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Who sits at the table? LinkedIn exposure shapes managers' situated attention and strategic preferences

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ABSTRACT

The Attention-Based View emphasizes that the social and material features of managerial situations have a crucial impact on the prioritization of issues and on how decision-makers select strategic answers to resolve these issues. This involves communication channels that guide the availability and salience of information in particular situations. One key situational feature of today's organizations is social media. Social media such as LinkedIn has a profound strategic impact on firms and increasingly shapes the context of strategy work. Yet, we still know little about how it affects individual managers and their situated attention. We conducted a preregistered experiment (N = 138) that simulated managerial LinkedIn use, as well as qualitative interviews (N = 18) with managers. We observed that the exposure to LinkedIn significantly influenced participants' strategic preferences. This effect remained stable when controlling for individual factors such as experience with strategy work and LinkedIn use, yet it strongly increased for senior-level managers, rendering these influences particularly meaningful for firm-level outcomes. Qualitative evidence suggests that this effect is due to the material reconfiguration of situated managerial attention driven by (1) the ubiquity of communication channels, (2) the consequential expansion of attentional boundaries, and (3) salience through emerging attention regulators. Together, our quantitative and qualitative findings advance the ABV by theorizing how LinkedIn materially reconfigures situated attention in today's strategy work.

1. Introduction

The Attention-Based-View (ABV) highlights that decision-makers' situated attention allocation to particular issues and answers shapes managerial behavior, giving rise to firm-level outcomes (Ocasio, 1997, 2011). The ABV emphasizes that the social and material features of managerial situations have a crucial impact on the prioritization of issues, and on how decision-makers select strategic answers to resolve these issues (Brielmaier and Friesl, 2023; Ocasio, 1997, 2025). This, for instance, involves communication channels that guide the availability and salience of information in particular situations (Joseph et al., 2024; Ocasio et al., 2018). One key situational feature of today's organizations is social media (e.g., McFarland and Ployhart, 2015; van Knippenberg et al., 2015). Social

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media are designed to attract the attention of its users across both private and professional situations, influencing their preferences and behavior in manifold ways (Bhargava and Velasquez, 2021; van Bavel et al., 2021).

The use of social media, in particular the professional network LinkedIn, has become an increasingly common source of information among managers (Heavey et al., 2020; Ocasio et al., 2023; van Knippenberg et al., 2015). So far, prior research has predominantly taken a 'volitional view' by investigating social media as a form of strategic communication. For instance, recent work has explored how top managers engage with audiences via social media platforms (e.g., Grafström and Falkman, 2017; Heavey et al., 2020) and, thereby, attract public interest (Men et al., 2018), create trust and satisfaction with their firm (Tsai and Men, 2017), cope with competing demands of stakeholders (Castelló et al., 2016), or even increase M&A announcement returns (Wang et al., 2021a). Yet, a 'recipient view', which unpacks the effects of social media consumption on managerial attention and strategic preferences remains poorly understood. This perspective is particularly relevant for ABV research, which emphasizes that what decision-makers attend to in particular situations shapes organizational outcomes (Ocasio, 1997, 2025). Social media, and especially LinkedIn, may redirect attention toward certain issues and answers, thereby influencing which options managers consider relevant. This recipient view of social media, specifically regarding the business-oriented platform LinkedIn, is the focus of this paper.

Social media permeate situations much more than traditional media by enabling immediate access to real-time information that is specifically designed to attract attention (e.g., McFarland and Ployhart, 2015; Stanko and Beckman, 2015; Wang et al., 2021b). Whether it is during the daily commute or in-between meetings, social media constantly attract managers' attention, confronting them with potentially relevant strategic information (Andreassen et al., 2014; Heavey et al., 2020). Regardless of its ubiquity in daily work and despite multiple calls to intensify corresponding research (Brielmaier and Friesl, 2023; McFarland and Ployhart, 2015; Ocasio et al., 2023; van Knippenberg et al., 2015), we only have a limited understanding of how social media use affects managers themselves, particularly how it directs situated attention and the consequences this has for which issues and answers come to matter. As Heavey and colleagues (2020, p. 515) emphasize, an "important aspect of social media neglected in research to date is the impact of social media engagement on strategic leaders' attentional processes". Against this background, and with LinkedIn being the dominant platform in professional contexts, critical questions are: *How does LinkedIn, as situational feature of managerial work, shape attention allocation? How does this affect the prioritization of strategic issues and answers?*

To address these questions, we combined a preregistered experimental study with a qualitative follow-up study (see Molina-Azorin, 2012). This set up allows us to study both the effect of social media use on attention allocation as well as the material features of situated attention. We developed a novel experimental setup that invited managers to act as the CEO of a fictitious company ($N = 138$ after exclusions). The preregistered experiment involved choice scenarios that managers worked on while attending to fictitious LinkedIn posts. The presented LinkedIn feeds dominantly featured one of two potential growth strategies (organic or inorganic options; Lockett et al., 2011; Penrose, 1959). We measured how this situational exposure influenced managers' strategic preferences, i.e. the extent to which they prioritized the dominantly featured strategy over the alternative (Gamache et al., 2015). Additionally, we examined how the supplementary features of LinkedIn posts influence the potential impact of the feeds' content on strategic preferences (cf., Joseph and Gaba, 2020). Therefore, we manipulated the hierarchical level of a post's author (CEO versus employee) and the post's social resonance (high versus low number of likes and comments). This setup mirrors the status of LinkedIn as the most popular social media platform among top managers.

We observed that the exposure to LinkedIn significantly influenced participants' strategic preferences. From a fictitious total budget of 100 million US$, participants invested on average 7.6 million US$ more into those strategic answers that were dominantly featured in their LinkedIn feed. This effect remained stable when controlling for individual factors such as experience with strategy work and LinkedIn use. However, it strongly increased to 18.5 million US$ for senior-level managers, rendering these influences particularly meaningful for firm-level outcomes. Surprisingly, neither the hierarchical level of the posts' author nor the number of likes and comments influenced participants' strategic preferences. Yet, posts from authors with a low hierarchical level but with high amounts of likes and comments, had a significant effect on managers' preferences for strategic answers. This uncommon combination may make these posts particularly salient and thus attract managers' attention (Ocasio, 1997). The experimental results were further explored in $N = 18$ narrative interviews with managers, enabling us to extend these findings to real world managerial situations. The interviews reveal how social media platforms like LinkedIn contribute to a 'material reconfiguration of situated attention'. This concept captures how such platforms reshape what managers attend to, when they do so, and which signals gain strategic relevance. We identify three features that drive this reconfiguration: The ubiquity of communication channels, the consequential expansion of attentional boundaries, and the salience through emerging attention regulators.

Our experimental and qualitative findings have two wider theoretical implications for the ABV and the concept of 'situated attention'. First, despite its central role in Ocasio's (1997, 2025) seminal work, situated attention has only recently received increased scholarly attention (Ademi et al., 2025; Brielmaier and Friesl, 2023; Nicolini and Korica, 2021). We extend the ABV by showing that the ubiquity of social media constitutes a consequential material condition that alters what 'situatedness' means in contemporary organizations. Rather than being tied to a particular setting and their material cues (e.g., Joseph and Ocasio, 2012; Joseph and Wilson, 2018), LinkedIn posts continuously attract attention and subtly permeate diverse organizational situations. This ubiquity matters: LinkedIn posts, as small, subtle, and seemingly negligible material cues, constantly direct situated managerial attention toward particular strategic answers and thereby shape strategic preferences. Second, we theorize that social media reconfigures situated attention by exposing the limits of organizational attentional control. Whereas the ABV traditionally conceptualizes communication channels as internal mechanisms of control (e.g., Ocasio, 1997; Ocasio and Joseph, 2008), LinkedIn functions as an external communication channel that constantly confronts managers with issues and answers beyond a firm's structural regulators. Our data suggest that these external influences not only expand managers' attentional boundaries but importantly also introduce new regulators of salience that shape situated attention. This raises broader questions about the control of attention in organizations in the digital era

(Ocasio, 2025; Ocasio et al., 2023).

2. Theoretical foundations and hypotheses

2.1. Social media as a situational characteristic of strategy work

A key material feature of our contemporary world are social media, designed to capture humans' limited attentional resources and, thereby, impact humans and their behavior in manifold ways (Bhargava and Velasquez, 2021; Stanko and Beckman, 2015; Wu, 2017). Over the last decades, scholars have proposed varying definitions of social media (Aichner et al., 2021). Drawing on the most prominent publications in this domain, we formally define social media as a digital web 2.0 application that enables its user to 1) create a (semi-) public profile on a particular platform, 2) connect with other users, and 3) share and consume information on this platform (Boyd and Ellison, 2007; McFarland and Ployhart, 2015; Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). Information posted on social media such as LinkedIn, Instagram, or Facebook convey different kinds of both explicit as well as implicit data (e.g., Matthews et al., 2022; Tifferet and Vilnai-Yavetz, 2018) that enable its users to draw inferences (cf. Leonardi, 2014). For instance, a post's content, the number of Likes as well as implicit data such as the photo of a post's author may be used by actors to evaluate the validity of the information shared (e.g., Borah and Xiao, 2018; Meinert and Krämer, 2022).

Due to its distinct characteristics, strategic decision-makers within firms spend an increasing amount of time on social media, particularly on the business-oriented platform LinkedIn (Andreassen et al., 2014; Heavey et al., 2020). Social media, such as LinkedIn, differ from traditional media such as newspapers, magazines, or analysts' reports through its interactive, immediate, and hedonic nature, shaping how managers share and consume information (Bhargava and Velasquez, 2021; Wang et al., 2021b). In contrast to traditional media, social media enables managers to interact with audiences through immediate real-time updates (e.g., Etter et al., 2019; McFarland and Ployhart, 2015) and thereby volitionally make a positive impression on others with low effort (e.g., Bao et al., 2023; Castelló et al., 2016; Tsai and Men, 2017). Extant research has demonstrated that such activities on social media positively influence stakeholders' perception of a firm's corporate social responsibility (Wang and Huang, 2018), a firm's reputation (Etter et al., 2019), or stakeholders' trust (Grant et al., 2018). Furthermore, research has highlighted that managers use social media to maintain control over the public discourse in situations of crises by, for instance, selectively disclosing information that portrays the organization in a favorable light (e.g., Heavey et al., 2020). In particular, the interactive and immediate nature of social media allows managers to share their "own news or delive[r] information on a crisis before others are able to" (Fowler, 2017, p. 720).

This 'volitional' view of social media of course rests on the premise that others attend to social media content for the purpose of seeking information or in other words are 'recipients' of social media content. And indeed, a number of studies highlights that managers increasingly use social media to access strategically relevant information (e.g., Nicolini and Korica, 2021; van Knippenberg et al., 2015) by, for instance, tapping into the wisdom of otherwise 'unheard' groups such as employees or communities (Baptista et al., 2017; Hautz et al., 2017). However, despite the pervasive character of social media and its increasing importance in managerial work, research on the 'recipient view' and the role of social media for attention allocation has remained highly limited (Heavey et al., 2020; Ocasio et al., 2023). Accordingly, below we build upon the attention-based-view of the firm (ABV, Ocasio, 1997) to investigate how the consumption of social media content might influence strategic decision-makers themselves.

2.2. An attentional perspective on LinkedIn use in strategy work

Building on the seminal work of the Carnegie school (Cyert & March 1963; Simon, 1947), the ABV assumes that decision-makers' limited attention is the key, yet limited resource in organizations. The ABV argues that organizational-level behavior ultimately depends on how decision-makers allocate their attention to issues and answers available in particular situations and that these situations are regulated by so called organizational attention structures (Ocasio, 1997). While ABV-based research has predominantly focused on the structural conditions of attention allocation (e.g., Barnett, 2008; Fu et al., 2020; Ocasio, 2011), Ocasio (1997, 2025) has initially put the situated nature of attention front and center. Yet, it is only recently that research has started to unpack the social (Nicolini and Mengis, 2024; Nicolini and Korica, 2021) but also individual-level (Ademi et al., 2025) dynamics of situated attention. A key characteristic of any situation is its materiality, guiding actors' attention towards particular issues and answers and thus shaping decision-making (e.g., Dameron et al., 2015; Ocasio, 1997; Ross and Nisbett, 1991). Accordingly, social media are an important material characteristic of strategic situations (Brielmaier and Friesl, 2023); i.e. situations in which managers attend to organizational issues and answers (Ocasio, 1997, 2025).

While the characteristics across key social media platforms (e.g., LinkedIn, Facebook, or Instagram) have some parallels, we focus on LinkedIn as business-oriented platform. LinkedIn has by far been the most popular social media platform among managers in recent years, offering access to a broad range of strategic information about competitors and emerging trends (e.g., Heavey et al., 2020). As briefly outlined above, LinkedIn exhibits a distinct nature, distinguishing it from traditional media. It is this distinct nature that may play a key role in how the platform affects decision-makers' attention in strategic situations. As an inherently hedonic information system (Van der Heijden, 2004), LinkedIn constantly attracts actors' attention towards its content, that only requires limited attentional effort to consume (e.g., Bhargava and Velasquez, 2021; Heavey et al., 2020). Information shared on LinkedIn is imminently and immediately available for managers across different situations, be it between two strategy meetings, after an exhausting call, or at home at the dining table; in other words: "anywhere and anytime" (Boczkowski et al., 2018; McFarland and Ployhart, 2015).

What is more, in contrast to news outlets, users of LinkedIn are familiar with their contacts, lending credibility to the information shared (e.g., Utz, 2016). Thus, LinkedIn provides decision-makers 'effortless' access to strategic answers that other firms or

decision-makers choose (Heavey et al., 2020), triggering 'bottom-up' (stimulus-driven) attentional processing (Ocasio, 2011; Shepherd et al., 2017). For instance, LinkedIn posts may draw managers' situated attention to a competitor's announcement of an acquisition, their investment into a new technology, or the launch of a diversity campaign. While such bottom-up processing of information demands less attentional resources than top-down (goal-driven) processing (Kahneman, 1973), particularly in the context of social media platforms such as LinkedIn, it may still strongly affect managers' strategic preferences (Shepherd et al., 2017), i.e. the extent to which they prioritize one strategic answer over another (Gamache et al., 2015). Thus, for recipients, information shared on LinkedIn often remains 'on top of their heads'; it is more salient and available than other sources of information (Shepherd et al., 2017; Tversky and Kahneman, 1973). Based on this reasoning, we propose.

Hypothesis 1. Exposure to LinkedIn posts influences managers' preferences for strategic answers.

Posts on LinkedIn provide access to a variety of immediately visible information beyond pure content (e.g., Tifferet and Vilnai-Yavetz, 2018). It is this prototypical structure that may shape the impact of social media on managers' attentional processing and thus their preferences for particular strategic answers (cf., Joseph and Gaba, 2020; Simon, 1947). Importantly, and in contrast to platforms like Instagram or TikTok, LinkedIn conveys professional information about its users, most notably about their job title and thereby the authors' hierarchical position within an organization. This information may matter for how LinkedIn content is processed by managers. Research in applied psychology has long demonstrated that individuals are more attentive to activities of actors in higher hierarchical positions; they consider their viewpoints as more trustworthy and are more likely to adopt them (Bickman, 1974; Fiske, 1993). Relatedly, Ocasio (1997, p. 197) notes that "[t]he most critical players in attention regulation [of other actors] are typically the CEO and top management". This may particularly hold true in a strategy context. Strategy is traditionally understood as the domain of the top management, particularly the CEO, and, thus, an individual's legitimacy in the strategy process and its wider discourse is closely related to their rank in a firm (e.g., Hambrick, 1981, 1989; Ocasio and Joseph, 2008). Thus, managers may draw upon the hierarchical position of a post's author to make inferences about a post's legitimacy and relevance in strategic situations. From this perspective, LinkedIn posts from authors in higher hierarchical positions should be more salient, i.e., attract more managerial attention and, thus, unfold a stronger effect on managers' strategic preferences than posts from authors in lower hierarchical positions (Ocasio, 1997, p. 198f.). Thus, with reference to hypothesis 1, we propose.

Hypothesis 2a. LinkedIn posts from authors with a higher hierarchical rank have a stronger influence on managers' preferences for strategic answers than posts of authors from lower hierarchical ranks.

Besides information about the author, the structure of LinkedIn posts also conveys information regarding its 'social resonance', i.e. the relevance to a particular audience or even the public, in the form of likes and comments. Generally, strategy decision-makers are required to sustain attention to public debates in order to identify emerging technological trends (Gerstner et al., 2013) or to detect potential firm-level (Rerup, 2009) or industry-level risks (Hoffman and Ocasio, 2001). Today, social media play an important role for managers in assessing the environment (e.g., Heavey et al., 2020). At the same time, also LinkedIn use entails the risk of encountering vast amounts of irrelevant, misleading, or even fabricated information, competing for users' attention; in the words of van Knippenberg and colleagues (2015) "information [on social media] scales faster than attention". Previous research on social media shows that to overcome this issue, actors draw upon the number of likes and comments as a proxy or key heuristic (e.g., Borah and Xiao, 2018; Meinert and Krämer, 2022). By the same token, managers may draw upon the number of likes and comments of a LinkedIn post to make inferences about its validity and relevance in strategic situations. From this perspective, posts with a high number of likes and comments should be more salient, i.e. attract more managerial attention and, thus, unfold a stronger effect on decision-makers' strategic preferences than posts with a low number of likes and comments (Ocasio, 1997, p. 198f.). Thus, with reference to hypothesis 1, we propose.

Hypothesis 2b. LinkedIn posts with high social resonance (high number of likes and comments) have a stronger influence on managers' preferences for strategic answers than posts with low social resonance (low number of likes and comments).

The arguments above imply that LinkedIn may influence situated decisions in an informational bottom-up sense by increasing the availability and salience of certain strategic answers over others (Kahneman, 1973; Ocasio, 1997; Shepherd et al., 2017). However, its influence likely extends beyond content availability and thus cognitive factors that shape information processing. Indeed, psychological process models distinguish between cognitive influences and affective influences on attitudes and choices, with the latter being particularly effective under conditions of fleeting attention, such as when scrolling through LinkedIn posts (e.g., Petty and Cacioppo, 1986).

Social media, including LinkedIn, are arenas of impression management and self-presentation (Tifferet and Vilnai-Yavetz, 2018; Van Dijck, 2013), where the content almost exclusively reflects positive outcomes (Heavey et al., 2020; Soroka et al., 2018). This focus on success may not only inform but also affectively trigger social comparison and foster dissatisfaction with one's own firm's performance (cf., Buunk and Gibbons, 2007). Indeed, extensive research shows that exposure to idealized content on social media lowers users' satisfaction with their own situation (for instance with regard to their own body). Yet, this research also shows that while triggering dissatisfaction, these social media posts also include suggested activities and behaviors that allow to create alignment with the ideal presented on social media (e.g., Ryding and Kuss, 2020; Vandenbosch et al., 2022). In the context of LinkedIn, the extent of triggered dissatisfaction may thus moderate the extent to which portrayed leadership practices or strategic moves are adopted. As such, LinkedIn content may not only induce dissatisfaction, but the more dissatisfaction induced, the more situated attention may be directed toward strategic answers that promise the resolution of the evoked dissatisfaction (e.g., Cyert and March 1963; Rhee et al., 2019). Based on this reasoning, we propose.

Hypothesis 3a. Exposure to LinkedIn posts decreases satisfaction with the status quo of a firm's performance.

Hypothesis 3b. Dissatisfaction with a firm's performance, evoked by exposure to LinkedIn posts, moderates the influence of LinkedIn posts on preferences for strategic answers.[2]

3. Experimental methods

Below we describe our sampling plan, all data exclusions, all manipulations, and all measures in the study. The experiment was preregistered at the Open Science Framework (OSF) registry (https://osf.io/4kepg/?view_only=a7d5adad747846299c56e53153b91d4c). All data, the analysis code, and research materials are available at the OSF repository: https://osf.io/juhzg/files/osfstorage?view_only=e709b200572149749e561513eb34e01f.

3.1. Experimental design

Our experimental protocol simulates the use of social media embedded in a choice situation while allowing to manipulate the content of social media posts. Participants were $N = 200$ managers (138 after exclusions) at varying hierarchical positions who were randomly assigned to the conditions of a 2 x 2 x 2 experimental design with one within-subject factor and two between-subject factors (see Table 1).

As between-subject factors, we manipulated the hierarchical position of the authors of the respective feed (i.e., "high" = CEO, "low" = Junior engineer) and the social resonance of the social media content (i.e., "high" = 10 000–15,000 likes and 200–250 comments, "low" = 10–15 likes and 2–5 comments; exact numbers were determined randomly within the given ranges for each specific post). Furthermore, we manipulated within-subject which out of two strategic approaches was presented in a specific post (organic growth strategy or inorganic growth strategy (see Lockett et al., 2011). Participants received social media content on both strategic approaches. However, one strategy was covered by the majority of social media posts (60 %), while the second strategy was only covered by one post within the feed (10 %). To make demand characteristics (Orne, 1962) and experimenter effects (Rosenthal, 1976) less likely and, thus, increase external validity, we also presented social media content which was unrelated to both strategic approaches (30 % of all posts). The strategic approach dominantly featured was balanced over participants, and all posts were presented in random order. Thus, the third experimental factor can be described as the dominance of each post's content within the feed ("high" = 6/10 posts; "low" = 1/10 posts)".

3.2. Developing social media posts

We developed a set of posts in an iterative process (Roth et al., 2020; Wade et al., 2020). Initially, we reviewed several hundred posts of over 20 CEOs on LinkedIn and analyzed them in terms of covered topics, structure, and writing style. We particularly focused on how these CEOs presented strategic answers (e.g., acquisitions or internal investments) in their posts. Based on this assessment, we manually and carefully created ten fictitious LinkedIn posts, each consisting of a text section and an image. Three of these posts had identical content across participants. For the remaining seven posts we created two versions of the text section, depending on the experimental condition (see Table 1 for the experimental design). We designed these two versions to be highly similar (e.g., same wording; same picture; comparable length), only differing in the crucial aspect we aimed to manipulate (an organic vs. an inorganic growth strategy). We conducted several preliminary studies, to ensure that the dominant strategic answer was clearly evident for each post and to further validate that our posts looked like authentic LinkedIn posts. Therefore, we asked strategy experts (researchers within this field who hold a PhD) for feedback on the covered strategic answer. Only strategic answers which were unanimously assigned to the corresponding growth strategy, were used for the main experiment. Furthermore, we collected feedback from a student sample on the general authenticity of our stimuli. After multiple phases of testing, evaluations of both samples were highly positive („it looks like real LinkedIn posts"; „looks and reads exactly like my LinkedIn feed"; "feels like I am on LinkedIn myself").

3.3. Dependent variables

The main dependent variables were ratings for strategic answers and corresponding budget allocations. These measures were collected directly after participants had read through their LinkedIn feed. Participants rated four strategic actions for their fictitious company on a five-point scale, going from "very unlikely to adapt this strategy" to "very likely to adapt this strategy". Two of these strategic actions belonged to each superordinate strategic answer (i.e., "invest in your employees" and "invest in your factories" for an organic growth strategy; "acquire another company" and "invest in a joint venture" for an inorganic growth strategy). These actions were displayed in random order. We asked participants to rate specific actions, i.e. the strategic answers, instead of strategic approaches to increase external validity and prevent demand effects (similar to Chng et al., 2012). To further increase external validity, we not only measured explicit attitudes regarding different corporate strategies, but also concrete action intentions (Ajzen et al., 2018). To do so, participants received a fictitious budget of 100 million USD that they could allocate to the different strategic actions (similar to Chng et al., 2012; Reinhardt et al., 2024). Participants could freely decide how they split this sum between all four actions and how

[2] Please note that this hypothesis was preregistered as an additional exploratory analysis and will thus be investigated accordingly.

Table 1
Experimental factors.

Factor	Factor Type	Selection/Manipulation
Hierarchical Position of Posts' Authors	Between	High
		Low
Social Resonance of Posts	Between	High
		Low
Content Dominance	Within	High
		Low

much of the total sum they wanted to spend. We further randomized whether ratings or budgets were collected first. Moreover, we measured satisfaction with the status quo of participants' fictitious firm via ratings on a visual analog scale going from "Very unsatisfied" to "Very satisfied" (responses were scaled from 0 to 100). To capture the influence of social media exposure on this variable, we measured satisfaction before and after the fictitious LinkedIn feed was presented. The second satisfaction rating was collected directly after participants had read through the posts (before rating the strategic answers and allocating the budgets).

3.4. Experimental procedure

After reading the informed consent statement and agreeing to all experimental terms, we collected additional information for each participant to describe our sample: gender, age, nationality, industry, managerial level, experience with strategy work, and LinkedIn use. Next, participants were briefed that within the experiment they would act as the CEO of the fictitious automotive company "CAR". They received background information on this firm and on the strategic issues it has to tackle (see Appendix B). Participants were informed that they would lead a digital board meeting in a few minutes to determine CAR's future strategic options. To bridge the waiting time, they should read through their LinkedIn feed in order to assess current trends in the automotive industry. To create familiarity with the authors of the social media content, participants also received short descriptions of each person (see Appendix C). After this introduction phase, participants indicated their satisfaction with their firm's status quo, based on the provided information (see dependent variables). Then, each participant received a customized LinkedIn feed consisting of 10 posts and we measured but not limited the time participants required for reading through it. Finally, we collected all dependent variables (see dependent variables), debriefed all participants, and thanked them for their participation.

3.5. Social desirability and common method bias, manipulation and manipulation check

To address potential influences of social desirability, the informed consent statement explicitly stressed that responses would be anonymous and confidential. In addition, we ensured participants that there were no right or wrong answers to any question. To control for common method bias (Podsakoff et al., 2000, 2003), we captured managers' preference for strategic answers with multiple methods, using different scales and questions. We further varied the range of the anchors. For example, strategic actions were evaluated on a five-point Likert scale, and possible budgets for strategic actions ranged from 0 to 100.

At the end of the experiment, we asked participants which strategy the firms in their LinkedIn feed mainly used to adapt to the changing environment. They indicated their response on a visual slider, going from "Organic growth strategy" to "Inorganic growth strategy" (ratings were scaled from 0 to 100). This question served as a manipulation check and was further used to exclude participants from the analyses who did not pay sufficient attention to the social media feed.

3.6. Recruitment strategy and sample characteristics

We collected data of 200 managers by deliberately contacting LinkedIn users in managerial roles as well as persons from the professional network of the authors (as indicated by job titles such as Head of, Vice President, Director, Managing Director, CEO etc.). Due to the selectivity of this target group, data collection took from May to October 2022. As preregistered, 62 participants (31 %) were excluded as they did not pass the manipulation check (see above), i.e., indicated a rating below 50 when an inorganic growth strategy was dominantly presented or indicated a rating above 50 when an organic growth strategy was dominantly presented. We did not replace excluded datasets with new ones due to the high selectivity of the study population. Results for the whole sample (without data exclusions) are presented in the supplement. Our final sample consists of 138 managers (103 males, 35 females; age: $M = 40.5$ years, $SD = 10.6$ years, minimum of 26 years and maximum of 69 years). To ensure high external validity of our findings, we focused on recruiting experienced managers in high managerial positions. This is evident by an average time of experience with strategy work of 10.5 years ($SD = 8.4$ years, maximum of 35 years) within our sample. Furthermore, 70 % of our participants indicated a middle (36 %, $n = 49$) or high managerial position (34 %, $n = 47$). To further maximize external validity, we recruited a diverse sample from various industries and service lines (e.g., information technology: $n = 23$, consulting: $n = 22$, healthcare and pharma: $n = 14$, financial services: $n = 10$, automotive: $n = 9$, energy: $n = 5$). Participants indicated 22 different nationalities with Germany mentioned most often ($n = 88$). 87 % ($n = 120$) of the participants were active LinkedIn users.

3.7. Data analyses

Manipulation check: We calculated a two-tailed *t*-test for independent samples, comparing ratings for the manipulation check between participants who received social media content dominantly proposing an inorganic compared to an organic growth strategy. Please note that this analysis includes all participants, irrespective of their response to the manipulation check.

Hypotheses: To test H1, H2a, and H2b, we calculated two separate $2 \times 2 \times 2$ analyses of variance (ANOVAs) of average ratings and average budget allocation to one strategic answer. Dominance of posts' content (high vs. low) was used as a within-subject factor, while social resonance (high vs low) and hierarchical position of the posts' author (high vs low) were used as between-subject factors. Significant three-way interactions were followed by two separate ANOVAs for posts by authors of high and low hierarchical position and significant two-way interactions were further investigated by two-tailed *t*-tests. Conceptually similar results would have been obtained if instead calculating 2x2 ANOVAs of the difference between ratings/budget allocations for the dominant compared to the non-dominant growth strategy. As this kind of analysis would have required additional *t*-tests to investigate the effect of the dominance of the posts' content, we decided to instead calculate three-way ANOVAs, including all three relevant factors in one statistical test (dominance of posts' content, social resonance, hierarchical position of the posts' author).

Based on H1, we expected a significant main effect of the factor dominance of posts' content, with higher ratings and budget allocations for the dominant compared to the non-dominant growth strategy. Moreover, based on H2a and H2b, we proposed significant main effects of social resonance and the hierarchical position of the posts' author. For both hypotheses, this main effect should be reflected in higher ratings and budget allocations for the "high" compared to the "low" factor level. To test H3a, we conducted a two-tailed paired-samples *t*-test, comparing satisfaction ratings before and after social media exposure. To test H3b, we compared average budget allocations for dominantly compared to non-dominantly presented strategies between participants who reported reduced satisfaction after social media exposure and participants who reported equal or even higher satisfaction after social media exposure with a two-sided *t*-test. Finally, we calculated the Pearson correlation of changes in satisfaction (after social media exposure – before social media exposure) and the effect of content dominance on allocated budgets (dominantly presented strategy – non-dominantly presented strategy).

Additionally, we investigated whether the effect of social media exposure on strategic preferences is affected by individual characteristics. Therefore, we calculated a multiple linear regression of allocated budgets, using individual and demographical characteristics (gender, age, managerial level, experience with strategy work, LinkedIn use) as additional predictors next to content dominance. Furthermore, we calculated two *t*-tests comparing allocated budget differences of dominantly and non-dominantly presented strategic answers between high and medium as well as high and low managerial level.

4. Experimental results

The experiment results suggest that exposure to a particular strategic answer on LinkedIn significantly affect the amount of financial resources allocated to this strategic answer. On average, managerial participants allocated approximately 7.6 million US$ more (from a fictional budget of 100 million US$) to a strategic answer that was prominently featured in the LinkedIn feed. This suggests that LinkedIn exposure influences decision-makers' preferences for strategic answers. Second, neither the hierarchical rank of the post's author nor the number of likes significantly moderated this relationship. However, we observed that managers were particularly responsive to posts authored by individuals at lower hierarchical levels when those posts received high levels of social resonance (i.e., many likes and comments).

Several additional results are worth noting. Exposure to LinkedIn significantly reduced satisfaction with one's (fictitious) firm. This decrease of satisfaction, however, did not moderate participants' preferences for strategic answers and their dominant presentation in social media. Yet, descriptively, those participants who reported lower satisfaction after compared to before the social media exposure, invested on average even over 11 million US$ more into strategic answers dominantly presented on LinkedIn. Moreover, while not statistically significant (presumably due to the reduced sample size), the descriptive results indicate that top managers' strategic preferences are more strongly influenced by presented strategic information on LinkedIn. Top managers invested 18.5 million US$ more into strategic answers dominantly presented. A detailed presentation of hypothesis tests and statistical results follows below.

4.1. Manipulation check

Participants who received a majority of posts covering an inorganic compared to an organic growth strategy indicated significantly higher ratings for the manipulation check (inorganic group: $M = 75.42$, $SD = 22.03$; organic group: $M = 54.66$, $SD = 27.13$), $t(198) =$

Table 2
Average ratings (standard deviations in brackets) for each combination of content dominance (high vs low), hierarchical position (high vs low) and social resonance (high vs low).

Content Dominance	High Hierarchical Position		Low Hierarchical Position	
	High Social Resonance	Low Social Resonance	High Social Resonance	Low Social Resonance
High	3.56 (0.80)	3.74 (0.66)	4.21 (0.72)	3.78 (0.77)
Low	3.91 (1.06)	3.76 (0.89)	3.28 (0.92)	3.98 (0.75)

5.92, $p < .001$, $d = 0.84$. As higher ratings represent an inorganic strategic answer it can be assumed that the manipulation has been successful.

4.2. Hypothesis tests

Ratings. Table 2 shows average ratings for each combination of content dominance, hierarchical position of the author and social resonance of the post.

There were no main effects, $Fs < 1$, but the results revealed a two-way interaction of hierarchical position and content dominance, $F(1,134) = 5.90$, $p = .016$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.03$. As shown in Fig. 1, ratings for posts by authors of low hierarchical position, were significantly higher for the dominantly compared to the non-dominantly presented strategic answer, $t(64) = 2.40$, $p = .019$, $d = 0.30$ (95 % CI [0.05, 0.54]). In contrast, such an effect was not present for posts by authors of a high hierarchical position, $t(72) = 1.05$, $p = .296$, $d = 0.12$ (95 % CI [−0.11, 0.35]).

There was neither an interaction of the authors' hierarchical position and social resonance, $F < 1$, nor of content dominance and social resonance, $F(1,134) = 2.33$, $p = .129$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.01$. Crucially, there was a three-way interaction of all factors, $F(1,134) = 10.14$, $p = .002$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.05$. Fig. 2 shows that posts by authors of low hierarchical position yielded higher ratings for the dominantly compared to the non-dominantly presented strategy, $F(1,63) = 6.73$, $p = .012$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.07$, but ratings were not affected by social resonance of the posts, $F(1,63) = 1.44$, $p = .234$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.01$.

For authors of low hierarchical position, content dominance and social resonance interacted significantly, $F(1,63) = 12.03$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.11$. Posts with high social resonance led to higher ratings for the dominantly compared to the non-dominantly presented content, $t(35) = 4.09$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.68$ (95 % CI [0.32, 1.04]), while such an effect was not present for posts with low social resonance, $|t| < 1$. Meanwhile, for posts by authors of high hierarchical position neither a main effect nor the interaction effect was significant, $Fs \leq 1.11$, $ps \geq 0.296$, $\eta_p^2 \leq 0.01$. Overall, these results neither support Hypothesis 1 nor Hypothesis 2a or 2b.

Budget allocation. Table 3 shows average budget allocation for each combination of content dominance, hierarchical position of the author and social resonance.

Budgets allocated to strategic actions were significantly higher for the dominantly compared to the non-dominantly presented strategic answers (dominant: $M = 52.03$, $SD = 24.09$; non-dominant: $M = 44.40$, $SD = 23.07$), $F(1,134) = 4.27$, $p = .041$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.03$. Allocated budgets were not affected by hierarchical position of the posts' authors, $F < 1$, or social resonance of the posts, $F(1,134) = 1.47$, $p = .228$, $\eta_p^2 < 0.01$. There was neither an interaction of the authors' hierarchical position and social resonance, nor of content dominance and social resonance, or of hierarchical position and content dominance, $Fs \leq 2.36$, $p \geq .127$, $\eta_p^2 \leq 0.02$. However, all three factors interacted significantly (see Fig. 3), $F(1,134) = 4.20$, $p = .042$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.03$.

For posts by authors of low hierarchical position, allocated budgets were significantly higher for the dominantly compared to the non-dominantly presented strategy, $F(1,63) = 6.72$, $p = .012$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.08$, but budgets were not affected by social resonance of the posts, $F < 1$. Content dominance and social resonance interacted significantly, $F(1,63) = 4.16$, $p = .046$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.05$. For posts with high social resonance, allocated budgets were significantly higher for the dominantly compared to the non-dominantly presented content, $t(35) = 3.01$, $p = .005$, $d = 0.50$ (95 % CI [0.15, 0.85]), while such an effect was not present for posts with low social resonance, $t < 1$. Meanwhile, for posts by authors of high hierarchical position, all main effects and the interaction effect missed significance, $Fs \leq 3.32$, $ps \geq 0.073$, $\eta_p^2 s \leq 0.01$. Overall, these results provide support for Hypothesis 1 but do not support Hypothesis 2a and 2b.

Satisfaction with the status quo *of one's firm.* Satisfaction ratings were significantly lower after compared to before the social media content was presented (before: $M = 59.45$, $SD = 24.15$; after: $M = 49.90$, $SD = 21.11$), $t(137) = 4.74$, $p < .001$, $d_z = 0.40$ (95 % CI [0.23, 0.58]). This outcome provides support for Hypothesis 3a.

4.3. Exploratory analysis

Table 4 shows results of the multiple linear regression. Most importantly, no individual or demographic factor predicted allocated

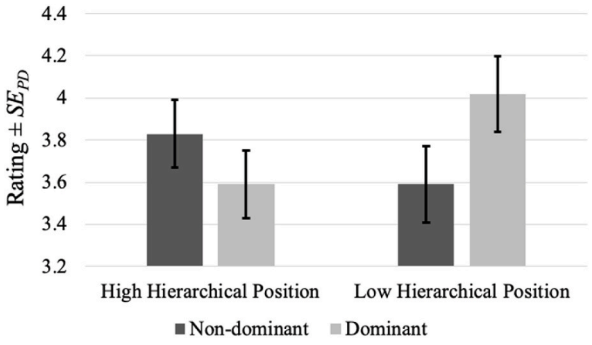

Fig. 1. Average ratings for each combination of content dominance and hierarchical position
Note. Error bars indicate standard errors of the paired differences (Pfister and Janczyk, 2013), calculated separately for each level of hierarchical position (high and low).

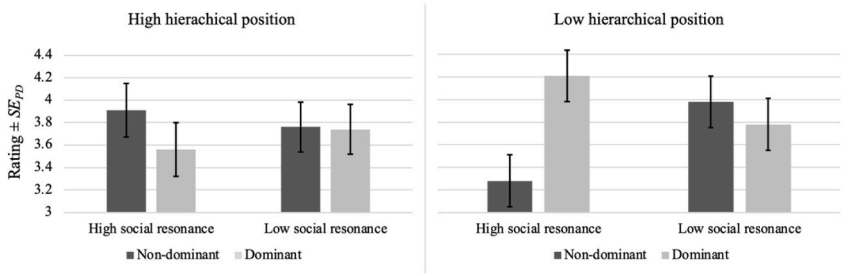

Fig. 2. Average ratings for each combination of content dominance, hierarchical position and social resonance
Note. Error bars indicate standard errors of the paired differences (Pfister and Janczyk, 2013), calculated separately for each level of social resonance (high and low).

Table 3
Average budget allocations (in million US$; standard deviations in brackets) for each combination of content dominance (high vs low), hierarchical position (high vs low) and social resonance (high vs low).

Content Dominance	High Hierarchical Position		Low Hierarchical Position	
	High Social Resonance	Low Social Resonance	High Social Resonance	Low Social Resonance
High	45.03 (24.68)	52.72 (22.14)	60.31 (26.14)	49.03 (21.11)
Low	47.50 (24.29)	46.79 (21.87)	36.53 (24.17)	47.31 (20.52)

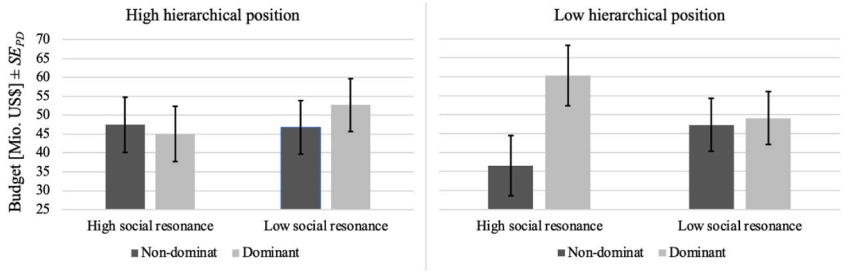

Fig. 3. Average budget allocations for each combination of content dominance, hierarchical position and social resonance
Note. Error bars indicate standard errors of the paired differences (Pfister and Janczyk, 2013), calculated separately for each level of social resonance (high and low).

budgets ($ps \geq 0.086$) but content dominance was still a significant predictor after including all other variables in the model, $b = 7.63$, $p = .008$.

Budget differences were descriptively higher for participants indicating a high managerial level ($M = 18.51$, $SD = 48.81$) compared to a middle ($M = 1.49$, $SD = 41.02$); $t(94) = 1.85$, $p = .067$, $d = 0.38$); or low managerial level ($M = 2.62$, $SD = 40.51$); $t(87) = 1.66$, $p = .101$, $d = 0.35$. For participants who reported lower satisfaction ratings after the social media exposure, we found descriptively, however statistically not significantly, higher budget differences between dominantly and non-dominantly presented strategic answers compared to participants who did not report reduced satisfaction ratings (reduced satisfaction: $M = 11.61$, $SD = 44.57$; equal or higher satisfaction: $M = 0.41$, $SD = 42.67$), $t(136) = 1.43$, $p = .154$, $d = 0.24$. Moreover, there was no correlation of differences in satisfaction

Table 4
Results from linear regression of allocated budgets.

Variable	β
Managerial level (low)	−1.82 (0.684)
Managerial level (middle)	−2.40 (0.534)
Experience with strategy work	0.38 (0.191)
Age	−0.35 (0.086)
Gender	−0.73 (0.841)
LinkedIn use	−2.88 (0.506)
Content dominance	7.63 (0.008)
Constant	58.54 (<0.001)
N	138

Note. p-values in parentheses are based on non-clustered *SE*s.

Table 5
Overview about conducted interviews.

Participant	Strategic Role	Industry	Firm Size	Age	Date
Manager 1	Senior Manager	Consulting	>10 000	30–39	Feb. 2024
Manager 2	CEO	Insurance	1001–5000	40–49	Jan. 2024
Manager 3	Managing Director	Automotive	>10 000	40–49	Feb. 2024
Manager 4	Head of Strategy	Steel	1001–5000	30–39	Feb. 2024
Manager 5	Senior Manager Communications	Digital Services	5001–10 000	30–39	Jan. 2024
Manager 6	Senior Project Leader	Automotive	>10 000	40–49	Feb. 2024
Manager 7	CEO	Steel	5001–10 000	50–59	Jan. 2024
Manager 8	Manager	Consulting	1001–5000	30–39	Jan. 2024
Manager 9	Director & General Manager	Business Services	101–250	30–39	Feb. 2024
Manager 10	Senior Research Manager	Semiconductor	>10 000	50–59	Jan. 2024
Manager 11	CFO	Digital Services	101–250	40–49	Mar. 2025
Manager 12	CEO Business Unit	Mechanical Engineering	501–1000	50–59	Mar. 2025
Manager 13	Head of Transformation	Digital Services	5001–10 000	40–49	Mar. 2025
Manager 14	Senior Advisor	Financial Services	501–1000	50–59	Mar. 2025
Manager 15	Vice President	Business Services	101–250	40–49	Mar. 2025
Manager 16	Senior Director	Consulting	>10 000	40–49	May 2025
Manager 17	Managing Director	Automotive	>10 000	40–49	Apr. 2025
Manager 18	Partner and Practice Leader	Consulting	>10 000	50–59	May 2025

(after social media exposure – before social media exposure) and allocated budgets (dominantly presented strategy – non-dominantly presented strategy), $r = -0.06$, $t < 1$. Overall, these results provide no support for Hypothesis 3b.

5. Qualitative interpretation and extension: insights from managerial interviews

To support the interpretation of our experimental results within real-world managerial contexts, we conducted a complementary qualitative interview study. This study aimed not only to provide validation for our experimental findings, but also to interpret and extend them by exploring how managers experience LinkedIn use in everyday managerial practice (see Molina-Azorin, 2012).

We conducted 18 semi-structured interviews with managers across different hierarchical levels, including CEOs and directors. The interviews lasted on average 50 min and explored when, how, why, and with which implications LinkedIn is used in professional settings. We applied purposeful sampling within the extended professional network of the research team to ensure variation in managerial role, age, and industry (see Table 5 for an overview). Interviews were conducted until they no longer yielded novel insights relevant to our research focus (Bouncken et al., 2025). All interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim.

We analyzed the interview data using a thematic coding approach, following a deductive–inductive strategy (Proudfoot, 2023): initial codes were informed by our experimental set-up and hypothesis (e.g., the influence of LinkedIn use on strategic preferences, H1), while remaining open to emergent themes that were not anticipated in the experimental design. The first author conducted the initial coding of all interview transcripts. This was followed by several rounds of discussion among the authors team to compare interpretations, refine the coding structure, and return to the data to test and consolidate emerging themes. Through this process, we identified a number of recurring key descriptive themes such as 'Using LinkedIn in "in-between" situations (e.g., toilet, train, waiting)', 'Perceived influence of LinkedIn on views and behavior' or 'Managers actively try to resist LinkedIn's influence through reflective use'. We then synthesized these descriptive themes into three overarching conceptual themes (Miles and Huberman, 2014) that capture how LinkedIn contributes to a material reconfiguration of situated managerial attention. Table 6 illustrates our coding logic and provides illustrative quotes that support each conceptual theme (ubiquity of communication channels, consequential expansion of attentional boundaries, and salience through emerging attention regulators). In the following section, we elaborate on these themes and show how they help interpret and extend our experimental findings.

5.1. Ubiquity of communication channels

Our interview data strongly suggest that LinkedIn is a ubiquitous communication channel, constantly capturing managers' attention in a wide range of everyday situations; "*from early to late, from getting up to going to bed* […]*, in every free moment*" as M1 put it pointedly (interviewed managers are referred to using the abbreviation "M" followed by the interview number). These situations include checking LinkedIn, for instance directly after breakfast as first task of the day, on the toilet, during lunch breaks, and—as reflected in our experimental design—within, before, and between meetings:

> I usually check it [LinkedIn] once in the morning, I'd say, I'm on it for about fifteen minutes then. Then again for about fifteen minutes around lunchtime, once more in the afternoon, and maybe again in the evening. So usually around 10–15 minutes each time. Mostly in the in-between times, between meetings and similar situations, when I can't really start a new task, but rather just think, okay, I've got 15 or 20 minutes now, so I scroll through it (M9).

Yet the ubiquity of LinkedIn in managers' daily work, does not imply that they always devote their full attention to its content. Managers repeatedly emphasized that they sometimes engage with LinkedIn content deliberately and attentively, but also habitually use the platform as a "*brief distraction*" without being deeply involved. As M17 put it, "*sometimes it is just skimming, and that can end with*

Table 6
Additional evidence for qualitative illustration and extension of the experimental results.

Conceptual themes	Key descriptive themes	Illustrative Quotes	Link to Experimental set-up
Ubiquity of communication channels	Checking LinkedIn at multiple times a day (e.g., morning, lunch, evening) Using LinkedIn in "in-between" situations (e.g., toilet, train, waiting) Alternating between attentive and inattentive use Addictive component of LinkedIn fosters constant use	*"Basically, whether I'm sitting on the train, on the bus, or just have two or 3 min without having something specific to do […] you naturally end up scrolling through the [LinkedIn] feed […] also before a meeting." (M5)* *"Consciously during free moments at the computer […] between meetings. In those cases, it's actually at the computer. Then there are push notifications that trigger it, while driving, during breakfast, while waiting. It is honestly one of those apps I always open briefly. Often just to see what the new updates are, or to get some content." (M17)* *"Sometimes it [LinkedIn] is definitely just a way to pass time, a gap filler, but at other times it's also an attentive engagement" (M7)* *"[Linkedin] is programmed for addiction […] what we feel there [constantly using it] are addictive triggers." (M13)*	Experimental design & Manipulation Check: The quotes illustrate that the experimental design realistically resembles managers situated daily use between two meetings. They also provide an explanation for the relatively high exclusion rate of the successful manipulation check.
Salience through emerging attention regulators	Hierarchical rank does not reliably guide attention The number of likes is largely ignored Social endorsements by respected peers guide attention Familiarity and repeated exposure build credibility and guide attention	*"I see it more like—somehow, I already know the people who post, the ones whose content I see. I generally do attribute competence to them, I would say. I'm not sure that I consciously look at it [hierarchical rank] that way. […] Of course, you see some people more often than others. And from that, a kind of profile probably emerges—like that person is the one with the higher title. But I don't think that really influences me so much. I would say it's more about how present they are."* (M15) *"You tend to get certain posts in your feed more because others have liked them, peers have liked them. So it's more like, when a colleague or someone I know thought it was good, that's more of a trigger point. Like, why did they think it was so good? But the number of likes? That's not really a trigger for me."* (M7)	H2a & H2b: The quotes suggest that the influence of LinkedIn content is not primarily shaped by hierarchical rank or the number of likes. Instead, attention is guided by emerging attention regulators on the platform such as sustained presence, perceived competence, familiarity, or social endorsements by trusted peers. This helps explain why Hypotheses 2a and 2b were not supported in our experiment.
Conceptual themes	**Key descriptive themes**	**Illustrative Quotes**	**Link to Experimental set-up**
Consequential expansion of attentional boundaries	Using LinkedIn enables attention to otherwise unnoticed strategic issues Perceived influence of LinkedIn on views and behavior Exposure to LinkedIn content creates dissatisfaction with status quo Managers actively try to resist LinkedIn's influence through reflective use	"*And on [LinkedIn], you of course see industry peers and competitors, and I like to or often take a look at what they're doing […] simply to do a bit of copy-paste as well.*" (M12) "*You have to, if you manage to be aware that you're currently being influenced by [LinkedIn], and that your decisions at work on a certain topic might be affected by it, then maybe you can counteract it and reconsider such influenced decisions.*" (M4) "*You do start to wonder a bit [if you scroll through LinkedIn]—like we just discussed, this positivity bias. You sometimes ask yourself: aren't others doing better things? Shouldn't I be doing better things too?*" (M8) *"It [LinkedIn use] also creates a bit of a distorted perception like: why aren't we doing that? And I hear that from colleagues too, who come to me and complain a bit, like: the competitors are all doing it, so why aren't we? But we offer that as well. It's often about promoting something, speaking publicly about a particular topic. And then it's like: everyone else is doing it, but we are not. Even though we are doing something—maybe not exactly on that one topic, but on five other topics."* (M15)	H1, H3a, & H3b The quotes illustrate that LinkedIn enables attention to strategic issues that might otherwise go unnoticed, and that this exposure influences managers. This finding is consistent with the confirmed Hypothesis 1. The interviews highlight one potential moderator thereof: LinkedIn use creates dissatisfaction with the status quo, in line with the supported Hypothesis 3a. However, the level of this dissatisfaction does not necessarily moderate the influence of social media exposure on following actions. Some managers reflect on their emotional responses and attempt to counteract LinkedIn's suggestive power, which helps explain why Hypothesis 3b was not supported.

me simply continuing to scroll without really attending to the content". Remarkably, many managers attributed the omnipresent use of LinkedIn to its strong "*addiction component*" (e.g., M1, M7, M13, M18). These insights also help to explain the relatively high exclusion rate in our experimental study based on our manipulation check.

5.2. Consequential expansion of attentional boundaries

The interview data show that LinkedIn usage expands the range of issues and strategic answers managers attend to, enabling them to identify emerging trends they might otherwise overlook:

> "LinkedIn is definitely a major part of how I form my opinions about, what is currently relevant in the market, who is doing what, where you can somehow access [new] information. For me, it's really a central information portal. And it's very multifaceted, about alliances, about all sorts of things." (M1)

The interviews further suggest that this situated attention allocation to LinkedIn content is consequential, aligning with our experimental results, which demonstrate that such exposure significantly affects managers' strategic preferences. Nearly all interviewees emphasized LinkedIn's strong influence. As M5 put it, "*So, in my view, anyone who says that it* [content on LinkedIn] *doesn't influence them is lying. Of course, it always influences you—consciously or unconsciously*". Several managers shared concrete examples of how LinkedIn posts had shaped their views on strategic matters within their industry:

> Electromobility was a topic I wasn't entirely sure about. I wondered whether it was really the ultimate solution to fighting CO_2 emissions, especially since producing electric vehicles also generates considerable CO_2. But then I came across posts from major automotive companies like Audi who shared content on sustainability. Those posts somehow eventually convinced me that it does make sense (M4).

Managers further highlighted that the consequentiality of attention to LinkedIn content often lies in the dissatisfaction it creates with the current situation (see supported hypothesis 3a)—triggered by what one manager described as an "*absolutely brutal comparison*" that could inform action:

> [A top managerial peer from a competitor] posted in January, 'Hey folks, announcement: in a month I'll be at the [prestigious industry] tech summit talking about AI.' Then I go back into our organization and ask: who from our side is at the tech summit? Why is no one from us speaking? Why don't we have a panel slot?" (M1)

Nevertheless, the level of this dissatisfaction did not necessarily affect following actions (see rejected hypothesis 3b). Some managers emphasized that they actively counteracted the platform's suggestive power by stepping back from their emotional reactions and engaging with the content more reflectively:

> There's this saying, right, the rolls from the other baker are always the better ones. You always like to look at others and at first think it's great, just because it looks different. […] And I think [on LinkedIn] one is often too quickly influenced, just because you see something different and immediately judge: that's better, we have to do that too. That's something you should not do. You should definitely compare, that's okay, as benchmarking I think that's important, but when it comes to jumping to conclusions [and do the same], I'm always careful. (M12)

5.3. Salience through emerging attention regulators

The interviews also reveal that not all LinkedIn content is equally influential. Rather, its impact depends on what we label *emerging attention regulators*, socially embedded cues on the platform that shape which content becomes more salient to managers. Interestingly, and in line with our experimental findings (see rejected hypothesis 2b), the number of likes played little or "*absolutely no role*" (e.g., M5) in shaping the impact of posts on managers' situated attention. What mattered more was whether a personally known or valued contact had liked a post:

> The number of likes doesn't matter to me. What does matter is when people I value like certain posts. That does motivate me to read the post or take a [closer] look at it. It gives the post a certain credibility (M17)

Similarly, hierarchical position does not consistently function as a regulator of attention (see rejected hypothesis 2b). While managers acknowledged that posts from high-status figures—such as "*CEOs from competitors*" or recognized "*authorities*"—often carry more weight than content from "*some self-declared coach sharing yet another life lesson, I usually skip that*" (M17), they also stressed that this influence was not primarily driven by formal rank. Instead, the influence of LinkedIn posts is shaped by regulators such as personal familiarity and perceived competence, formed through prior contact, reputation, or sustained presence on the platform.

> There are certain, let's say, high-ranking individuals […], respected based on reputation or my own appreciation whose posts naturally catch my attention. For example, in my network there's [a former colleague of him]. He was once at [his company], then on the supervisory board of [a DAX company]. Later he was CEO of his own start-up for a while […], let's say, outstanding individuals whom I simply find interesting, whose views I care about. (M15)

6. Discussion

6.1. Theoretical interpretation of findings: Social media and the material reconfiguration of situated attention

Social media are an omnipresent feature of our time that profoundly shapes our personal and professional life. Despite its importance and manifold corresponding calls (e.g., Brielmaier and Friesl, 2023; Ocasio et al., 2018; Ocasio et al., 2023; van Knippenberg et al., 2015), strategy research was reluctant to provide insights into how social media influences strategic decision-makers. More broadly, McFarland and Ployhart (2015, p. 1653) note that "social media is a relatively unexamined type of context that may affect the cognition, affect, and behavior of individuals within organizations"—a statement that still holds largely true today. Responding to these calls, we combine experimental evidence with qualitative insights into everyday managerial practice. This allows to theorize a fundamental phenomenon of our time: the material reconfiguration of situated managerial attention. This concept captures how social media platforms like LinkedIn reshape what managers attend to, when they do so, and which signals gain strategic relevance. We identify three features that drive this reconfiguration: the ubiquity of communication channels, the consequential expansion of attentional boundaries, and the salience through emerging attention regulators.

Ubiquity of communication channels: The availability of information is a crucial antecedent of the situated allocation of attention toward particular issues and answers (Ocasio, 1997). Communication channels form the conduit through which such information is distributed across actors. Yet, the distribution of (and the exposure to) information in turn depends on the extent that actors participate in these communication channels (Joseph and Ocasio, 2012; Plotnikova et al., 2024). Our findings highlight the growing importance of LinkedIn as a meaningful and omnipresent external communication channel through which issues and answers gain visibility and become subject to situated attention allocation. LinkedIn differs from traditional channels such as strategy meetings or the business news. It is constantly available, ready-to-hand, and often used habitually. It has become a taken-for-granted way of attending to information. We conceptualize this as the 'ubiquity of communication channels', a crucial, yet so far largely overlooked, material feature reconfiguring situated attention allocation in today's organizations (see Ocasio et al., 2023).

Consequential expansion of attentional boundaries: A core argument of the ABV is that organizations control managerial attention by channeling actors toward a limited set of issues and answers in particular situations (Brielmaier and Friesl, 2023; Ocasio, 1997). Our qualitative findings illustrate that LinkedIn does not only constitute a ubiquitous communication channel but it also expands the situational boundaries of attention. Specifically, it exposes managers to a broad range of environmental cues (like competitor announcements or emerging trends), outside an organization's attention structures, that would otherwise remain unnoticed. This expansion is consequential: As demonstrated in our experiment and supported by the interviews, exposure to such content can influence managers' strategic preferences. Our quantitative and qualitative data further suggest that this expansion carries an affective dimension, directing attention toward perceived shortcomings, triggering dissatisfaction with the status quo. However, the level of this dissatisfaction does not necessarily affect the influence of social media exposure on strategic actions. Managers may counterbalance their initial emotional reaction through critical reflection, suggesting that they establish their own form of attentional control in a space where organizational control is limited.

Salience through emerging attention regulators: According to the ABV, attention allocation to particular issues and answers is governed by attention structures, the key players, rules of the game etc. that shape what is considered important (Ocasio, 1997; Ocasio and Joseph, 2008). As we have argued above, LinkedIn functions as a ubiquitous communication channel that expands the boundaries of managerial attention beyond the organization's attention structures and control (see Ocasio et al., 2023). Yet, this material reconfiguration of situated attention does not imply an absence of regulation; rather, it may introduce new forms of it. Our findings suggest managers' attention on social media is governed by distinct, emerging attention regulators that are inherently tied to the platform's social dynamics. Amid the constant stream of content, not all posts are equally influential. Our experimental results show that this influence is not explained by the author's hierarchical rank or the number of likes. The interviews, however, indicate that attention and influence are shaped by familiarity, perceived competence, and reputation, often built over time through prior interactions or consistent visibility on the platform. We conceptualize this as 'salience through emerging attention regulators'; social media platforms like LinkedIn generate their own rules of which issues and answers gain relevance and thereby ultimately influence managers' situated attention.

6.2. Theoretical contributions

As Ocasio (2025, p. 6) recently emphasized, situated attention is "the most novel insight of the attention-based view, even if it has perhaps been the one least empirically studied". In this paper, we empirically explore and theorize how exposure to LinkedIn shapes the situated attention and strategic preferences of decision makers in organizations. Our core theoretical insight is that social media platforms, specifically LinkedIn, reconfigure the materiality of situated attention. By advancing the foundational yet still underdeveloped notion of situated attention (Brielmaier and Friesl, 2023), we make two broader contributions to the ABV.

First, we contribute to the ABV by theorizing the ubiquity of social media as a consequential material condition that reconfigures the situatedness of managerial attention. In a recent review, Brielmaier and Friesl (2023) argue that strategy research has yet to adequately account for how specific material cues influence managers' situated attention allocation. We address this gap by conceptualizing LinkedIn as a 'ubiquitous communication channel' that persistently captures managerial attention through its content across a wide variety of situations. Our findings suggest that exposure to these material cues is not bound to specific settings but appears constantly: during commutes, between and during meetings, or in routine breaks. This omnipresence calls for rethinking what "situatedness" means in the digital 'post-Chandlerian era' (Ocasio et al., 2023). Traditionally, the ABV conceptualizes attention as

situated in particular settings, shaped by a distinct materiality (e.g., Brielmaier and Friesl, 2023; Ocasio, 1997; Joseph and Ocasio, 2012). Our findings imply that social media alters this meaning of situatedness: rather than being tied to a particular setting, attention to LinkedIn posts is continuously attracted and subtly permeates diverse organizational situations. Our qualitative findings suggest that LinkedIn use carries an addictive quality, to which top managers are not immune. Such LinkedIn use is consequential. Through our experimental results, we show that even brief exposure to LinkedIn posts may come with severe yet potentially unintended consequences, making certain issues and answers salient and thereby affecting managers' strategic preferences. These effects were particularly pronounced for top managers, preparing the ground for their critical impact on the firm-level. Our study thus indicates that it may be the seemingly negligible material features of managerial life (such as a single LinkedIn post seen before a board meeting) that direct attention towards a particular issue or answer (cf., Ocasio, 2025; Ross and Nisbett, 1991). Our study also highlights an affective moderator thereof: Exposure to LinkedIn content leads to dissatisfaction with one's firm by directing attention to competitors' activities and achievements, as we demonstrate in the experiment as well as indicated by the interview data. While the level of this dissatisfaction does not seem to affect the influence of social media content on strategic preferences, it may still trigger managers to envisage new strategic activities in order to resolve this dissatisfaction (Cyert & March 1963; Rhee et al., 2019). Notably, our interviews indicate that managers are not unaware of these dynamics. Many expressed concerns about LinkedIn's influence and described deliberate efforts to remain reflective and even restrictive in their consumption; in other words, to mitigate the effects of LinkedIn's ubiquity on their attention allocation and its consequences. A promising avenue for future research lies in examining the practices through which managers regulate their situated attention to social media content and the broader strategic implications of these practices.

Second, we contribute to the ABV by demonstrating how social media, as an external communication channel, reconfigures situated attention by exposing the limits of organizational attentional control. The key argument of the ABV is that strategic behavior depends on situated attention to issues and answers, and that such attention is regulated through communication channels embedded in organizational attention structures (Brielmaier and Friesl, 2023; Ocasio, 1997). These channels are viewed as instruments of attentional control, "set up by the firm to induce organizational decision-makers to action on a selected set of issues" (Ocasio, 1997, p. 194; Ocasio et al., 2018). Accordingly, ABV research has predominantly focused on internal communication channels, such as meetings or administrative protocols that guide situated attention in alignment with organizational priorities (e.g., Joseph and Ocasio, 2012; Ocasio and Joseph, 2008; Joseph and Wilson, 2018). Reflecting this focus, Ocasio (2025) has recently explicitly described the ABV as a theory of "attentional control." Our study extends this perspective by showing that organizational attentional control has clear limits and thus calls for a broader rethinking of what attentional control and regulation means today (Ocasio et al., 2023). Platforms outside an organization like LinkedIn function as powerful communication channels, continuously surfacing issues and answers that expand managers' attentional boundaries beyond the firm's formal attention structures and thus outside its control. This is evident in our interview data, which show that LinkedIn is widely perceived as a legitimate and informative channel for strategic decision-making. Thus, in an environment where external communication channels continuously shape managers situated attention, internal mechanisms of attentional control become less effective or require new design principles (see Stanko and Beckman, 2015). Importantly, however, this does not imply an absence of attentional control. Our combined experimental and qualitative findings demonstrate that neither hierarchical rank nor the number of likes reliably regulate attention on social media. Instead, our qualitative evidence suggests that new regulators emerge through managers' engagement with the platform, including, for instance, accumulated reputation. In other words, LinkedIn introduces its own rules of salience that reconfigure which issues and answers capture managerial attention. Thinking further along these lines raises broader concerns about organizational control over attention (Ocasio, 2025), especially regarding the underlying algorithms influencing which content LinkedIn users see in their feed. This aspect becomes even more important in light of algorithmically curated content that may expose managers to misinformation, fake news, or manipulation and thus represents a critical avenue for future research.

7. Limitations

As with any study, our work is subject to limitations that also open avenues for future research. In particular two aspects merit closer consideration. The first limitation pertains to the generalizability of our findings to real world strategic decision-making. Our experimental approach allowed us to gather clear-cut evidence for a causal influence of social media information on strategic preferences. That is: Our results substantiate the theoretical claim that social media exposure can indeed exert profound effects on strategic preferences in managerial contexts. What our results do not allow is to assess the extent of this influence in real-world decision making. Real-world decisions are more meaningful by definition, because actual firm-level outcomes are at stake (Bolinger et al., 2022; Di Stefano and Gutierrez, 2019). Also, social media exposure does not always occur in the information space that is relevant for strategic decisions, for instance in terms of social media exposure on a manager's phone while issuing a decision in direct, verbal communication later on. Follow-up work is required to tackle these issues. Such extensions can build upon the novel experimental protocol and the empirical foundations that are developed by this study. A second limitation of our experimental approach lies in the use of fictitious

posts by fictitious authors. Although we attempted to simulate a sense of familiarity between participants and the authors (see Appendix C), this naturally falls short of real-world dynamics. Social media in general, and LinkedIn in particular, come with important network characteristics as social media consumers often maintain a personal or professional relationship with the authors of posts. Close network ties may enhance the credibility, relevance, and impact of social media information, as also emphasized by the interview data. The findings from our experimental approach thus likely represent a conservative estimate of the true impact of social media on strategic preferences, that is likely boosted if this information originates from trusted sources within a manager's network. Thus, while challenging to manipulate experimentally, investigating how network proximity shapes the attentional and behavioral effects of social media in strategy-making offers a promising avenue for future research.

8. Conclusion

Social media platforms like LinkedIn are omnipresent, permeating organizational situations and thereby constituting an integral part of the context that shapes managerial attention and preferences. Our experimental design mirrors a common scenario in organizations where managers scroll through their social media feed, filling the time before their next meeting or distract themselves from their work duties. Through our quantitative and qualitative findings, we showcase that LinkedIn is a ubiquitous feature of managerial work, expanding the scope of attention allocation, and that even short exposure to posts can have a severe effect on strategic preferences. The implications are clear: social media occupy a seat at the table of strategic decision-makers. In doing so, we contribute to the understanding of how LinkedIn shapes managers' situated attention allocation and how this affects the prioritization of strategic issues and answers. Our findings have theoretical implications on the effects of social media as external communication channels. In particular, they reveal how porous organizational boundaries have become in the digital era, as external channels increasingly shape situated attention in ways that exceed firms' internal mechanisms of attentional control. Furthermore, the effect of social media on situated attention and strategic preferences promises new insights into the dynamics but also performance implications of strategic decisions. One such domain is mergers and acquisitions, where imitation tendencies may be amplified through social media exposure. This matters because, as prior research shows, acquisition performance is higher for early movers and lowest at the peak of an acquisition wave (e.g., Andonova et al., 2013; McNamara et al., 2008). Our results also speak directly to managerial practice. Strategic decision-makers must be aware of the subtle influence exerted through LinkedIn and most likely other social media platforms. As highlighted in our interviews, some managers reported developing a reflective and cautious approach to consuming LinkedIn content, recognizing its persuasive power and actively working to control its influence by themselves.

Social media matter, it is about time that strategy research fully appreciates the profound effects of social media on managers and their situated attention and seeks to understand how this effect scales up to observable strategic outcomes.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Christoph Brielmaier: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Visualization, Validation, Supervision, Software, Resources, Project administration, Methodology, Investigation, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Moritz Reis:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Visualization, Validation, Software, Resources, Methodology, Investigation, Funding acquisition, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Martin Friesl:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Supervision, Funding acquisition, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Roland Pfister:** Writing – review & editing, Supervision, Software, Methodology, Formal analysis, Conceptualization.

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Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lrp.2025.102586.

Appendix A

The following figures (Figs. 1a–8a) present eight versions of a social media post in order to illustrate the different experimental conditions (organic or inorganic strategy, author high or low in a firm's hierarchy, high or low social resonance). We further randomized for each post whether the author of the post had a rather male ("Max H.") or rather female ("Anna L.") name and whether the company of the post's author was called "Alpha Automotive" or "Beta Automotive".

Fig. 1a. Social media post authored by a CEO with high social resonance and about an inorganic strategy.

Fig. 2a. Social media post authored by a CEO with low social resonance and about an inorganic strategy.

Fig. 3. Social media post authored by a junior engineer with high social resonance and about an inorganic strategy.

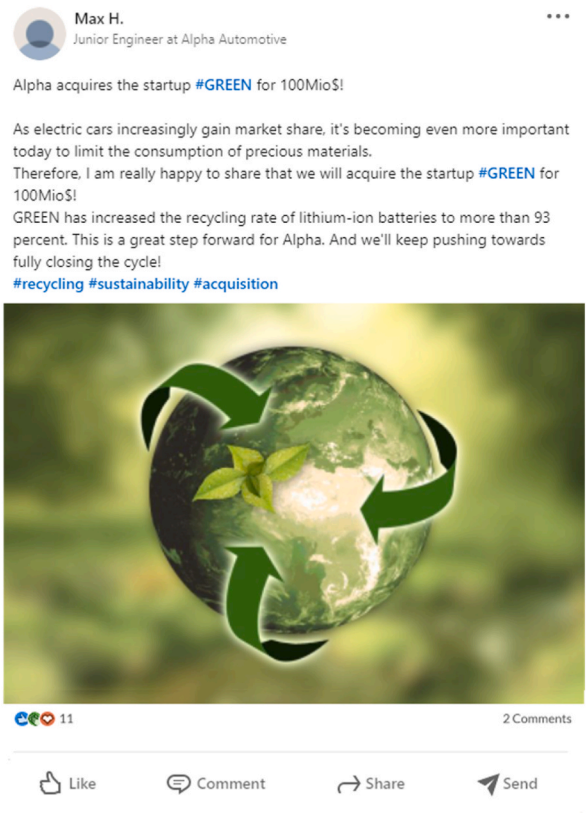

Fig. 4a. Social media post authored by a junior engineer with low social resonance and about an inorganic strategy.

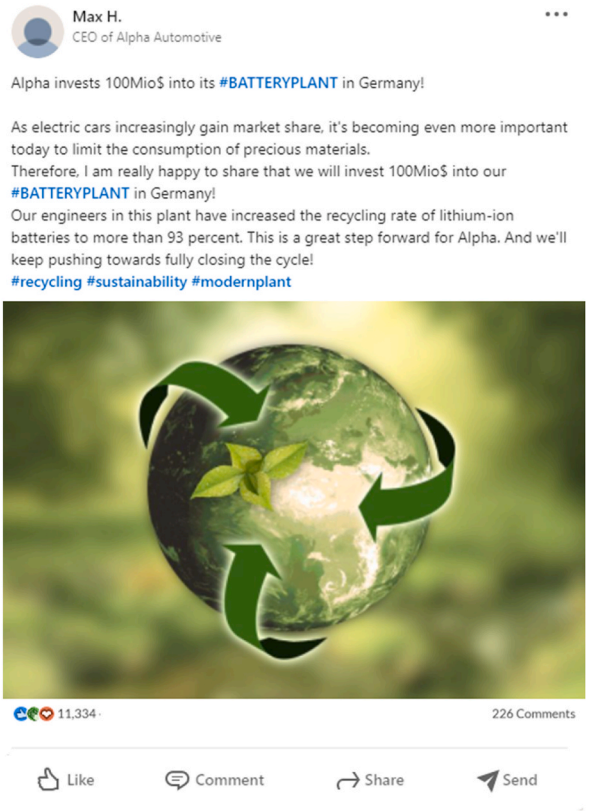

Fig. 5a. Social media post authored by a CEO with high social resonance and about an organic strategy.

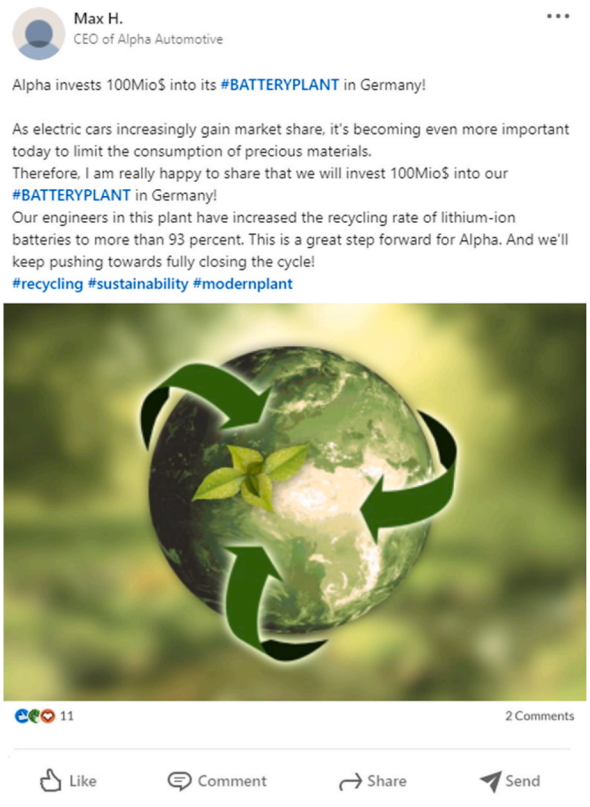

Fig. 6a. Social media post authored by a CEO with low social resonance and about an organic strategy.

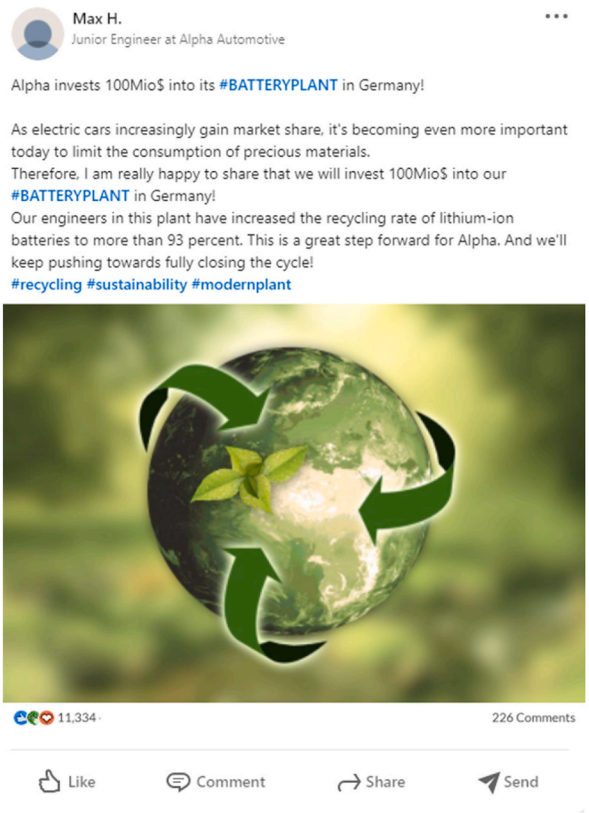

Fig. 7a. Social media post authored by a junior engineer with high social resonance and about an organic strategy.

Fig. 8a. Social media post authored by a junior engineer, with low social resonance and about an organic strategy.

Appendix B

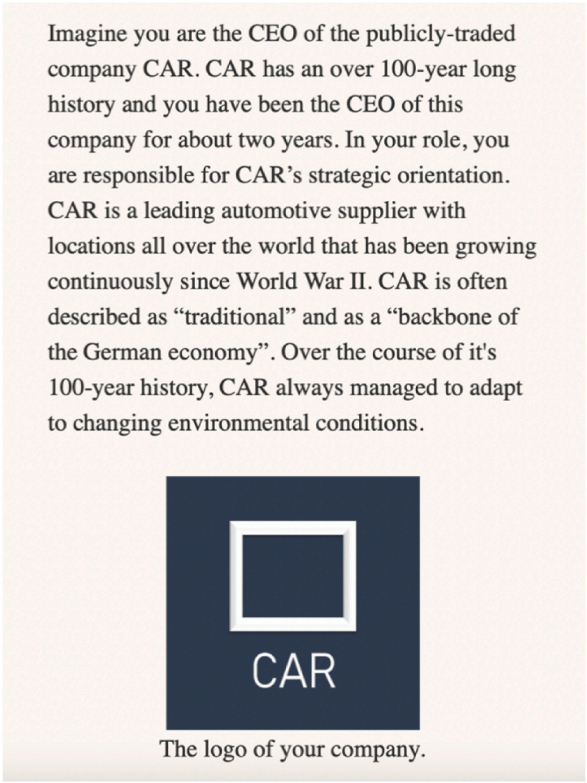

Fig. 1b. Description of participants' role and background information on their fictitious company.

Appendix C

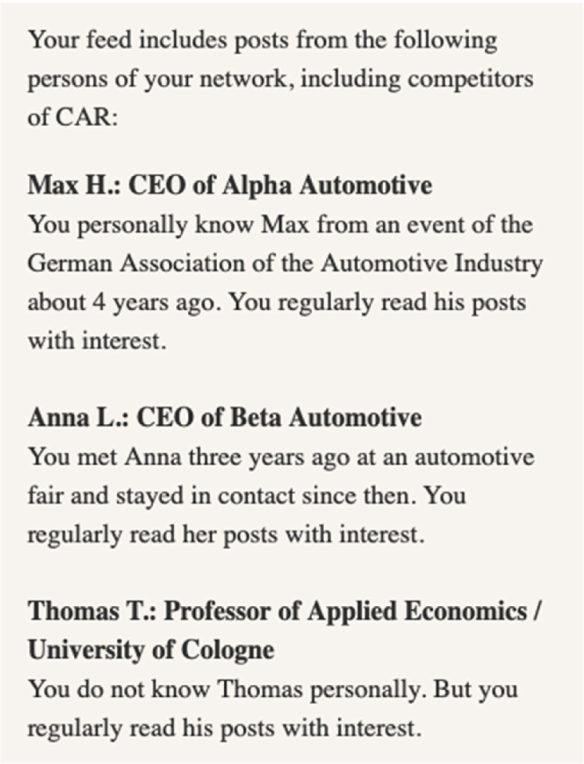

Fig. 1c. Exemplary descriptions of the authors of the social media posts.

Data availability

All experimental data is shared. Also the study is preregistered. The interview data cannot be shared due to data protection.

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