and simulation assignments after each gaming session, what do you think would be a fair price for this?

- Less than €10 / student

- €10 - €25 / student

- €26 - €50 / student

- €51 - €75 / student

- More than €75

- Not applicable (if paid as a lump sum)

19. If you pay for simulation platforms or software on a lump sum basis, please provide an estimate of the annual cost for the entire course. (Open-ended)

The below questions are for both (users and non-users)

20. Would you be interested in receiving additional training or resources that specifically address incorporating simulation games into your academic courses?

- Yes

- No

21. If you are open to additional training or resources, which format would you prefer?

- Webinars

- Online tutorials

- In-person workshops

- Written guides and manuals

- Other (please specify): _____