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Exploring the Effectiveness of LinkedIn as a Tool for B2B Customer Acquisition in the Asia Pacific Region

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Abstract

This research aims to explore the use of LinkedIn as a tool for B2B customer acquisition, in order to tap into a timely issue faced by many sales and partnerships personnel working digitally in globally dispersed sales teams. The research problem and data are based on Organization X and signifies the bottleneck in the sales process lying in not receiving an initial response from the potential clients who are contacted through LinkedIn. Hence the research objective is to identify the factors affecting this low conversion rate, and to understand LinkedIn behavioural patterns and preferences of working professionals in the Asia Pacific region. The key variables explored are message length, message subject, prior knowledge, and LinkedIn usage frequency, which have been proved to have a weak relationship with the rate of responsiveness, whereas the preference for being approached through channels other than LinkedIn, such as email and through fellow employees have been recorded to be higher. Preference has also been observed for shorter, precise messages with informative message subjects, which would lead to higher tendency of replying to B2B related messages on LinkedIn.

Keywords: LinkedIn sales, B2B marketing, Customer acquisition, Digital sales

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Introduction

With the world moving towards a digitalized and globalized space, organizational operations in relation to B2B communications have been transformed into the digital sphere (Bharadwaj and Shipley, 2020; Corsaro & Anzivino, 2021; Shankar et a*l*., 2021). Digital marketing and the use of social media for B2B customer attraction have been adopted by firms, but related research in identifying the optimal sales strategies using those tools are still limited (Pandey et al., 2020). This has been discussed further by Bharadwaj and Shipley (2020), having presented that B2B buyers invest 27% of their time to find B2B contacts and sources online, whereas Salesforce (2020), cited in Corsaro & Anzivino (2021) stated that 68% of B2B buyers sales happen online.

This study is referred to from organization X, a multinational which offers Human Resources related services to B2B clients. They prefer to remain anonymous, hence they have been addressed as X throughout the paper. This research aims to identify the root causes behind the low rates of response from potential B2B customers on LinkedIn for company X and to identify target customer behaviour and communication preferences with regards to professional networking and being contacted through LinkedIn.

This chapter discusses the nature of X's sales pipeline, the background and context of the bottlenecks experienced, followed by the research problem, the research aims, objectives and questions, the impact of the research to the organization and academia, and lastly the consultancy process taken place with the organization X.

The Background

Company X's service offerings mainly lie in global talent sourcing, crafting employer branding strategies, talent community building and related marketing activities. Based on organizational data 30% of successful B2B sales have come from companies who have directly approached them. Scholars have also generally noted the success of inbound sales being converted into customers relatively more than outbound sales efforts (Solve, et al., 2017). The organization has Business Development teams dispersed globally, working at their global, regional, and country offices, with their main purpose being B2B customer acquisition.

All teams follow a globally accepted sales pipeline of organization X, the stages being Suspect, First Approach, Prospect, Lead and Customer, and this research is mainly focused on optimizing the 'prospect' stage of X's B2B sales. The sales funnel model adopted by X is similar to the funnel that is discussed by scholars D'Haen & Poel (2013), in which they have also cited Coe (2004)'s finding that the average rate of conversion from prospects to leads to be 10%. In X's sales funnel, in the 'suspect' stage they have been researching for potential customers using digital tools such as LinkedIn, and they have been approached in the 'First Contact' stage. The 'prospect' stage is where the first conversation happens with the potential customer, with an introduction to the services that can be provided.

The rate of initial response from the potential customer's end being low is the bottleneck in discussion. X's representatives usually approach Managers/Senior Managers/Directors from HR, Marketing or Partnerships departments via LinkedIn. This sales funnel can be comparatively complex relative to the Skylstället's sales model which includes Contact, Meeting, Proposal and Sale, and according to this model lead conversion is easier due to customized proposals (Ekblom, et al., 2016).

LinkedIn and other social networking sites are used as tools for professional networking, recruitment and product marketing etc. (Mohiuddin, 2019) and maintaining a credible online presence through social media and other digital platforms has turned out to be critical for B2B based organizations (Pandey and Shinde, 2019). Various studies have highlighted the use of LinkedIn as a tool for sourcing, testing and shortlisting candidates (Subhani et al., 2012; Zide et al., 2014; Tifferet & Vilnai-Yavetz, 2018), which are closely related to the services Organization X is looking to sell through the same platform.

The use of LinkedIn as a professional networking tool have been discussed by scholars such as Corsaro & Anzivino (2021) and Pandey et al. (2020), but associated strategies and communication preferences of the target customer profiles have not been discussed widely in literature.

Research Problem

This research aims to identify the reasons behind the problem company X is facing with low conversion rates in the sales pipeline from the First approach to the potential B2B customers into the 'prospect' stage, i.e., getting a response. The conversion rates of have been ranging from 2.17% to 17.15% between January and June 2021. The research eventually led to determining the bottlenecks with the B2B customer acquisition strategy of using professional networks such as LinkedIn. Even though previous research has explored the implications of social media presence (Agnihotri et al., 2016; Andzulis et al., 2012) and content strategy on B2B customer acquisition, there is a gap in research that does not necessarily study customer response behaviour on LinkedIn in a B2B context.

Research Aims and Objectives

Given the lack of research related to potential B2B customer behaviour and response preferences on professional networking sites such as LinkedIn, this study aims to identify LinkedIn usage patterns and preferences of Senior Management personnel and decision makers of organizations in the Asia Pacific region.

The objectives of the research would be to find out the following:

1. To understand the factors affecting the low conversion rate from First Contact to Prospect in X's sales funnel.
2. To understand B2B customer (top management personnel and decision makers of corporates in the Asia Pacific Region) behavioral patterns and response rates on LinkedIn.

Research Questions

1. What are the factors affecting the low conversion rate of B2B customers from first contact to prospect in X's sales funnel?
2. What are the behavioral patterns of B2B customers affecting their response rates on LinkedIn?

The results of the study assist X not only regionally but on a global level to identify the ideal B2B customer acquisition strategies and to utilize the use of LinkedIn for professional networking in a way that maximizes results. It also helps fill the gap of research in this area by specifically addressing the B2B buyer behaviour and response preferences which directly affect B2B customer acquisition for many industries and organizations, in the globalized, virtual work context of the new-normal following the Covid-19 pandemic.

Consultations have taken place prior research to identify where the issue lies and to identify the gravity of the problem and its impact to the organizational revenue and performance. X's Global and Regional Business Development Managers have provided their sales pipeline figures relevant for the Asia Pacific region applicable from January to August for the year 2021.

Literature Review

B2B Sales in Organizations

B2B relationships and sales in the context of X's can be identified as falling under the category of providing services through talent sourcing solutions. Customization of these services to provide value-based selling is a topic discussed by scholars like Liu & Zhao (2021),Madhavaram & Hunt (2017), and Penttinen *et al.* (2018). Töytäri *et al.* (2011) have highlighted the need for value-based selling to be the increasing difficulty to differentiate between services by competitors in the same landscape. According to Liu & Zhao (2021) the main purpose of customization of services in B2B sales is for the purpose of enhancing the value creation. This concept has been discussed further by Kowalkowski *et al*. (2012) by terming it as 'Service Injection', whereas Tuli et al. (2007); Nordin and Kowalkowski (2010), cited in Liu & Zhao (2021) have described how industry giants like Rolls-Royce and IBM have transitioned towards providing customized "solutions", thus addressing customer pain points.Classen & Friedli (2019) have also presented a definition in line with the above studies but has continuously emphasized the implications of Value Based Marketing on Value Based Selling, through which the superior value that is offered is quantified. Vargo *et al*. (2015) have complimented the above theories by mentioning that Value Based Selling is a very broad concept which involves the co-creation of value between the provider, customer and among other other relevant parties in the service ecosystem. Töytäri *et al.* (2011) have added to the above theories by Vargo *et al*. (2015) and Liu & Zhao (2021) by specifically highlighting the importance of a very good understanding about the customers' business and operations, while focusing on cocreating the value proposition with them. However, according to Burke *et al*.(1990) cited in Madhavaram & Hunt (2017), customization of professional services has been explored for decades and the study also expresses that it was to address customer-specific requirements, similar to Nordin and Kowalkowski's (2010) theory.

Kaario *et al* (2003), cited in Töytäri *et al.* (2011) have specified the appropriate use of value-based selling instead of traditional selling methods where the existing product/service offering is directly offered to all potential customers indifferently, only when the "customer's willingness to partner and the value of the relationship" are both high. The sales strategy is to be determined based on these two factors and the presence of one would lead to the use of a mixed strategy from the above techniques, according to the above study.

Studies have also discussed in detail the definition of 'value' in value-based selling. Töytäri *et al.* (2011) have used the following model to represent the concepts of customer perceived value and desired value with reference to theories by Khalifa (2004), Sa´nchez-Ferna´ndez and Iniesta-Bonillo (2006), Graf and Maas (2008), and Flint *et al*. (1997).

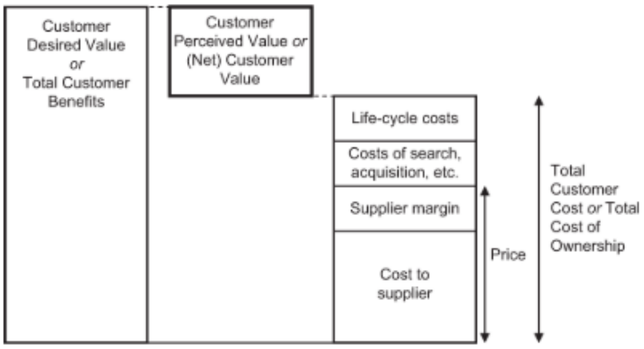

Figure 1: Customer desired and customer perceived value (Töytäri et al., 2011)

However, Classen & Friedli(2019) have mentioned about the lack of knowledge on whether higher revenue generation is possible through value-based methods given the recent advancements into digitalized services.

Social Media and B2B Sales

The use of digital marketing for the purpose of B2B sales generation is also a frequently discussed topic by scholars. In this context scholars have discussed various aspects such as advertising (Holliman & Rowley, 2014), networking through social media to initiate B2B relationships and the nature of these interactions (Singaraju *et al*., 2016; Wang *et al*., 2016) , the process of selling to B2B customers through social media(Agnihotri *et al.*,2016) etc.

Positive affirmations about the brand, service or product through positive reviews and recommendations on social media has found to be extremely effective in driving trust and leading to the attraction of new sales, as well as in improving conversion rates (Classen & Friedli, 2019; Ludwig et al., 2013). Burtan (2019), too, has agreed with the above studies and has pointed out the importance of the trust factor, and in salespeople acting as the trusted consultants helping their decision-making process.

Daniel et al. (2015) have discussed the impact of big data technologies on B2B sales and marketing in organizations, stressing upon its effectiveness in identifying customer behavioral patterns and in advanced decision making. The effective utilization of social media tools has proved to be one of the most effective and efficient ways of developing a B2B sales funnel in the modern era according to modern studies (Andzulius et al., 2012; Ahi et al., 2017; Neeley and Leonardi, 2018). This opposes earlier studies like Boyd and Spekman's (2004), cited in Sundström et al. (2021) which have stated that B2B relationship building using electronic channels is impossible and unsuccessful.

The following conceptual model has been presented by Agnihotri et al. (2016) to depict the relationships between social media and related factors in B2B sales conversions. This study is identified to be one of the first researches that wholly focus on social media and B2B sales (Nunan et al., 2018).

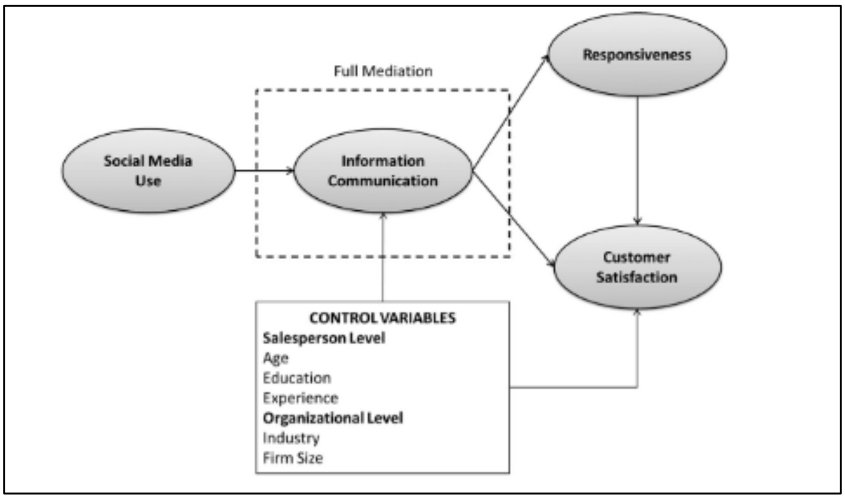

Figure 2: Social media use and B2B sales (Agnihotri et al.,2016)

The above study reflects on the importance and the significance of the individual salesperson's social media activity and behaviour on social media on B2B sales and relationships that they would be building for their organizations. However, Nunan *et al.* (2018) has mentioned that even though Agnihotri *et al.* (2016) have assessed these variables through surveys, the evaluation of the salespeople's perceptions is lacking in this study. The study by Schultz *et al.* (2012) is in line with the findings of Agnihotri *et al.* (2016) and has proved that strong social media presence of sales people lead to higher conversion rates and better B2B relationships. Andzulius *et al*. (2012) has also agreed with the above ideologies and has also added few major ways to utilize social media in B2B sales and conversions as understanding the customer, approaching potential B2B customers, identification of customer needs and pain points, presentation, sales deal closing and for following-up on already contacted customers.

Studies by both Itani *et al*. (2017) and Rodriguez *et al.* (2016) have emphasized about the positive relationship between the use of social media in B2B sales and customer understanding and knowledge in salespeople and sales success rates.

However, despite research proving the effectiveness of the utilization of social media in B2B sales both Agnihotri *et al.* (2016) and Stelzneer (2018) have mentioned that the adoption of it is quite low in the practical environment, with only 50% of senior managers believing in the benefits it can bring in.

Outsourcing the Recruitment Process

The major reason behind business processes being outsourced has been identified as cost reduction by Stoler & Underwood (2020). But contrary to this, Gundling *et al.* (2016) has expressed that in an HR sense, outsourcing is mainly done to fill the gap in available resources. Their study has also pointed out, that sometimes in some countries like India, outsourcing is seen as a weakness and is mostly avoided.

However, according to Gundling *et al.* (2016) global talent has been identified as the solution for most organization's struggle to stay agile and competitive, and the best way to source this talent is through outsourcing to relevant parties who have access to that talent base. Patel *et al.* (2019) and Ruth *et al*. (2015) have findings that go hand in hand with Gundling *et al*.'s (2016) above statement, by pointing out the importance of HR in an organization's performance and operations, and how outsourcing it can boost performance dramatically.

Recruitment outsourcing is not indeed a modern approach despite what Gundling *et al.* (2016) and Poonam (2021) have mentioned about India, and according to Vernon *et al.* (2000), cited in Johnson *et al.* (2014) 59% of European companies had outsourced their recruitment requirements back then. However, Johnson *et al.* (2014) and Cole(2017) have mentioned that recruitment process outsourcing in Asia is limited compared to Europe, and this statement is in line with Gundling *et al.'s* (2016) statement regarding India. However, both Cole (2017) and Misko (2012), cited in Siew-Chen & Vinayan (2016), labour shortages existing in the Asia-Pacific region have resulted in a positive shift towards Recruitment process outsourcing. Cole (2017) has further expressed the widespread of HR outsourcing, mentioning that the industry adds up to US$200 bn in value.

Recruitment process outsourcing decisions are affected by organizational factors such as "operational needs, resource limitations, urgency and internal capabilities" and contextual factors that gives the recruiter a thorough understanding about the related surrounding environment (Siew-Chen & Vinayan ,2016, p.1038) . The same factors above have been listed by Cole (2017) as factors that help increase the rate of success in recruitment process outsourcing.

Making co-locating arrangements with outsourced service provider has proved to bring in positive results in recruitment process outsourcing (Ganebnykh et al., 2021), such as avoiding opportunistic behaviour, easier resource integration etc. according to Siew-Chen & Vinayan (2016). Co-location is not seen as a mandatory need for recruitment process outsourcing by Gundling *et al.* (2016). Advantages of recruitment process outsourcing, in addition to cost reduction have been discussed by Cole (2017) as the access to a large pool of talent, which resonates closely with Gundling *et al.*'s (2016) concept of global talent.

Talent Community Building and Employer Branding

The competitiveness in the job market applies to both the employers and potential employees. Hence, given the difficulty and competition to source out the best talent and attract a set of employees that help the organization stand out and build a competitive edge in the industry, investments on attracting talent is considered to be highly important (Graham & Cascio, 2018; Garibaldi,2014), and is mostly a joint effort in between HR and PR departments (Jakopovic, 2017). Presenting employer branding as a cross functional process, like the above idea by Jakopovic (2017), has also been used by Theuer *et al.* (2016), Cornwell and Lee (2016) and Moroko and Uncles (2016). The term 'Employer Branding' has been defined in a multitude of ways by scholars. It has been defined as how an employer's reputation and its value to employees has been communicated by Monteiro *et al*. (2020) and Lievens and Slaughter (2016). Backhaus (2016) has refined the above concept by presenting employer branding as a way of differentiating as an employer while also using it to maintain employee loyalty. Itam *et al*. (2020) have also added to the above ideas about employer branding that it leads to creating a psychological contract and a positive brand image in both current and potential employees.

According to Biswas and Suar (2014), an employer brand consists of three components as "employer brand equity, brand loyalty and employee engagement, and attraction and retention of talent". This concept has been viewed in a different angle by Dabirian *et al.* (2016), by categorizing the types of value it entails as "social value, interest value, application value, development value, economic value, management value and work/life balance". The above classifications of employer branding by Biswas and Suar (2014) and Dabirian *et al.* (2016) can be identified to be compiled and presented by Theurer *et al*. (2018)' s study which has presented employer branding to be in order as, "employer knowledge development and investment, interaction of employer branding activities with employee mindset, firm performance and competitive advantage, financial market performance and shareholder value".

The important role played by social media and marketing on employer branding has been highlighted in many studies such as Kissel & Buttgen (2015), Graham & Cascio (2018) and Kucherov & Zhiltsova (2021), thereby agreeing with the idea that it's a cross functional process. Graham & Cascio (2018) have further elaborated on these applications and their effectiveness in tracking and measuring the return on investment on employer branding.

However, employer branding is a risky weapon to handle according to Elegbe (2017), who has elaborated on how a broken promise or slight mishap could result in a very fast decline in the created reputation. Armstrong and Taylor (2014) have also identified employer branding to be one of the two factors that decide the effectiveness of an organization's talent attraction strategy.

LinkedIn for Professional Networking

LinkedIn has kept its mark already as the most used social networking site for professional networking (Totoro, 2017). Claybaugh & Haseman (2013) have also mentioned sites such as Viadeo and Xing in addition to LinkedIn as professional networking sites.Utz & Breuer (2019) have found that Xing is more popular in German speaking countries than LinkedIn. Networking is known to be a factor that makes one standout in the process of searching for a job and career success (Davis & Kimball, 2014, cited in Dach,2015; Davis et al., 2020). Not only in recruitment and job search, but professional networking has also been found to be a way to share information and to create new relationships with people from the same or different industries(Claybaugh & Haseman, 2013), which comes in handy to create a pull strategy for B2B sales especially.

Schneiderman (2016) has elaborated on the process of professional networking on LinkedIn, which goes on as inviting conversation, remembering little details about others in order to have a relevant conversation, reaching out to the newly created networks about the nature of their work and also sharing about professional goals and focuses. Utz & Breuer (2019) have also spoken about the above point by mentioning about latent ties, which is when one strategically connects with others for later benefit, and has also pointed out the informational benefits of LinkedIn.

Linkedin for Sales and Customer Behaviour Patterns

Research has been very limited in terms of the identification of user behaviour patterns and preferences related to their presence on professional networking sites such as LinkedIn. However, Bridgstock (2019) has identified LinkedIn to be a platform which is built with the purpose of helping brands build their reputation, relationships and to connect with existing and potential customers, which implies that LinkedIn has a direct or indirect sales component to it.

LinkedIn Sales Blog (2021) has stated that 63% of corporate buyers in Asia Pacific find remote work to have made the purchasing process more convenient. What previously used to be a matter of physically attending events and conferences to network and to create sales deals has now shifted to a vitual platforms like LinkedIn according to LinkedIn (2021). According to LinkedIn's State of Sales report for 2021 , seller- buyer connections are strengthening on LinkedIn at an increasing rate, with 74% of the sellers stating their need of expanding their LinkedIn network (LinkedIn, 2021). The use of LinkedIn for sales has been discussed by W.Martin (2013) by categorizing salespeople into four as enthusiasts, casual, personal and non-participants based on their LinkedIn presence (Figure 3). Further, the study has gone onto describing the use of LinkedIn in different stages of the sales process as follows:

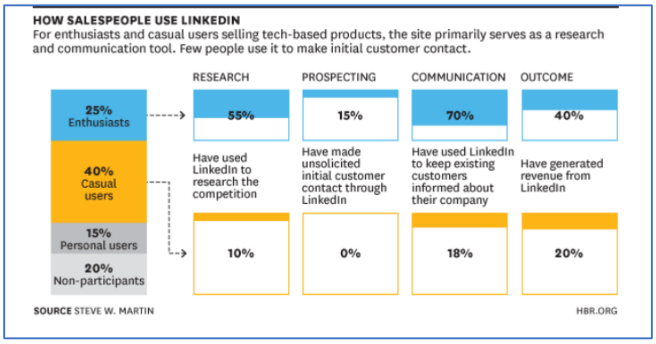

Figure 3: How Salespeople use LinkedIn (W.Martin, 2013)

There are very few literature sources exploring user behaviour characteristics affecting B2B sales on LinkedIn. Keinänen & Kuivalainen (2015) has found out that those who use social media in their private life have a higher tendency to utilize social media for work purposes. However, Agnihotri *et al.* (2016) have stated that social media presence alone would not guarantee successful sales performance or customer satisfaction, and that it should be properly utilized. Niedermeier *et al.* (2016) have suggested creating collaborative communities on social media, whereas Agnihotri *et al.* (2012), cited in Ring (2020) have suggested gaining potential and existing customers' trust by being very responsive on comments and messages. Wood (2016) has recommended that they avoid the sales pitch at first, and focus on creating a relationship and trust initially.

Rieck (2010), cited in Keinänen & Kuivalainen (2015) have discussed the theory of people's personality being a constant in both their personal and professional interactions. Lakkala (2011), cited in Keinänen & Kuivalainen (2015) has noted that age and gender bear a significance in this topic, with the older generation using social media less, women using social media at a higher frequency compared to men and CEOs and higher management using social media comparatively less.

Research Methodology

The methodology used to understand the factors affecting the low conversion rate from first contact to prospect in the B2B sales funnel and to understand the behavioural patterns and response rates on LinkedIn related to professionals in the Asia Pacific region, has been elaborated in this section. This study was conducted based quantitative research, which can be classified under the positivism research philosophy has been carried out through conducting a survey among 88 working professionals in the Asia Pacific region who fall under the target profiles of organization X's B2B connection prospects. Ethical compliance was ensured throughout the research process and the data collected has been recorded anonymously.

This research was conducted through a mono method quantitative study, with the use of a survey as the sole data collection technique. According to Saunders *et al*. (2016) exploring relationships between different variables, using sampling techniques and other statistical and graphical techniques is done through quantitative research. Referring to the short research time frame and related restrictions a quantitative research is deemed to suit the purpose of the research best.

Survey research is one of the most common data collection techniques related to quantitative research and according to Leavy (2017) and it includes a standardized set of questions, also known as the 'survey instrument', being answered by the target audience, created in a way such that they are statistically analysable. This research survey has been carried out in a cross-sectional, implying that data collection has been done at one point of time (Ruel *et al*., 2016). The survey questions have been designed in a way to address the research hypotheses, facilitating the identification of relationships in between variables related to personal preference and behaviour on LinkedIn leading to forming B2B relationships through the platform.

Hypotheses

The variables affecting the potential B2B customer response rates on LinkedIn have been assumed to be the usage frequency, and previous knowledge about the organization/ person. The research has also explored the effect of the variable – preference for other communication channels, on the rate of response for B2B sales messages on LinkedIn.

Table 2: Hypothesis

H_{01}:	There is no relationship between LinkedIn usage frequency of working professionals and the rate of responses.
H_{11}:	There is a relationship between LinkedIn usage frequency of working professionals and the rate of responses.
H_{02}:	There is no relationship between previous knowledge in the organization in the person approached and the rate of success in the sales deal.
H_{12}:	There is a relationship between previous knowledge in the organization in the person approached and the rate of success in the sales deal.
H_{03}:	There is no relationship between the length and information provided in the B2B connection message and the rate of response.

H_{13}: There is a relationship between the length and information provided in the B2B connection message and the rate of response.

H_{04}: There is no relationship between the message subject in the B2B connection message and the rate of response.

H_{14}: There is a relationship between the message subject in the B2B connection message and the rate of response.

Ethical compliance

Research ethics have been given a high priority in the research survey design and in the research conducting process. Data access is through internet- mediated access, which implies that the survey has been passed to the target audience using emails, LinkedIn messages and online networking. The research avoids any ethical issues that could have been dawned as a result of using video conferencing, and face-to-face interviews, by sticking to a fully written survey format. The respondents are expected to fully read and agree to a participant information sheet which details out all relevant information about the research and obtains their consent to information being stored and collected. Information has been collected with anonymity without revealing the identity of the respondent.

Further, X's concerns about data access providing and confidentiality have been addressed through anonymity and data is used in a way that identifying the organization is not possible through generalization (Saunders, et al., 2016).

Data Analysis

Survey data has been used to filter collected data to ensure the audience is in the target composition – i.e., working professionals from Asia Pacific. Descriptive statistical values for mean, mode, median, standard deviation and skewness have been calculated first to understand the collected data set and to determine the suitability of the predetermined inferential techniques.

The dependent variable has been the rate of responsiveness to messages on LinkedIn, and how it changes based on other factors such as the length of message has been observed initially through a scatter graph and Pearson's correlation coefficient have been used to assess the strength of the relationship between the two variables (Saunders, et al., 2016). The probability of the relationship occurrence, i.e., significance testing (Berman-Brown and Saunders, 2008) has been analyzed based on the test statistic and degree of freedom calculated through SPSS. Further, an analysis of variance, ANOVA have been conducted to find out the variables affecting the rate of response for B2B connection efforts through LinkedIn the highest.

Results and Analysis

Reliability Analysis

Table 3: Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.673	30

A Cronbach's alpha value greater than 0.6 is considered to be reliable according to Taber (2017) hence this study is reliable (Refer Table 3).

Correlation

Association between LinkedIn usage frequency and rate of responsiveness on LinkedIn

H_{01}: There is no relationship between LinkedIn usage frequency of working professionals and the rate of responses.

H_{11}: There is a relationship between LinkedIn usage frequency of working professionals and the rate of responses.

Table 4: Correlation (Usage Frequency)

		Rate_of_Responsiveness	LinkedIn_Usage_Frequency
Rate_of_Responsiveness	Pearson Correlation	1	.284**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.007
	N	88	88
LinkedIn_Usage_Frequency	Pearson Correlation	.284**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.007	
	N	88	88

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Based on Table 4 there is a weak positive relationship between LinkedIn usage frequency and the rate of responsiveness for B2B customer acquisition messages on LinkedIn with a R value of 0.284.

The "p" value for this association is 0.007 hence it is statistically significant at 99.3% confidence level. This supports $H_{11\ to}$ a slight extent.

Association between Previous knowledge of the organization/person and rate of responsiveness on LinkedIn

H_{02}: There is no relationship between previous knowledge in the organization in the person approached and the rate of success in the sales deal.

H_{12}: There is a relationship between previous knowledge in the organization in the person approached and the rate of success in the sales deal.

Table 5: Correlation (Prior Knowledge)

		Previous_Knowledge	Rate_of_Responsiveness
Previous_Knowledge	Pearson Correlation	1	-.045
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.675
	N	88	88
Rate_of_Responsiveness	Pearson Correlation	-.045	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.675	
	N	88	88
	N	88	88

Based on the correlation analysis (Table 5) the R value is -0.045 which indicates that there is a weak negative relationship between prior knowledge and the rate of responsiveness for B2B customer acquisition messages on LinkedIn as a whole.

As the "P" value is 0.675 this association between message subject and the rate of responsiveness is considered to be statistically significant at 32.5% confidence level. This supports H_{02} since the relationship is negligible.

Association between Message Length and rate of responsiveness on LinkedIn

H_{03}: There is no relationship between the length and information provided in the B2B connection message and the rate of response.

H_{13}: There is a relationship between the length and information provided in the B2B connection message and the rate of response.

Table 6: Correlation (Message length)

		Rate_of_Responsiveness	Message_Length
Rate_of_Responsiveness	Pearson Correlation	1	.210*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.049
	N	88	88
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.055	.000
	N	88	88
Message_Length	Pearson Correlation	.210*	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.049	
	N	88	88

Message length and the rate of responsiveness have an overall weak positive relationship with an R value of 0.210(Table 6). However, there is a higher impact from messages with missing information on this result. As the "P" value is 0.049 this association is statistically significant at 95.1% confidence level. This supports H_{13} to a slight extent.

Association between message subject and rate of responsiveness on LinkedIn

H_{04}: There is no relationship between the message subject in the B2B connection message and the rate of response.

H_{14}: There is a relationship between the message subject in the B2B connection message and the rate of response.

Table 7: Correlation (Message subject)

		Rate_of_Responsiveness	Message_Subject
Rate_of_Responsiveness	Pearson Correlation	1	.062
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.569
	N	88	88
Message Subject	Pearson Correlation	.062	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.569	
	N	88	88

Based on the correlation analysis in Table 7, there is a weak positive relationship between message subject and the rate of responsiveness, with a R value of 0.062.

As the "P" value is 0.569 this association between message subject and the rate of responsiveness is considered to be statistically significant at 43.1% confidence level. This supports H_{04} as the relationship is negligible.

Regression Analysis

The impact of LinkedIn usage frequency on rate of responsiveness on LinkedIn

Table 8: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.284[a]	.081	.070	.68257

a. Predictors: (Constant), LinkedIn_Usage_Frequency

Based on the R square value of 0.081 (Table 8) there is an impact of 8.1% from LinkedIn usage frequency on the rate of responsiveness on LinkedIn for B2B related messages. As the "p" value for this association is 0.007 hence it is considered to be statistically significant at 99.3% confidence level.

Y =a +bx
Rate of responsiveness = 1.435 + 0.38 (LinkedIn usage frequency)

The impact of Previous Knowledge on rate of responsiveness on LinkedIn

Table 9: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.045[a]	.002	-.010	.71126

a. Predictors: (Constant), Previous_Knowledge

Based on the R square value of 0.002 (Table 9) there is an impact of 0.2% from Previous knowledge on the rate of responsiveness on LinkedIn for B2B related messages. Based on the "P" value is 0.675 the influence is significant at 32.5% confidence level.

Y =a +bx
Rate of responsiveness = 2.628 -0.046 (Previous Knowledge)
The impact of message length on rate of responsiveness on LinkedIn

Table 10: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.210[a]	.044	.033	.69607

a. Predictors: (Constant), Message_Length

Based on the R square value of 0.044 (Table 10) there is an impact of 4.4% from Previous knowledge on the rate of responsiveness on LinkedIn for B2B related messages. Based on the "P" value is 0.049 the influence is significant at 95.1% confidence level.

Y =a +bx
Rate of responsiveness = 1.560 +0.277 (Message Length)

The impact of message subject on rate of responsiveness on LinkedIn

Table 11: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.062[a]	.004	-.008	.71064

a. Predictors: (Constant), Message Subject

Based on the R square value of 0.004(Table 11) there is an impact of 0.4% from LinkedIn usage frequency on the rate of responsiveness on LinkedIn for B2B related messages. And based on the P value of 0.569 the influence is significant at 43.1% confidence level.

Y =a +bx
Rate of responsiveness = 2.261 + 0.063 (Message Subject)

Discussion and Evaluation

Based on the survey results, the relationship between message length, LinkedIn usage frequency message subject, prior knowledge, and the rate of responsiveness for B2B connection messages on LinkedIn is existent, but very low, thus proving H_{11}, H_{12} and H_{13} and $H_{14.}$ The low impact of LinkedIn usage frequency could be explained through the messages being responded to based on the received mobile notifications, since a considerable number of LinkedIn users have the mobile application (LinkedIn, 2021). Individually considering the impact of prior knowledge, knowing the organization or the person has affected a higher response rate to messages. This proves and highlights the findings of Classen and Friedli (2019) and Ludwig *et al*. (2013) regarding the importance of creating positive brand affirmations through social media presence.

The message subject and message length have very low impact on the rate of responsiveness as well, however professionals prefer receiving precise, shorter messages including key information. These contrasts the findings of Janke (2014) and Zucker (2021) who have found a very strong positive relationship between message subject and rate of response.

Results have also shown a higher preference placed on being reached out to through email and fellow employees instead of LinkedIn, as opposed to the findings of Schimel (2018). Schneiderman (2016) has identified a main reason for the low rate of responsiveness on LinkedIn to be in the weaknesses of specific information not being properly presented. The results are somewhat in line with Wood (2016)'s argument that professionals on LinkedIn do not like receiving sales messages, but instead prefer networking and genuine conversations.The results have also shown that there is a high LinkedIn usage among top management personnel like regional managers, global managers and C-level employees as opposed to what has been suggested by Keinänen & Kuivalainen (2015).

Conclusions

The findings mainly reflect that, although the direct impact from the message length, message subject, prior knowledge, and LinkedIn usage frequency on rate of responsiveness on LinkedIn for B2B connection efforts is low, there are individual factors such as short messages and previous personal networking that affect the motivation to respond. Professionals also prefer being approached through email and fellow employees higher than LinkedIn. The research was limited in terms of the survey responses received, considering that over 2/3rd of the people who were reached out to through LinkedIn did not respond. Also, the research does not have a country specific or department preference analysis and presents and overall demonstration of the communication preferences. Based on the findings and existing literature it is advisable for sales professionals to prioritize email communications over LinkedIn, and to also invest time on networking and general conversations rather than pitching their products. These recommendations can be identified to be entrepreneurial as opposed to innovative, since they focus on solving the existing problem using the existing background and research, instead of innovating an entirely new solution to address better and efficient B2B sales connection methods.

Research Limitations and Directions for Future Studies

It should be noted that this research reflects the results of a survey conducted generally among professionals across the Asia Pacific region, a country wise analysis of the effectiveness of LinkedIn for B2B sales is recommended for future studies, since different factors unique to each country could affect the overall results. Also, the research results have been compiled by considering the answers of professionals in all levels of organizations. A further study considering the impact of the respondent's position in the organization on their tendency to respond to B2B sales related messages and the influence they might have on converting the leads into a deal can be recommended.

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