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Master Thesis

Social media use and belongingness:

How is following leaders and colleagues on social media related to employees' feeling of belongingness to the organization?

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Donatella De Paoli

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Abstract

Humans are perceived to be strongly dependent on the group members (Over, 2016), and psychology scholars state that humans have a fundamental need to be socially connected to others (Maslow, 1968). Further, the research on belongingness provides evidence that humans have a fundamental need to belong and a motivation to fulfil this need (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Nonetheless, there is a lack of research and literature on the sense of belongingness concerning organizational employees in particular.

In this study, we investigate whether there is a relationship between following leaders or colleagues on social media and employees' feeling of belongingness to the organization, as well as what factors could have moderating effects on the relationship. We propose six models that guide our research, and to explore the relationships we use data collected from an online survey with 69 participants. The participants work in a well-known Norwegian food-producing company where the CEO is known to be active on social media. The data analysis shows that the relationship between following leaders on social media and employees' feeling of belongingness to the company is non-significant. Likewise, the data analysis shows that the moderating effects are not significant either.

However, two of the propositions are partially supported by the data, and the descriptive analysis has led to important findings being established. The study contributes to the gap in the current literature by exploring how following colleagues on social media can be a predictor of employees' feeling of belongingness to the workplace, that has not been previously examined. Furthermore, our findings suggest that the number of colleagues followed on social media is positively associated with employees' feeling of belongingness. Moreover, the study highlights the importance of having an active official company's social media profile and promoting it among employees, since following it is positively correlated with following colleagues on social media, which relevance and importance are described in the paper. Ultimately, practical implications, limitations and suggestions for future research are discussed.

1.0 Introduction

Humans are commonly perceived to be among the most social creatures we know of, and it is acknowledged that we are deeply dependent on our group members on many different levels (Over, 2016). We live together, work together, sleep together (Leary, Kelly, Cottrell & Schreindorfer, 2013), and the concept of belongingness has a long history in social psychology research. Psychology theorists from Freud to Maslow have long proposed that humans have a fundamental need to be socially connected to others, and one can find belongingness in the middle of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (Maslow, 1968). Also, Baumeister and Leary (1995) have also developed a belongingness theory, proposing that the desire for interpersonal attachments – the need to belong – is a fundamental human motivation. They argue that this essential need is an intrinsic desire, thus, nearly universal among human beings. The empirical literature on belongingness provides evidence that humans have a fundamental need to belong and are motivated to fulfil this need (Baumeister & Leary, 1995).

As initially mentioned, there is a large amount of research on our intrinsic desire to belong. However, research and literature are scarce on the sense of belongingness concerning organizational employees in particular. In addition, there is next to no research on how social media use by leaders might influence this feeling of belonging. Most of the studies are on students and children (Liu & Guo, 2015) and not in relation to employees' feeling of belongingness to the workplace or organization itself. However, people nearly always seek interpersonal connections, regardless of the context, meaning that employees also will try to belong at their workplace and to enhance their sense of belongingness (Green, Gino, & Staats, 2017).

"The cell phone has become the adult's transitional object, replacing the toddler's teddy bear for comfort and a sense of belonging" – Margaret Heffernan (2013)

Also, during the last couple of decades, the use of technology has increased drastically, and the quote by Margaret Heffernan is becoming more relevant every day. We live in a global world where technology is changing the manner of business, which also includes how and where we work, how we interact and how

we communicate (Cascio & Montealegre, 2016). These changes in ways to interact especially apply to younger people, such as Generation Z or Digital Natives, who were born in the late 1990s and had access to the Internet since childhood (Prensky, 2001; Colbert, Yee, & George, 2016). They are used to applying digital means to connect on a personal level in their everyday life and build relations online. People use digital communication to talk to friends and family, interact with colleagues or keep in touch with old friends, and these types of communication platforms are more commonly known as social media. We hang on to our phones like transitional objects, and today, social media provides us with interpersonal communication, where "being social" is the aim (MacRury & Yates, 2016).

In light of previous research on human motivation and belongingness, we argue that the need to belong is the key motivator for people to use these types of digital communication. This motivation makes us further wonder how the use of social media can enhance belongingness at work. Also, we want to bring the ongoing situation, the COVID-19 pandemic, to light. The pandemic outbreak has had multiple severe consequences worldwide (World Health Organization, 2020). It has, among other ramifications, forced all of Norway to turn upside down on the ways we work and socially interact. Organizations have had to apply new methods of doing their regular business, and up until today, it is unsure how long this situation will last, and how severe the total ramifications will be for society. Nevertheless, the pandemic presents a context where it may be even more relevant to make the employees feel a sense of belonging to their workplace through the use of social media, particularly because we do not know how long this will last. Belongingness is not just a psychological need. It can also be helpful for better workplace performance (Baumeister & Leary, 1995), and in a period like this, it can be crucial for an organization. Especially since research examining the identity formation of remote workers proposes that extreme isolation can disrupt the employees' ability to see themselves as a part of the organization (Bartel et al., 2007; Bartel, Wrzesniewski, & Wiesenfeld, 2012). This social isolation tends to reduce individuals' motivation to act in favour of other in-group members (Twenge et al., 2007), disrupting work performance.

1.1 Research Question

Research shows that especially younger generations naturally expect top executives to use social media to communicate (Zynk Communication and Leadership AS, 2017). For example, Generation Z has grown up with the Internet and social media providing them with fast access to information. This rapid access to information also creates an expectation of transparency and visibility (Zynk Communication and Leadership AS, 2017). This expectation is particularly relevant in Norway, where press freedom ranks as the best in the world (World Press Freedom Index, 2020), and among Norwegians. Norwegians rank as one of the most active social media-nations per capita in the world based on the use in per cent of the population. However, Norwegian top executives have not logged on to social media yet (Zynk Communication and Leadership AS, 2017), which again highlights the importance and relevance of our research.

Based on the research gap identified earlier in the introduction and the context just presented, we want to explore the following research question:

"How is following leaders or colleagues on social media related to employees' feeling of belongingness to the organization?".

We believe that leaders frequently function as role models and that colleagues often can be perceived as the creators of belongingness due to the humans' intrinsic need to belong to the people around them. Thus, our research aims to add unique insights by exploring the relationship between employees following their leaders or colleagues on social media and their feeling of belongingness to the workplace. We seek to use what is currently known about belongingness, social media and leadership and apply this knowledge to the current context of business where one is increasingly concerned with digitalization. We also aim to investigate whether there is a need for a new leadership role at the workplace – a digital influencer – and if there is, how it may influence employees' feeling of belongingness to the workplace.

Due to the nature of our research question, we use quantitative research methods. Our initial aim is to explore the concept of employees' belongingness and how this relates to the use of social media by leaders and colleagues, and the possible

moderating factors of these relationships. Thus, quantitative research is suitable (Sukamolson, 2007). Bryman and Bell (2011) define quantitative research as a type of research that attempts to search for social phenomena and the relationships between them, which reflects the aim of our study.

Further, we use a descriptive research design, since the general purpose of descriptive research is to provide a clear image of a phenomenon as it naturally occurs, to describe and explain (Bickman & Rog, 2008), with no endeavour made to change behaviour or conditions (Hopkins, 2000). The data is collected through an online survey among the employees of the well-known Norwegian food producing company. The company is chosen to be part of this investigation because all the employees work under a CEO who is known for the active use of social media, which is an important condition needed for our research.

1.2 Relevance of the Research

The topic of the current research is highly up-to-date since younger generations, such as Generation Z, are becoming adults and are actively entering the workforce in 2020 (De Meuse, & Mlodzik, 2010). Their expectations of ways to communicate and how to establish an emotional connection presumably differ from older generations (Meister & Willyerd, 2010). This might require managers to adapt, become digital influencers for their followers and use this modern channel of belongingness facilitation in order to retain young employees.

Furthermore, the current pandemic situation, COVID-19, increases the importance of investigating whether the use of social media can be utilized as a tool for creating and facilitating the feeling of belongingness that can affect employees. Research, which will be presented in detail in the following chapter, provides evidence that the feeling of belongingness is crucial for employees' social, physical and emotional well-being. It is also shown to be crucial for self-motivation, mental health, job satisfaction, in addition to organizational citizenship behaviour, initiative and responsibility at work, and helping and unprejudiced behaviour towards managers. If a personal attachment to the workplace in the modern world we live in could be established through digital communication, it would be important for the companies to reconsider their attitudes towards the use of social media among colleagues, as well as would highlight that the leaders have to accept

the blurring of boundaries between home and office and use this channel of belongingness creation and facilitation.

If the analysis of our collected data supports our initial beliefs, it could, in essence, be of high importance and relevance for many companies, since top- and linear managers would have evidence that being active on social media and posting both personal and professional content, may be beneficial for them, especially if they rarely have real-life contact with their employees on a daily basis.

2.0 Literature Review

In the following chapter, we will present a literature review related to the research topic. The aim is to examine the present key concepts and research on the topics we find relevant before doing quantitative research and analysis. Firstly, we consider the current theory on digital communication and social media, where we introduce key concepts such as Digital Natives, Generation Z and digital influencers. Further, we examine the concept of belongingness, how it is related to work and why it is essential at the workplace. Ultimately, we investigate the concept of leadership and elaborate on some of the previous research on the topic. We introduce a key concept, authentic leadership, and examine it in light of the increased use of digital communication tools and social media. Based on the literature review, we have included six propositions that will further guide the analysis in our paper.

2.1 Digital Communication and Social Media

In this context, it is crucial to highlight that in 2020, Digital Natives and Generation Z employees are actively entering the workforce. Employers need to adjust to the unprecedented challenge of having five generations of staffers working together (Meister & Willyerd, 2010). One considers that the projected percentage of Generation Z employees at the workplace will be around 25% in 2030, and almost half of the workforce in 2040 (De Meuse, & Mlodzik, 2010). This percentage may require changes in leadership styles, -roles and -behaviours to be able to manage employees with vastly different interests, life experiences, new generational perceptions of leadership and demand of internal and external online connections (Meister & Willyerd, 2010).

2.1.1 Digital Natives and Generation Z

The literature considers Digital Natives to be "native speakers" of the digital language of computers, video games and the Internet (Prensky, 2001). They are the ones who were born with access to technology and now never fully "unplug" (Colbert, Yee, & George, 2016). Generation Z, in its turn, are people born in the late 1990s (De Meuse, & Mlodzik, 2010), and therefore, may be considered to be Digital Natives as well. Thus, we combine these two groups and further write about the new generation of young people who cannot imagine their life without smartphones, the Internet and social media.

The young generation coming to the workplace today does not want to work for the company just because of its brand or salary. They want to be amazed every day, they look for an emotional connection to the job, and that connection may be of a different type from what the leaders are aware of, due to some generational differences (Tapscott, 2008). Now, 99% of children from 12 to 15 years old go online for no less than 20 hours per week (Smart Insights, 2020). More than 25% of teenagers reach their smartphones within the first 5 minutes of waking up (Colbert, Yee, & George, 2016), and social media such as Instagram and YouTube are of high popularity. Thus, digital influencers play a significant role online. Digital influencers are people "who have established credibility online and who share their opinions and experiences with a large audience" (Adams, & Reichbach, 2016, p. 14) or people who possess an "ability to cause effect, change behaviour, and drive measurable outcomes online" (Solis, & Webber, 2012, p. 8). Thus, following many of such influencers online, the young generations coming to the workplace nowadays might expect their job leaders to be such digital influencers as well, just in the organizational context.

Also, we interviewed the vice president of global employer branding, recruitment and talent management in a big FMCG company on the 02.05.2019. During the interview, she stated that "companies want to appeal to the younger employees, but face challenges since younger generations get motivated by other factors than the older ones" (Anonymous, 2019). Moreover, "the way leaders are trying to motivate the younger generations nowadays seems not to be enough. They need an emotional commitment to their job, and leaders will have to learn new ways of communication in order to attract and retain human capital" (Anonymous, 2019). Meister and

Willyerd (2010) suppose that senior executives have to master new communication tools to use with their employees since social media and networks are the main ways employees communicate, connect and collaborate. Notably, Leftheriotis and Giannakos (2014) provide evidence that age has an insignificant impact on the use of social media for work, meaning that during the last few years, social media and novel types of communication started being perceived as relevant and useful by older employees as well. Prensky (2001) also highlights that adults, or "Digital Immigrants", are quickly adopting technology since it became available, but do not typically succeed in that at the same level as Digital Natives do, since the latter learn everything about technology right from the beginning of their lives.

In addition, collaboration, speed and transparency became important aspects of the younger generations' lives. They want to feel that they have an opportunity to share their opinion, do it quickly and be sure that it is heard (Tapscott, 2008). Social media provides them with such opportunities and can be a voice channel (Lam, 2016). For example, they can comment on the post of their manager or CEO or even send a direct message, which decreases the feeling of hierarchy and makes the top-management reachable for the employees. Importantly, those managers should not be afraid of showing their private life (in the adequate frames of content) to colleagues through social media. Batenburg and Bartels (2017) provide evidence that integrating personal and professional audiences on Facebook produces higher levels of likability than segmenting different audiences.

Furthermore, Korzynski (2015) states that employee engagement is positively related to the time leaders spend on online networking platforms. The author suggests that the next generation of leaders should pay increasing attention to online social networking platforms to be more effective in prospering employees' social and emotional well-being. Moreover, there is empirical evidence that job satisfaction is positively related to time spent interacting with co-workers on Facebook (Robertson & Kee, 2017). Robertson and Kee (2017) suggest that social media such as Facebook can be an organizational strategy to promote job satisfaction at work. Despite this, plenty of current business sources provide evidence that CEOs who are not being active on social media put their businesses at risk (e.g., Forbes, 2018; Business Insider, 2019; CNBC, 2019).

2.2 Belongingness

There are multiple definitions of what belonging and belongingness are. Baumeister and Leary (1995) state that the sense of belonging is the feeling of being cared for by others and the feeling that others are interested in your well-being. They describe the need to belong as a fundamental human motivation. Further, the sense of belonging has also been defined as an experience of personal involvement in a system or environment, making a person feel like an important part of that system or environment (Hagerty, Lynch-Sauer, Patusky, Bouwsema & Collier, 1992). Also, belongingness was defined by Anant (1966, p. 21) as a "sense of personal involvement in a social system so that persons feel themselves to be an indispensable and integral part of the system".

As initially mentioned in the introduction, humans are commonly known to be among the most social creatures we know of and are usually dependent on their group members (Over, 2016). There are multiple theories on human's need to belong, and Abraham Maslow was among the researchers who early recognized that humans strive to be a part of relationships. He placed "love and belongingness needs" in the middle of his Motivational Hierarchy of Needs. This ranking means that the need for food, safety and other basic needs comes first, but the psychological need to belong is placed higher than the need for esteem and self-actualization (Maslow, 1968). Baumeister and Leary (1995) later conducted an extensive literature review and developed a belongingness theory. They proposed that the review provided evidence enough to conclude that the need to belong is fundamental and that humans are motivated to fulfil this need. They argued that since this need is an intrinsic desire, it nearly applies to all human beings. Also, they proposed that the need to belong is related to differences in cognitive processes, emotional patterns, behaviour, health, and well-being. They acknowledged that the sense of relatedness affects people's perceptions of others, leading people to view friends and group members more favourably, which leads us to Social Identity Theory.

2.2.1 Social Identity Theory

The interplay between people sends significant signals regarding the social connection or belongingness we establish with each other. Research shows that

interactions between people can indicate seemingly inconsequential shared characteristics, which further can lead to an increased sense of connectedness and belonging. Knowledge of even small, incidental similarities can strengthen the relational connections between individuals (Green, Gino, & Staats, 2017). These relational connections can further be related to Social Identity Theory (SIT). The concept of social identity explains how people conceptualize themselves in intergroup contexts. Social identity is "the individual's knowledge that he belongs to certain social groups together with some emotional and value significance to him of this group membership" (Tajfel, 1972, p. 292; Abrams & Hogg, 2010). According to the SIT, people tend to divide themselves and others into social categories that are defined by prototypical characteristics (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). This essentially means that our social identity derives its value from intergroup relations and that we more easily connect with people we find similar to ourselves (Abrams & Hogg, 2010). Thus, when we interact with people we interpret as equal to oneself, we establish a sense of social identity in different intergroups. The shared characteristics between individuals in this intergroup may lead to an increased sense of connectedness and belonging (Green, Gino, & Staats, 2017).

2.2.2 Belongingness and Work Performance

There is limited literature available on the sense of belonging in an organizational context. However, Baumeister and Leary (1995) found empirical evidence that the need to belong has multiple and substantial effects on emotions and cognition – for example, having social attachments leads to positive emotions. Furthermore, relatedness and belonging enhance self-motivation and mental health and are one of the underlying factors for creating contexts of the appropriate developmental grid at the workplace (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Belonging and relatedness are also conducive to higher job satisfaction (Spehar, Forest, & Stenseng, 2016). Moreover, Den Hartog, De Hoogh and Keegan (2007) provide evidence that when employees have a stronger sense of belongingness at work, they are more helpful towards managers as a basic form of organizational citizenship behaviour.

In contrast, lack of belongingness may lead to decreased well-being, a variety of psychological and physical health problems (Baumeister & Leary, 1995), and a lack of initiative and responsibility at work (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Moreover, Ozcelik and Barsade (2011) state that workplace loneliness and not-belongingness enhance

employees' emotional withdrawal from an organization resulting in increased surface acting and reduced affective commitment. Importantly, people who share any, even unpleasant, experiences, or have anything in common, or even just are exposed to each other frequently, tend to form friendships or other attachments (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Further, the authors highlight that people seem most likely to be prejudiced against individuals or groups to which they have little or no opportunity to belong.

Another study suggested that the absence of personal involvement might decrease intrinsic motivation (Osterman, 2000), and it is fair to assume that this will further affect the behaviour at work. Belongingness is not just an intrinsic psychological need but can also be helpful when achieving better workplace performance (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Research shows that employees who feel a sense of belonging to their organization report higher enthusiasm, interest and enjoyment (Furrer & Skinner, 2003), and in an organizational context one performs better to improve the organization (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Also, Osterman's findings were consistent, showing that students who experience belonging have higher motivation and engagement in learning and are more committed to the school. Linking this to work performance, it is fair to say that increased belongingness to the organization will increase employees' motivation to engage, further enhancing organizational performance.

2.3 Leadership

Scholars define leadership in many different ways, and the definitions often rely upon their interpretations of what variables are most relevant or interesting (Yukl, 1989). For instance, Northouse (2010) defines leadership as a process where a person influences a group of people to achieve a common goal. Others describe it as the result of successfully creating a positive change for the common good (Sorensen, Traynor & Janke, 2010). These definitions are often used as a standard definition of leadership (Ward, 2020), even though there is an almost unlimited number of different interpretations of what leadership entails.

Throughout history, people have also tried to determine what constitutes a good leader (Turner, Rodney & Müller, 2005). the study of leadership According to Kumar (2018), the study of leadership can even be traced back to the ancient

Egyptians and the Greek philosophers such as Plato, Socrates, and Aristotle. Reviews of leadership literature unveil – not unexpectedly – that researchers have defined and adjusted the definitions across time, which can likely be explained by the changes in the business environment and the current needs of the employees and the business (Kumar, 2018). After performing an extensive review of more than 3000 leadership studies, Stogdill (1974, p. vii) stated that: "Four decades of research on leadership have produced a bewildering mass of findings (...), the endless accumulation of empirical data has not produced an integrated understanding of leadership" (cited in Yukl, 1989). Also, Chowdhury (2014) states that leadership is presumably the most investigated social phenomenon of all time, even though it is still not well understood due to its complexity (Chowdhury, 2014). Hence, there seems to be a collective agreement among researchers that leadership is one of the most researched, yet least understood phenomenon.

Over time, researchers have proposed many different styles of leadership. We see that there is an innumerable amount of different theories on how to be an efficient leader, what leadership styles are best and what characteristics are needed to be a good leader who can motivate and maintain their employees. Still, there is no specific style of leadership that can be considered universal. Over the past seventy years, six leading schools of leadership theory have dominated, being the trait school, the behavioral school, the contingency school, the charismatic school, the emotional intelligence school, and the competency school (Dulewicz & Higgs, 2003; Handy, 1982; Partington, 2003). Personality is shown to be related to leadership and does explain some of the fluctuations in leadership. However, scholars recognize that personality does not constitute leadership by itself (Hogg, 2001; Stogdill, 1974). Most research has moved from the traditional trait school or personality-based theory to a situational based theory or contingency school. Here, they believe that leadership methods change according to the situation and that no leadership style is appropriate in all circumstances (Hogg, 2001).

2.3.1 Authentic Leadership

Recently, there has been a growing recognition among scholars that a more authentic leadership development strategy becomes essential and needed for desirable outcomes (Avolio & Gardner, 2005). Luthans and Avolio (2003) state that

researchers have, up until that moment, recognized the importance of positive, transformational, and moral/ethical leadership when trying to cope with the changing environment and new expectations adequately. However, they further contribute to these theories by including what they call authentic leadership. In general, one can view authenticity as being yourself or being the one you truly are (Gallos, 2014). Authentic leadership, on the other hand, has been defined in many ways, whereas Luthans and Avolio (2003) define authentic leadership in organizations as a process that consolidates positive leader capacities and a highly developed organizational context. Authentic leadership positively impacts self-awareness and self-regulated positive behaviours both for leaders and followers. According to the authors, the authentic leader is – among other characteristics: confident, optimistic, transparent, moral/ethical, future-oriented, true to him/herself and develops associates into leaders themselves (Luthans & Avolio, 2003; Avolio, Gardner & Walumbwa, 2007). In general, some recurring aspects are important when adopting this leadership style, especially in light of the use of social media. For instance, features like transparency and trustworthiness are highly relevant (Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Luthans & Avolio, 2003).

Luthans and Avolio (2003) also depict authentic leadership as a type of positive leadership needed when the environment is dramatically changing, where the previous rules no longer work, and where the best leaders will be transparent with their intentions. Business Insider (2019) reveals that 65% of employees in the USA believe that the CEOs should make authentic connections through digital means and actively communicate about their companies online, especially during ambiguous times, such as during a crisis. Today, the pace and extent of the changes in the business environment are remarkably higher than ever before. One of the main reasons for these changes is the increase in the development of new technologies (Kuratko, Morris & Covin, 2011). The digital development has forced companies to make significant changes to their organizations, their long-term strategies, and how they communicate and motivate their employees (Abuhashesh, 2014). These changes are especially perceptible now in the times of the COVID-19 pandemic. The online activity of leaders should be as authentic as possible (Forbes, 2018). Also, in the context of the modern global business environment, the increase in the development of technologies has changed the role of social media. Social media are platforms where it is highly possible to be both transparent and express

trustworthiness by sharing personal content, such as pictures or personal thoughts. Thus, we argue that these technological developments and changes in the business environment call for authentic leadership and can be achieved and exercised through social media.

3.0 Propositions and Argumentation for Them

Based on the review of present literature and research, we have established a theoretical framework that would guide our further investigation and analyses and developed six propositions that would lay the foundation for our conceptual research model. We will further explain how the propositions are based on fundamental findings from previous research and our reasoning and reflections regarding the literature.

3.1 Proposition 1: "Following a leader on social media is positively associated with the employees' feeling of belongingness"

Goodenow (1992) proposes that the feeling of belongingness and engagement in an organization is reflected by the degree to which the employees feel personally recognized and involved by others in an organization. Further, Korzynski (2015) states that employee engagement is positively related to the time leaders spend on online networking platforms. Additionally, Robertson and Kee (2017) provide empirical evidence that job satisfaction is positively related to time spent interacting with co-workers on Facebook (Robertson & Kee, 2017). This relation implies that social media, such as Facebook or Instagram, can be a tool to promote job satisfaction. Seeing these theories in light of each other, we argue that the use of social media can be a way of involving the employees on a more personal level. Based on social identity theory, the establishment of common ground between the leader and the employees can be very beneficial. We believe that the use of social media by leaders may reduce negative stereotyping, which could appear due to hierarchical structures and a lack of opportunity to know more about those important people at the top.

Further, we propose that the use of social media can establish a sense of communality and involvement between the leader and the employees. Consequently, this may reduce the stereotyping, ultimately strengthening the

employees' feeling of belongingness. Therefore, we will examine if following the CEO, linear manager or top-manager of a company on, for instance, Instagram, and continually being exposed to their photos or other types of posts, might create a feeling of belongingness to the workplace, even without having a frequent real-life communication. Thus, the first proposal is as follows:
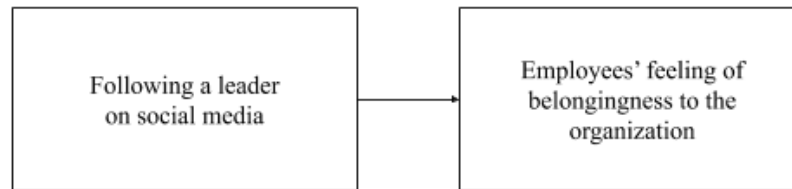

Figure 1. Proposition №1 suggests that following a leader on social media is positively associated with the employees' feeling of belongingness to the organization.

3.2 Proposition 2: "The moderating role of employees' generation on the relationship"

As mentioned in the literature review, the young generation actively coming to the workplace now and in the next couple of years essentially consists of Digital Natives and Generation Z who cannot imagine their life without smartphones, the Internet and social media. Based on the previous research on this topic, we assume that following a leader on social media might be influential for most employees and not only for younger ones since older generations use the Internet and social media today as well. However, the younger generations use social media on a completely different level than older ones, since the latter did not have such easy access to the Internet and smart technologies when they were born. "A language learned later in life goes to the other part of the brain" (Prensky, 2001, p. 3). Therefore, we still believe that the younger generation is being more influenced by social media communication than older ones. Thus, our second proposition is that the generation to which employees belong moderates the relationship between following a leader on social media and employees' feeling of belongingness to the organization.
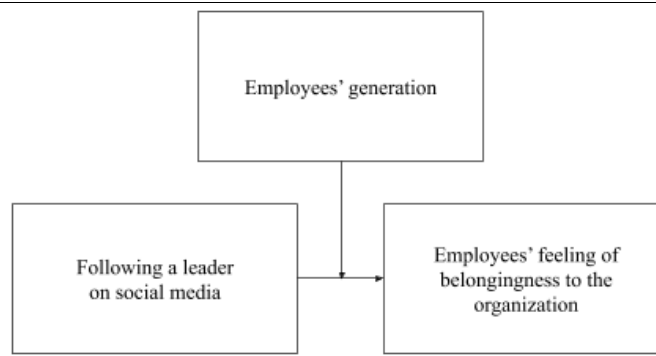
Figure 2. Proposition №2 states that the relationship between following a leader on social media and the employee's feeling of belongingness to the organization is moderated by the employees' generation.

3.3 Proposition 3: "The moderating role of the perception of authenticity on the relationship"

We argue that technological developments and changes in the business environment call for authentic leadership and can be achieved and exercised through social media. Based on the literature review, we draw an assumption that it is possible to exercise authentic leadership through the use of social media because it allows for transparency and trustworthiness (Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Luthans & Avolio, 2003; Business Insider, 2019). Ilies, Morgeson and Nahrgang (2005) also developed a proposition in their research stating that leaders who engage in more authentic behaviour/acting will experience greater flow and intrinsic motivation at work. They argue that authentic leaders have high levels of self-awareness, and this, in combination with their authentic behavioral and relational orientation, can influence followers' feelings of identification with the leader and the organization (Iliest, Morgeson & Nahrgang, 2005). One can also review this research in light of Social Identity Theory. By sharing personal, honest and transparent content on social media, one can be perceived as authentic. It is fair to assume that the employees will feel a greater connection to the leaders or colleagues who are doing so because they see similarities among them.

Hence, we suppose that if an employee follows their leader on social media, and they perceive the content provided by this leader as authentic and personalized, it can positively affect their feelings of identification. Thus, we propose that the perception of authenticity of the leader's content on social media will have a

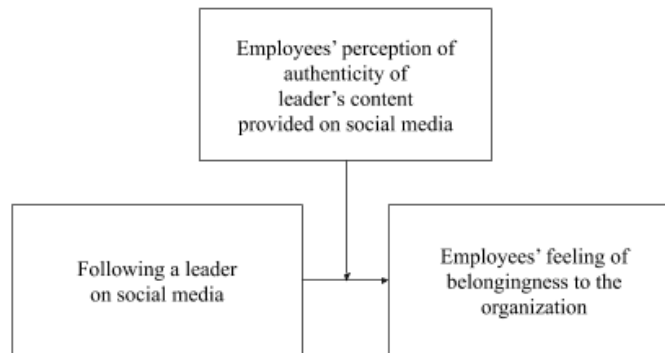moderating effect on the relationship in question. Accordingly**,** the third proposition is as follows:

Figure 3. Proposition №3 states that the relationship between following a leader on social media and employees' feeling of belongingness to the organization is moderated by the employees' perception of authenticity of the content provided by the leader on social media.

3.4 Proposition 4: "Following colleagues on social media is positively associated with the employees' feeling of belongingness"

Several previous studies question the use of Facebook and other social media at work, referring to this use as a negative trend (Robertson & Kee, 2017). However, Robertson and Kee (2017) investigated the relationship between employee satisfaction and interactions with co-workers on Facebook. The results show that an employee's satisfaction at work is positively associated with the amount of time they spend on Facebook interacting with co-workers. Research also states that people who frequently use Facebook (post content, use the 'Like' button, comment on others' content) are more likely to experience a feeling of connectedness to the people they interact with, and have higher levels of happiness (Valkenburg, Peter, & Schouten, 2006).

The findings described above lead us to the belief that it is not only leaders who are important to follow on social media, but colleagues as well. With reference to the SIT, the relationships between colleagues might be of high psychological importance concerning the feeling of belongingness. We establish a sense of connection to people we share characteristics with, which can lead to an increased sense of connectedness and belonging (Green, Gino, & Staats, 2017).

Seeing the findings regarding the social media use from the non-organizational context together with the job-related findings of the employees' job satisfaction, as well as with the research on the SIT, we came up with the fourth proposition. We propose that following colleagues on social media and being exposed to their personal content would create a higher personal attachment, with the possibility to connect based on individual similarities. Therefore, we anticipate that the results of our analysis will show a positive relationship between following colleagues on social media and the employees' feeling of belongingness to the organization. Accordingly, the fourth proposition is as follows:
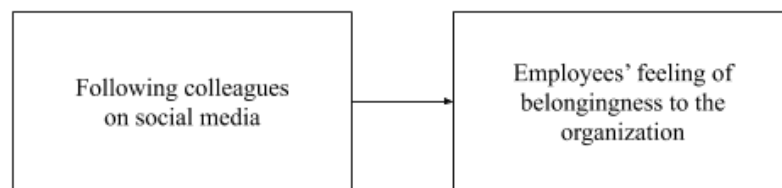
Figure 4. Proposition №4 states that following colleagues on social media is positively associated with the employees' feeling of belongingness to the organization.

3.5 Proposition 5: "The number of colleagues an employee follows on social media is positively associated with their feeling of belongingness"

Having the previous proposition in mind, we would like to know whether the effect of following a different number of colleagues would influence the strength of the examined relationship. Investigating this would entail examining the feeling of belongingness of those employees who follow colleagues in light of how many colleagues in the company. As a result of this, we propose that the higher number of colleagues that the employees follow on social media, the stronger is their feeling of belongingness to the workplace. Accordingly, the fifth proposition is as follows:

Figure 5. Proposition №5 states that the number of colleagues an employee follows on social media is positively associated with their feeling of belongingness to the organization.

3.6 Proposition 6: "Following the official company's profile on social media is positively associated with the employees' feeling of belongingness"

Finally, we decided to test whether following an official company's profile on social media could have the same effect on belongingness as following leaders or colleagues. We reckon that this could be the case since the purpose of the official profile of the company we investigate is to create engagement through employees' photos, news, interactive games and hashtags. As a result of this, the sixth proposition is as follows:
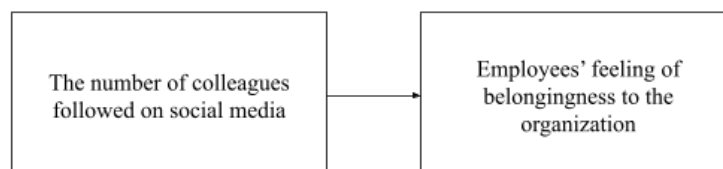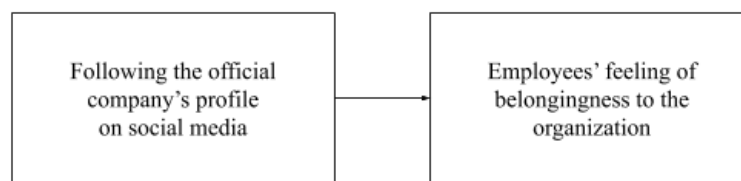

Figure 6. Proposition №6 states that following the official company's profile on social media is positively associated with the employees' feeling of belongingness to the organization.

4.0 Methodology

In the previous chapters, we have provided a review of prior research on the topics we find relevant to our further investigation and analysis. However, to gain accurate insights regarding the research question, we need to apply the appropriate research methods to collect and analyze the necessary information. The choices of methods for data collection play an essential part in the research. It is crucial to know which approaches and tools are appropriate and how to use them properly (Walliman, 2010). In the following chapter, we will discuss our choice of research methods and research design. We will also elaborate on our approach to the procurement and collection of the data, the procedure of gathering the data, the measures used, and our approach to ethics regarding the general data protection regulations (GDPR).

4.1 Research Methods and Design

Scholars commonly define research as: "A systematic and unbiased way of solving a problem (by answering questions or supporting hypotheses) through generating verifiable data" (Bacon-Shone, 2015, p. 6). The research methods are the tools and

techniques applied when doing research, and it is always necessary to know what the correct tools are and how to use them in the best possible way (Walliman, 2010).

Due to the nature of our research question, we have applied quantitative methods when doing this research. As the name suggests, quantitative research is concerned with quantifying relationships between variables. Sukamolson (2007) identifies six main kinds of research questions where quantitative research can be used, such as quantifying opinions, attitudes and behaviours, and finding out how a population feels about something. Thus, quantitative methods are suitable when the aim is to explain a phenomenon; for instance, what factors predict some other factors (Sukamolson, 2007). Also, Bryman and Bell (2011) define quantitative research as a type of research that attempts to search for social phenomena and the relationships between them. The success of our thesis is dependent on the collection of a vast amount of information from a sample, which will allow us to make some inferences about the question and propositions we are exploring. Thus, the study is suitable for a quantitative approach.

Further, one can divide studies that aim at quantifying relationships into different designs, where the design functions as a framework for data collection and analysis (Sileyew, 2019). Due to the nature of our research, we apply a descriptive research design. In descriptive research, surveys are often used, and a prevalent aspect within the descriptive design is that there is only one sample, and it is without any comparison group (Williams, 2007). Also, the general purpose of descriptive research is to provide a clear image of a phenomenon as it naturally occurs, to describe and explain (Bickman & Rog, 2008). Our thesis explores the concept of employees' belongingness to an organization and how this is connected to the use of social media by leaders or colleagues. We also investigate possible moderating factors of these relationships. Consequently, we aim to answer how belongingness is affected, rather than why it is affected. Thus, a descriptive research design is appropriate. Having a descriptive design also means that there will be no endeavour made to change behaviour or conditions (Hopkins, 2000).

Also, when applying a descriptive research design, one formulates a specific research question which one wants to validate before the research is conducted (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Thus, it requires that one already knows a great deal about

the research problem, which is why we do a literature review. The literature provides us with new knowledge about the pre-existing research, and thus, we are in a position to clearly define what we want to measure and how to do it (Crawford, 1997; Bickman & Rog, 2008).

Even though the descriptive research has its limitations, for example, not being able to identify a cause-effect relationship, it still plays an essential role in highlighting an examined phenomenon that is unknown (Bickman & Rog, 2008).

4.2 Data Collection

As presented above, we use a descriptive research design to develop new insights and understanding regarding our research question. Hence, we gather data intending to observe and quantify trends, which is generally identified as survey research (Andres, 2014). A quantitative, survey research model is used to collect our primary data. This survey allows us to gather information directly from the population, and to extract data from large samples of the population, making the results more representative to the organization.

However, not all phenomena produce numerical data, such as attitudes or beliefs, meaning it can be challenging to collect. There are relatively few phenomena that naturally occur in the form of quantitative or numerical data (Sukamolson, 2007). Since we investigate the different perceptions of the employees and their feelings, we use a survey where we ask the employees of the company to rate several statements on a scale, for us to measure and quantify the desired concept. We discuss the use of the survey in detail in chapter 4.4.

4.3 Sampling

Our primary data has been collected from a well-known Norwegian food producing company, consisting of approximately 300 employees across the country. However, the total amount of participants included in a sample used in a study is often dependent on several key factors (MacDonald & Headlam, 2008). To decide on whom to engage in the research, one needs to adopt a sampling technique to extract

the final sample. One may base the method of selection on a probability or a non-probability approach (Bryman & Bell, 2011).

The sample size in this research was primarily planned to be based on the total number of employees in the company and the variability in the population since an essential factor when deciding on the sample size is often the overall size of the population (Cohen et al., 2000; Lodico, Spaulding & Voegtle, 2006). Our initial aim was to use a simple random sample when recruiting a sufficient number of respondents because in most cases, it is not possible to use the whole population. However, we were able to distribute the survey to the entire organization when proceeding with the data collection, making all 300 employees part of the population. Still, we were not allowed to select which employees to sample. Thus, we had to accept the answers of those who decided to take part in the survey, with a hope that the final sample will turn out to be representative for the whole company. We will further elaborate on whether the results are biased and wrongful or not in the following chapter. We will compare our final sample with the statistics representing the whole population of the company.

4.3.1 Participants

The participants involved in this research are all employees working under the CEO of the company who is well-known for his active use of social media. We have included both participants who follow the leader on social media and those who do not follow him or do not have social media at all. Looking at the distribution of social media use among the respondents, it is clear that we face an underrepresentation of respondents who do not use social media. From the survey data, one can see that 3% do not use social media, whereas 97% do. To ensure that these responses were unbiased concerning the whole organization, we asked the contact person from the company if they could provide us with such statistical data. We received the answer that the company did not have any official data regarding the employees' use of social media, meaning that we cannot conclude whether the results are representative for the whole company or not. However, we consider such underrepresentation of people not using social media to be expected, since most people in Norway use some sort of social media in 2020. According to Zynk, 82.8% of the Norwegian population has an account on Facebook, where 82.2% are active

users, meaning they use it regularly. The same report states that above 50% actively use both Snapchat and Instagram as well (Zynk Communication and Leadership AS, 2017).

Further, we included all employees regardless of how long they have worked in the company. Also, the participants are from all the departments of the company, and they are included despite being a part-time or full-time employee. Out of the respondents who completed the questionnaire, there are 31 women and 37 men, which configure a balanced gender representation of 45% and 54% respectively. One employee responded "Prefer not to answer" when being asked about their gender; this response constitutes the remaining 1% (Figure 7). To ensure that these results are representative of the organization, we asked the company to provide official data on gender distribution. As illustrated in Figure 7, the distribution of gender is relatively equal in the survey as in the company, making the output representative for the organization.
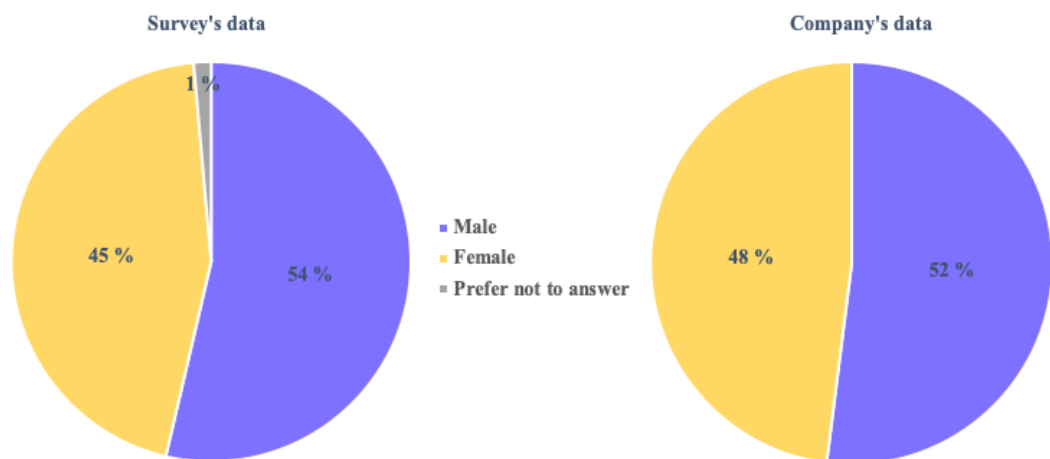
Figure 7. Gender representation among employees: respondents' survey answers compared to the official statistical data of the company.

The average age of respondents who participated in the survey is approximately 39 years old. The youngest participant is 20 years old, and the oldest participant is 66 years old. Since generational groups are of higher relevance for our research than the actual number of years, we also divide the respondents into generational groups based on their age (Figure 8). According to De Meuse and Mlodzik (2010), generation of "Boomers" includes people born between 1946 and 1964, "Xers" are born between 1965 and 1979, "Generation Y" or "Millennials" are born between 1980-1994. Lastly, the youngest employees nowadays belong to "Generation Z".

Those people who were born in 1995 and later. The variation of generations among the respondents in our research is in accordance with the general trends in the workforce (De Meuse & Mlodzik, 2010), and thus can be called representative. However, we also wanted to make sure that the results are representative not only in general but for the particular company as well, so we asked the examined organization to provide the company's official age distribution data. As can be seen in Figure 8, our final sample has a slight overrepresentation of Gen Y and Xers, and a slight underrepresentation of Gen Z and Boomers. However, we believe that the overall distribution of generations in the data is representative of the company. There are some small deviations in the percentages. However, still, we argue that it is representative of the whole population because the distribution of age based on the survey data compared to the population of the company is reasonably similar.
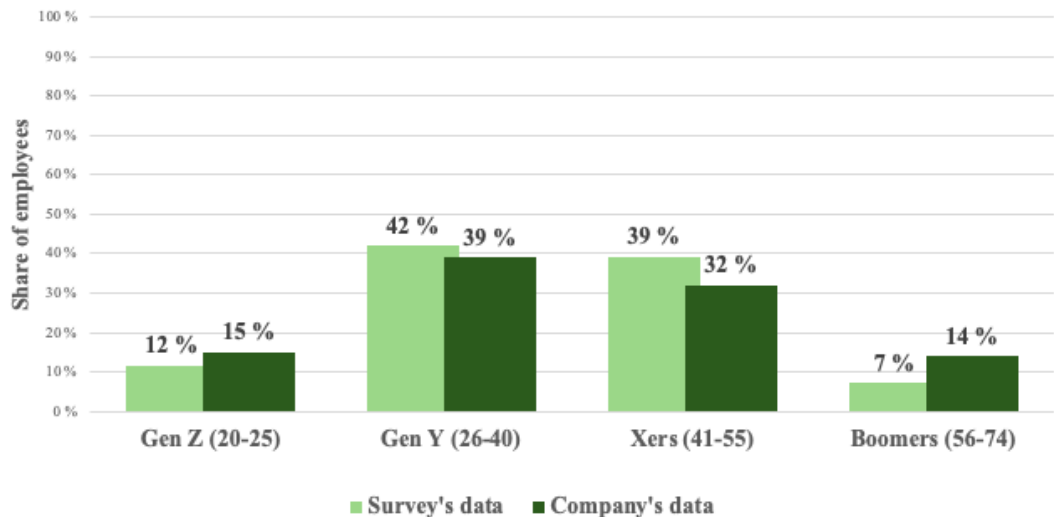
Figure 8. Representation of generations among employees: shares of survey respondents compared to the official statistical data of the company.

Further, we asked the respondents to answer how many years they have been working at this company until the present time. According to the respondents, the average working period in that company equals 7.4 years, the shortest period is 0.2 years, while the longest is 34 years. The official record of the company states that the average number of years the employees work in that organization equals 8. Comparing the data, we see that our data regarding the number of years spent in the company is representative of the organization. Figure 9 provides a clear illustration of the distribution of years spent in the company provided by the survey data.
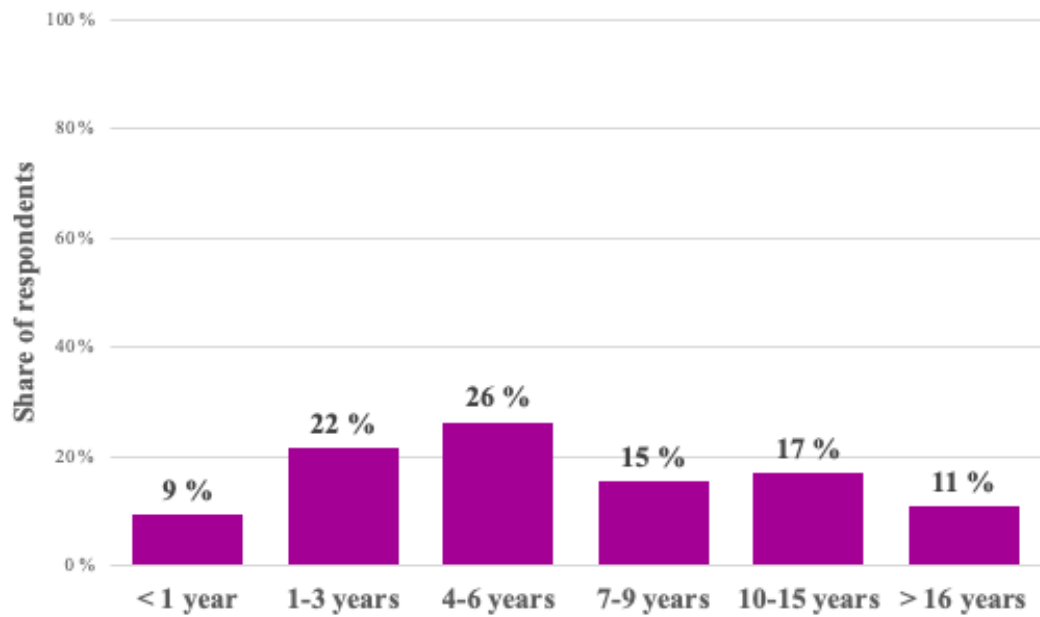
Figure 9. Representation of the number of years the respondents have been working at the company till the present time.

4.4 Measures

When constructing a survey, we need to make decisions regarding where to collect data and whom to sample. We also need to decide on how to formulate the questions in the survey. Since surveys usually are fully structured and fixed (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2014), the questions cannot be changed once the data collection has started. Additionally, a lot of useful information can often not be reduced to numbers, such as feelings, emotions and beliefs. Nevertheless, information that seems distant from quantitative measures can be converted to numbers and treated as quantitative by including a choice of answers in a questionnaire, for instance, a Likert-scale.

Further, we need to ensure sufficient measurements of the key concepts in our research. To do this and to increase the reliability of our results, we have used previously tested measures whenever possible. We will further discuss this in chapter 5. Another challenge is to ensure the reliability and internal validity of survey data, which is very dependent on the survey structure and the accuracy of the answers provided by the respondents. To ensure that the questions were understandable – not only to us – but to others, we tested the survey on people outside the population, such as friends and other students. Testing on other people provides us with some certainty that the survey is designed in a comprehensible and

coherent way, and essentially that we avoid reduced reliability and internal validity. Also, our contact person in the company examined the survey.

We measure multiple variables during the survey. However, to answer our research propositions, we focus only on a number of them, whereas the others might be used for additional findings. The main variables we are going to focus on during the analysis are:

- employees' age and generations;
- employees' feeling of belongingness to the workplace;
- whether the employees follow the CEO, linear manager and/or top-manager on social media;
- employees' perception of authenticity and personalization of the content provided by a leader on social media;
- whether the employees follow their colleagues on social media, and if yes - how many colleagues they currently follow;
- whether the employees follow the official company's profile on social media.

Also, the survey consists of two parts, where one measures belongingness, autonomy and competence (even though we only focus on the results of belongingness dimension). The second one is collecting the general information, such as age, gender, the use of social media and the perception of authenticity of the leaders' content on social media.

4.4.1 Independent Variables

We use four different independent variables to run the regression models. The first independent variable we use is a variable indicating whether they follow any of the leaders on social media. We measure this by directly asking whether the employees follow either the CEO, linear manager or top-manager on social media. One can define the measure of this variable as a nominal variable. The second independent variable we use is whether the employees follow their colleagues on social media. We measure this by directly asking whether they follow any of their colleagues. One can also define this variable as a nominal variable. A third independent variable is included and measured by asking the employees to specify how many colleagues they follow on social media. We measure the variable on a ranging scale.

Ultimately, we ask the participants whether they follow the official company profile on social media, which is used as a measure of the fourth independent variable. Also, this measure is defined as a nominal variable (Bryman & Bell, 2011).

4.4.2 Dependent Variable

During the preparations, we needed to figure out a way to measure the dependent variable – feeling of belongingness. When aiming to measure the feeling of belongingness, we determined that the best solution was to use an existing measure that has been used and confirmed before. We do this due to several reasons which we will further explain in chapter 5.2. The feeling of belongingness has previously been measured by self-evaluation of trust, which has been shown to influence members' sense of belonging to the community (Liu & Guo, 2015). Other researchers have used the Relatedness dimension of the Basic Psychological Needs Scale (Baard, Deci & Ryan, 2004) to measure belongingness in the work setting (Spehar, Forest, & Stenseng, 2016), where relatedness is the need for the feeling of belonging to a working community. After reviewing both alternatives, we decided to use the relatedness dimension from the Basic Psychological Needs Scale in the first part of our survey, applying a 7-items Likert scale, ranging from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 7 (Strongly agree). The relatedness dimension focuses on how employees feel being trusted, understood, listened to, being friends with, and supported by their colleagues at work (Baumeister & Leary 1995), ultimately proposing a score that reflects their feeling of belongingness in a work setting.

4.4.3 Moderating Variables

During the analyses, we also want to check whether there are variables that inflict a moderating effect on the relationship between the independent and dependent variables. We have decided to analyze the moderating effect of age/generations and the perception of authenticity of the leaders' content on social media. In the survey, age is measured by having the employees state their current age. During the analysis, we categorize age as a nominal variable where the distance is not equal across the span of the category (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Considering the aim of the research, we divide age into four groups: "Generation Z", "Generation Y" or "Millennials", "Xers" and "Boomers" (Table 1).

Table 1. Generational groups

Generation	Year of Birth	Age in 2020
Z	1995 and later	25 and younger
Y / Millennials	1980 - 1994	26 - 40
Xers	1965 - 1979	41 - 55
Boomers	1946 - 1964	56 - 74

Further, we measure the perception of the authenticity of the content by asking how the participants feel about the content that the leader publishes on social media. We decided not to use any of the already established measures since we wanted to look at the authenticity of the content posted on social media, not the leader's personality or leadership style. Thus, we needed to construct a new measure. In order to measure the perceived authenticity of the content provided by the leader on social media, we used a single-item measure to clarify whether the respondents perceived the activity as authentic and personalized or not. We divided the different choices of answers into three alternatives: "The account is personalized and for sure led by that person"; "I am not sure whether the account is led personally or by a third party SMM/PR"; and "It feels like the account is for sure lead by a third party, such as an SMM/PR agency".

4.4.4 Control Variables

Ultimately, we investigate whether our results are influenced by any other variables which can affect the relationship between the independent and the dependent variables. Gender, years in the company and the frequency of social media are used as control variables. Gender and years of work in the company are both single-item measures, and they are directly measured by asking the respondents to provide the information. We measure gender as a nominal variable, where 1 = "Male" and 2 = "Female", and years of work in the company are measured as a continuous, ranging scale. To measure the frequency of social media use of the respondents, we asked how frequently they check the content on each of the social media platforms

analyzed in our research. Then we used the average score for all the media channels for each respondent, which gives us the total frequency of use.

4.5 Procedure and Ethical Considerations

When conducting research, one has an ethical responsibility to ensure anonymity and informed consent, protect the participants from harm, invasion of privacy and deception (McLeod, 2015). Thus, before starting the data collection, we contacted "The Norwegian Center of Research Data" (NSD) to ensure that our survey was adequately in line with the ethical guidelines which NSD demands to follow. After about four weeks, we received a confirmation that our survey was accepted. Further, we wanted to ensure that all members of the sample had consented to the research, knowing what they participated to. We talked to the contact person from the company, and he ensured that all the employees were well-informed and acquainted with what they consented to. He assured them that everything was anonymous and in line with the GDPR-requirements. We explained to him that all the data would be protected and all personal information, which in this case was respondents' IP-addresses (McLeod, 2015), would be unavailable to anybody. Also, we clarified with him that we would delete all personal data after the analyses are completed. We also highlighted the importance of anonymity in the introduction of the survey they received as well.

When we had ensured consent from the organization, we distributed an online self-completion survey (Appendix A) to the participants during March 2020. The questionnaire was made available through a web-based platform (Qualtrics Inc.), and it was carried out in English to ensure the validity of the original survey. The participants were recruited by email, where they received an anonymous link to the web-based survey. The link was sent to all the employees by the contact person due to GDPR (Appendix B). Out of a total of N=300 employees, we received 40 responses on the 13th of March. Between the 14th and the 20th of March, we received 25 more responses. On the 20th of March, our contact person sent out a friendly reminder to participate in the survey, and during the 20th and the 23rd of March, we received six more responses. Thus, among the 300 questionnaires which were sent out, we received a total of 71 responses, presenting a moderate 24% response rate, which is accepted and considered to be effective for an emailed

survey to an organization (Schuldt & Totten, 1994; Baruch & Holtom, 2008). 69 responses out of those 71 are valid for use, the other two respondents have not finished the questionnaire, and thus, their answers are invalid and removed from the analysis.

5.0 Analysis and Results

After the survey completion, the data was transferred to the statistical program IBM SPSS Statistics 26.0. The program enables various statistical analyses to be performed, which helps us process the output from Qualtrics. In the following chapter, we will present the different analyses which we have performed, and the results from them.

5.1 Recoding

Before carrying out the descriptive- or statistical analyses, several of the questions in the dataset had to be recoded. As described in the original article where the Basic Psychological Needs Scale (Baard, Deci & Ryan, 2004) first was introduced, 3 of the variables in the Relatedness dimension are worded in a negative direction. For instance, "there are *not* many people at work that I am close to". Thus, before forming a scale by averaging the item responses, items 7, 16 and 18 must be recoded, so that score 1 represents the strongest degree of agreement to the question. More specifically, the questions are reverse-scored by subtracting the person's response from 8. Ultimately, the scale for Q7, Q16 and Q18 is reversed and therefore 1 = "strongly agree", 2 = "agree", 3 = "somewhat agree", 4 = "neither agree nor disagree", 5 = "somewhat disagree", 6 = "disagree" and 7 = "strongly disagree".

5.2 Reliability and Validity

Also, before analyzing the data, we performed a reliability analysis to check the internal consistency of the variables that we used to measure the feeling of belongingness and the consistency of the answers the respondents provided. Internal consistency tells us to what extent the items that make up a scale measure

the same underlying trait (Pallant, 2013), specifically to what extent the questions in the Relatedness dimension measure the feeling of belongingness.

Reliability control is something which is done for each factor separately, in this case being all the questions from the Relatedness dimension (Q2, Q6, Q7, Q9, Q15, Q16, Q18 and Q21). We checked the scale reliability, or internal consistency reliability, of the Likert-scale questions using Coefficient Cronbach's alpha (CCA), accepting an α-score of 0.7 or higher. Cronbach's alpha is the most common way to measure internal consistency and varies between 0.00 and 1.00, where Cronbach's alpha values above 0.7 indicate internal consistency (Pallant, 2013). The reliability analysis was performed in SPSS and revealed a CCA value of 0.773 (>0.7), which is within the common requirement. One can also check the column "Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted". We see that the CCA is quite stable, meaning none of the items disrupts the CCA value.

Table 2. Reliability statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.773	.828	8

As previously mentioned, when adopting the measure of belongingness in our survey, we chose to use an established measure from the previous study. We use the relatedness dimension from the Basic Psychological Needs Scale by Baard, Deci and Ryan (2004). Using a measure that builds on previous research helps us to ensure that the data output is as valid as possible since this measure is already validated. Also, we chose to keep the survey in English, which is the original language of the survey. Based on these decisions, we have determined that it is not necessary to perform a principal component analysis, or factor analysis, on the constructs to test the internal validity.

5.3 Descriptive Analysis

Before doing regression models for proposition testing, we have also done a descriptive analysis, since it can unveil essential and interesting findings in itself. First of all, it was important to look at the employees' social media usage. In the

survey (Q26), we asked which social media content the respondents check most often (Figure 10). It is important to note that the participants could choose several options at the same time. Looking at the results from the survey, "Facebook" is the most frequently used social media, and was selected as most commonly used by 30% of the respondents.
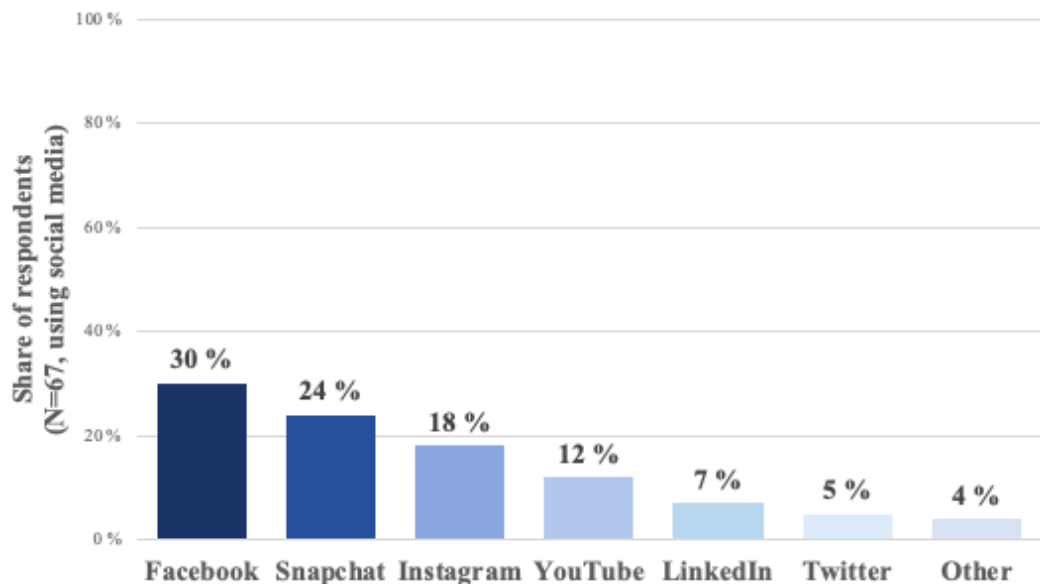
Figure 10. Representation of social media channels which were chosen as the most frequently used among the respondents.

Further, it is also important to understand how frequently the respondents use the chosen social media channels (Figure 11). The majority of the respondents using "Facebook" and "Instagram" claim to check the content in those social media channels several times a day or more. This finding is highly relevant in our research since we know that these are the social media platforms in which the leaders of the company we investigate are actively using.
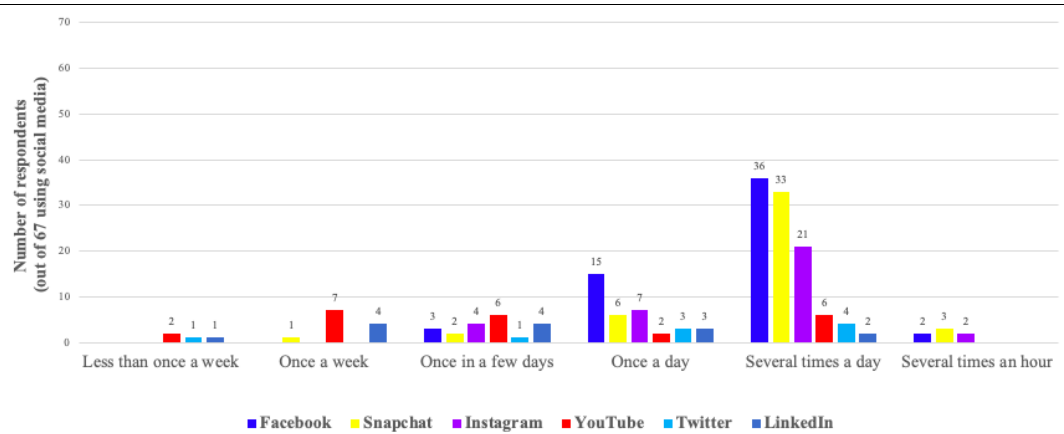
Figure 11. Representation of the frequency with which the respondents check the content on the selected social media channels.

From the descriptive analysis, we also note that 69% of the respondents who use social media also follow the CEO of the company on the mentioned social media channels. Further, 60% follow any other top-manager of the company, 52% follow the linear manager and 85% follow their colleagues from that company. Lastly, 85% of the respondents who use social media follow the official company's profile on the mentioned social media channels (Figure 12).
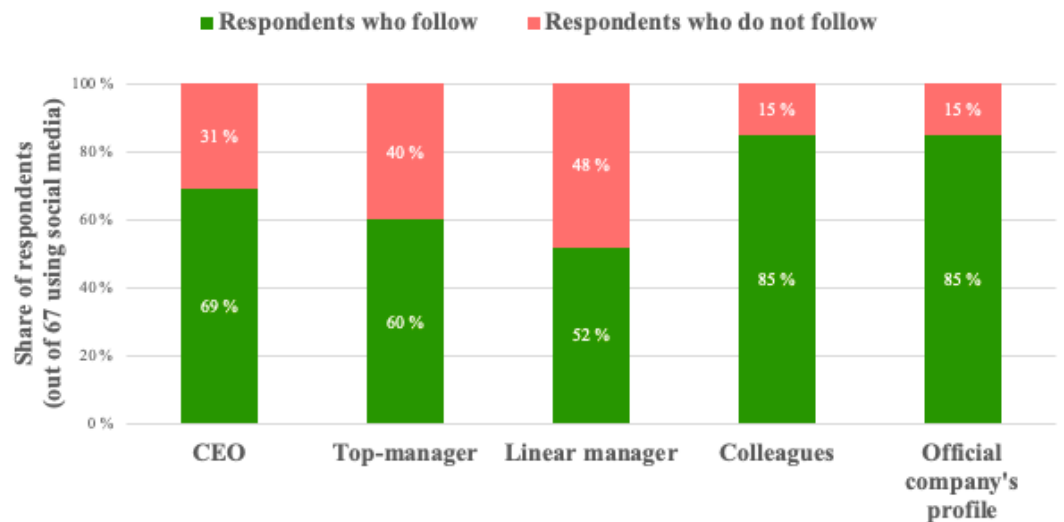
Figure 12. Share of respondents following the CEO / top-manager / linear manager / colleagues / official company's profile on the selected social media channels.

Furthermore, the majority – respectively 89%, 97.5% and 97% – of respondents who follow the profiles of CEO, top-manager or linear manager, describe the content provided by those leaders as personalized and authentic (Figure 13).

How would you describe your feelings about the content provided on the following social media profiles?
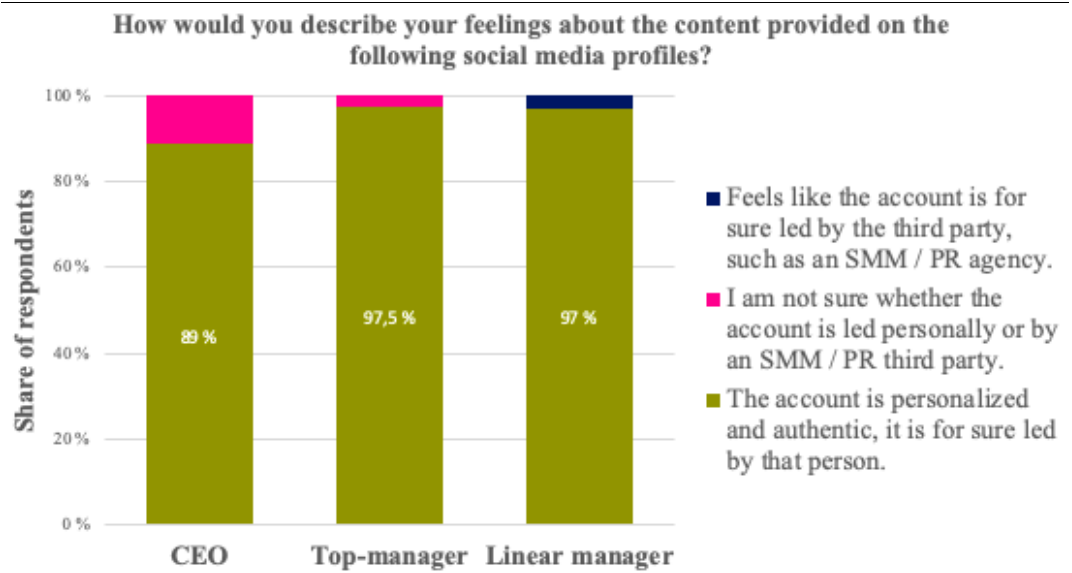
Figure 13. Respondents' perception of authenticity of the content provided by CEO / top-manager / linear manager on the selected social media channels.

The analysis also discloses that the respondents follow a various number of colleagues (Q30) on social media (Figure 14). The minimum number of colleagues' profiles at subscription equals 3, the mean statistic is 23, and the maximum number of colleagues who are being followed by the respondent on social media is 81.
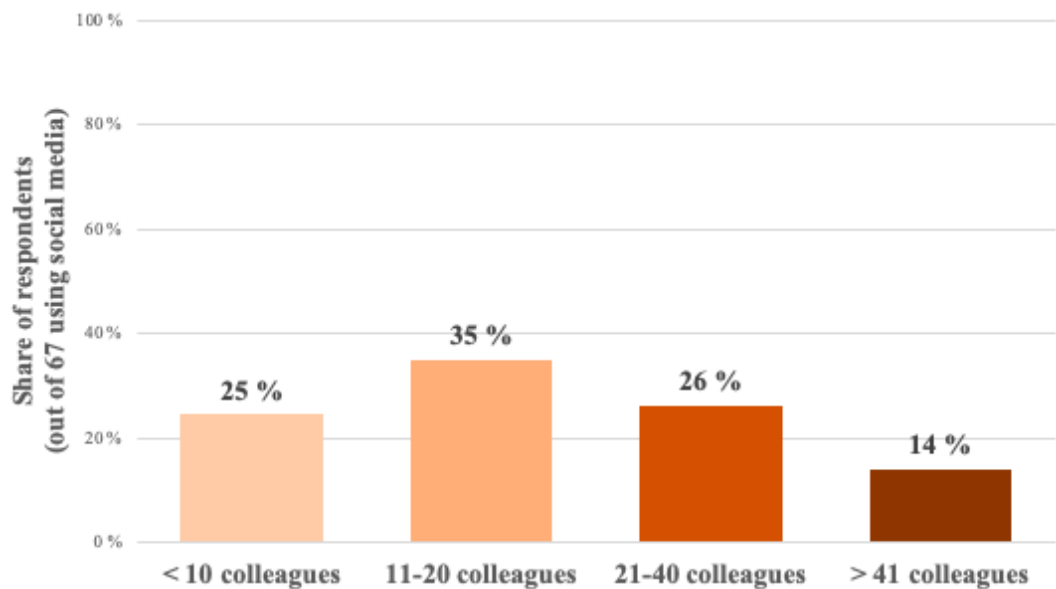
Figure 14. Histogram representing the number of colleagues that the respondents follow on social media.

Further, looking at the average number of colleagues that the employees follow (Figure 15), we see that there is a quite even distribution among the generations.

However, the most significant deviation can be seen in Generation Z, where the average number of colleagues they follow is 16.
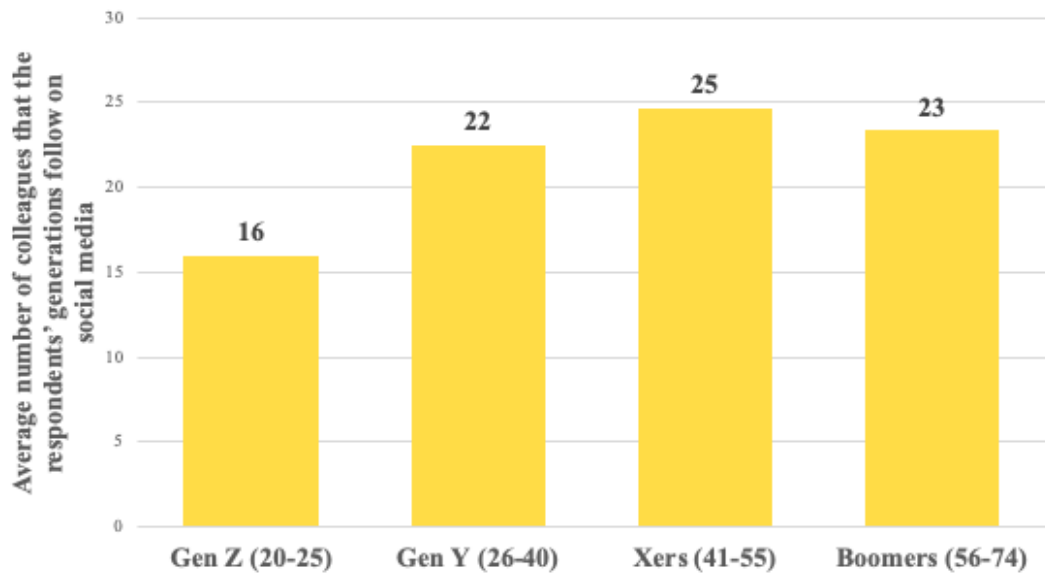
Figure 15. Histogram representing the average number of colleagues that the respondents' generations follow on social media.

Finally, we checked whether there is a variance in the answers in the survey so that we were able to conduct further analysis with regression models and correlations. In the descriptive analysis, skewness and kurtosis represent the distributional characteristics of each variable. Statistical skewness and kurtosis between ±2 are considered acceptable in order to prove normal univariate distribution (George & Mallery, 2010), which are the criteria we have chosen to use in further analysis.

The analysis indicates that for the majority of variables in the dataset, there are no problems with the distribution. Nevertheless, we see that some of the skewness- and kurtosis values are outside the recommended range. In the first part of the survey, skewness ranges between -2.071 (Q2) and 2.24 (Q24) and the kurtosis values range between -2.038 (gender/Q22) and 8.876 (Q2). These values are not unexpected for some of the questions in our survey, because of recurrence in answers. However, these are generally small deviations, and the majority of the variables are either fairly symmetrical or moderately skewed. Furthermore, numerous simulation studies have shown that regression and correlation are quite resilient to deviations from normality (McDonald, 2014). Regardless, most of the values fall within the acceptable range of values for skewness and kurtosis, indicating that the deviation from normality was not significant (Bandalos & Finney, 2010).

Looking at the skewness and kurtosis of the variable consisting of the means of all the questions in the Relatedness dimension, we get the values -0.422 and 1.924, which indicates no significant deviations. On the scale from 1 to 7, the lowest belongingness score of the respondents is 2.88, the mean score equals 5.41, and the maximum score is the actual maximum on the scale, 7.0 points. The histogram in Figure 16 provides a visual representation of the variance. One can see that the results follow a normal distribution curve, and the respondents' scores vary quite a lot since every decimal of the point depicts differences among employees' feelings. The results are slightly right-skewed, which coincides with the negative skewness of -0.422. However, the data is approximately normally distributed, and our data is suitable for further statistical analysis. Therefore, we proceed to the regression model building.
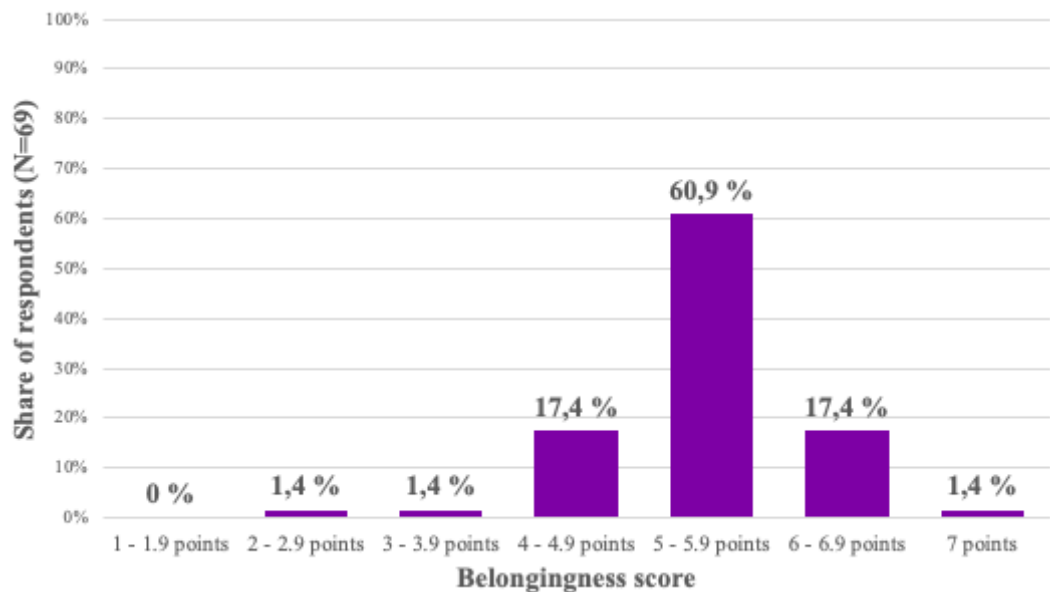
Figure 16. Histogram representing the distribution of employees' belongingness scores.

Lastly, one can see some skewness and kurtosis in the second part of the survey as well. As shown in Figure 13, there is a very high recurrence in answers regarding authenticity. Skewness ranges between 2.60 (Q28a) and 6.325 (Q29a), and kurtosis ranges between 4.97 (Q28a) and 40.0 (Q29a). The values reflect what we illustrated in Figure 13, and mean that all the values fall outside the acceptable range of skewness and kurtosis. The values indicate that the deviation from normality is significant (Bandalos & Finney, 2010), which will be further discussed in chapter 5.4.3.

5.4 Statistical Analysis

The six research propositions were tested through building linear regression models in IBM SPSS Statistics 26.0. The linear regression model analyses the relationship between the independent and dependent variables and the moderators.

5.4.1 Testing Proposition 1

The dependent variable (employees' feeling of belongingness to the workplace) was regressed onto the three independent variables (following a CEO/top-manager/linear manager on social media) to test the first proposition. The regression analysis results show that following any leader (CEO/top-manager/linear manager) on social media had a non-significant effect when predicting employees' feeling of belongingness to the organization (Table 3). The findings did not support Proposition 1, in which it was suggested that following a leader on social media could be positively associated with employees' stronger feeling of belongingness to the company.

For a clear understanding of the results, it is essential to note that to each question the answer "yes" was recorded as "1", while "no" as "2", that is why a negative β in Table 3 would mean, for example, that not following a CEO on social media decreases the belongingness score by 0.159 points.

Table 3. Regression results testing for direct relationships in proposition 1.

Variable	β	p-value	R-squared	Adj. R-squared	Pearson Correlation
Do you follow the <u>CEO</u> of the company on social media?	-.159	.337	.014	-.001	-.119
Do you follow any <u>top-manager</u> of the company on social media?	-.287	.064	.052	.037	-.228
Do you follow your <u>linear manager</u> on social media?	-.089	.565	.005	-.010	-.072

Note: *p < 0.05; **p < 0.01

Result: Proposition 1 – not supported.

5.4.2 Testing Proposition 2

In the second proposition, the analysis included the same independent and dependent variables, following a leader (CEO/top-manager/linear manager) on social media and employees' feeling of belongingness to the organization. However, it also includes employees' generation as a moderating variable to see if this affected the relationship between the tested variables. To test the moderating effect, we created an interaction term. The results showed non-significant relationships (Table 4). The results indicate that our data do not support Proposition 2, which was stating that generation could be a moderator in the relationship between following a leader on social media and employees' stronger feeling of belongingness.

For a clear understanding of the results, it is important to note that the generations were ranked from the youngest (GenZ = 1) to the oldest (Boomers = 4), that is why a negative β in Table 4 would mean, for example, that the older generation an employee belongs to, the lower their belongingness score is.

Table 4. Regression results testing for moderated relationships in proposition 2.

Variable	β	p-value	R-squared (whole model)	Adj. R-squared (whole model)
Do you follow the CEO of the company on social media?	-.314	.552	.018	-.028
Employees' generations	-.069	.830		
Interaction term (EmployeesGenerations × FollowingCEOorNO)	.081	.718		
Do you follow any top-manager of the company on social media?	-.161	.757	.053	.008
Employees' generations	.084	.800		
Interaction term (EmployeesGenerations × FollowingTOPorNO)	-.052	.804		
Do you follow your linear manager on social media?	-.344	.504	.016	-.031
Employees' generations	-.108	.749		
Interaction term (EmployeesGenerations × FollowingLINorNO)	.109	.592		

*Note: *$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$*
Result: Proposition 2 – not supported.

5.4.3 Testing Proposition 3

Moderators are useful when seeking to identify contingent conditions that either strengthen or weaken a causal relationship between the independent- and dependent variable (Fang, Kellermanns & Eddelston, 2019), which is the essential goal of proposition 3. The third proposition states that the relationship between following a leader on social media and employees' feeling of belongingness to the organization is moderated by the employees' perception of authenticity of the content provided by the leader on social media.

After analyzing the collected data, we realized that there was no variance in employees' perception of authenticity of the content which their leaders publish on social media. As can be seen in Figure 13, only 3% of employees responded that the content provided by their linear manager is not authentic, while 2.5% and 11% of employees were even not sure how to answer that question about the top-manager and the CEO respectively. Thus, we did not proceed with the regression analysis of this proposal due to the lack of variation in the respondents' answers.

5.4.4 Testing Proposition 4

In order to test the fourth proposition, we regressed the independent variable (following colleagues on social media) onto the dependent variable (employees' feeling of belongingness). The results (Table 5) show a statistically significant linear relationship between the variables (P-value = 0.010 < 0.05). The data indicates that employees who do not follow any of their colleagues on social media have a 0.540 lower belongingness score. That half-point can truly make an impact (Figure 16).

The direction of the relationship is negative (i.e., variables are negatively correlated), meaning the inverse relationship - when one variable increases, the other decreases. For a clear understanding of the results, it is important to note that the answer "yes" was recorded as "1", while "no" = "2". The magnitude, or strength, of the association, is approximately moderate (r = -.312).

However, the analysis has an R-squared of .097, which means that only 9.7% of the variance in employees' feeling of belongingness is explained by following colleagues on social media. Moreover, the adjusted R-squared is .083. Nevertheless, a low R-squared value does not invalidate the importance of significant variables (Norušis, 2006). Even with a low R-squared, statistically significant P-values continue to identify relationships, and coefficients have the same interpretation. Such a combination of low P-values and low R-squared shows that even high-variability data can have a significant trend indicating a real relationship between the significant predictors and the response variable (Hinton, McMurray, & Brownlow, 2014). That is why we conclude that Proposition 4 is partially supported, but requires further testing with a larger sample in order to be confirmed.

Table 5. Regression results testing for a direct relationship in proposition 4.

Variable	β	p-value	R-squared	Adj. R-squared	Pearson Correlation
Do you follow any of your company colleagues on social media?	-.540	.010*	.097	.083	-.312*

*Note: *p < 0.05; **p < 0.01*

Result: Proposition 4 – partially supported.

5.4.5 Testing Proposition 5

To test the fifth proposition, we regressed the independent variable (number of colleagues followed by employees on social media) onto the dependent variable (employees' feeling of belongingness). The results (Table 6) provide us with a statistically significant linear relationship between the variables (P-value = 0.014 < 0.05). Also, they indicate a practical relevance: increasing the number of colleagues an employee follows on social media by 1 adds 0.012 points to their belongingness score. That number might seem low, however, knowing that the variance in the number of colleagues followed by employees is wide (Figure 14), this change becomes much more influential when having, for example, 80 colleagues followed on social media (increases the belongingness score by 0.96 points).

The direction of the relationship is positive (i.e., variables are positively correlated), meaning when one variable increases, the other increases as well. The magnitude, or strength, of the association, is approximately moderate ($r = .323$). The R-squared is .104, which means that only 10.4% of the variance in employees' feeling of belongingness is explained by how many colleagues they are following on social media. The adjusted R-squared is .088. As described in the previous proposition testing, low R-squared value indicates that the model explains not enough variance in the data but does not nullify the trend between independent and dependent variables. Thus, we consider Proposition 5 to be partially supported, but we suggest testing it on a larger data sample in the future.

Table 6. Regression results testing for a direct relationship in proposition 5.

Variable	β	p-value	R-squared	Adj. R-squared	Pearson Correlation
How many of your company colleagues do you follow on social media?	.012	.014*	.104	.088	.323*

Note: *p < 0.05; **p < 0.01

Result: Proposition 5 – partially supported.

5.4.6 Testing Proposition 6

Testing the final proposition, we regressed the independent variable (following the official company's profile on social media) onto the dependent variable (employees' feeling of belongingness). The results showed that following the official company's profile on social media had a non-significant contribution to predicting employees' feeling of belongingness to the organization (Table 7). Thus, the findings did not support Proposition 6.

For a clear understanding of the results, it is important to note that the answer "yes" was recorded as "1", while "no" = "2", that is why a negative β in Table 7 would mean, for example, that not following the official company's profile on social media decreases the belongingness score by 0.129 points.

Table 7. Regression results testing for a direct relationship in proposition 6.

Variable	β	p-value	R-squared	Adj. R-squared	Pearson Correlation
Do you follow the official company's profile on social media?	-.129	.550	.006	-.010	-.074

Note: *p < 0.05; **p < 0.01

Result: Proposition 6 – not supported.

5.4.7 Summary of the Testing Results

For a better visual representation of all the analysis results, we provide a summarizing Table 8, which includes the number of the proposition, its description, and whether the data analysis supported the proposition or not.

Table 8. Recap of main findings

Proposition №	Findings	Description
1	Not supported	Following a leader on social media is positively associated with employees' feeling of belongingness.
2	Not supported	The relationship between following a leader on social media and the employee's feeling of belongingness to the organization is moderated by the employees' generation.
3	Not tested	The relationship between following a leader on social media and employees' feeling of belongingness to the organization is moderated by the employees' perception of authenticity of the content provided by the leader on social media.
4	Partially supported	Following colleagues on social media is positively associated with the employees' feeling of belongingness to the organization.
5	Partially supported	The number of colleagues an employee follows on social media is positively associated with their feeling of belongingness to the organization.
6	Not supported	Following the official company's profile on social media is positively associated with the employees' feeling of belongingness to the organization.

6.0 Discussion

As initially mentioned in the introduction, it is a large amount of research on humans' intrinsic desire to belong. Still, little is known about the sense of belongingness concerning organizational employees and the workplace. Also, it is next to no research on how social media usage by leaders might influence the employees feeling of belongingness. This descriptive research aimed to examine how following leaders or colleagues on social media is related to or associated with employees' feeling of belongingness to the organization and to investigate potential moderating variables. We composed six propositions that guided our research and analysis. Different independent variables have been tested together with different moderating variables, as well as the control variables, have been checked. Even though only 2 out of 6 proposals were partially supported, we have potentially uncovered some interesting findings, regardless of the main results. In the following chapter, we will discuss both our findings and the limitations of the paper. Ultimately, we will make some suggestions for future research.

6.1 Relationship Between Following a Leader on Social Media and Employees' Feeling of Belongingness

Before conducting the analysis, we proposed that the feeling of belongingness would be significantly dependent on whether or not the employees follow their leader, such as the CEO, the top-manager or the linear manager, on social media. On the one hand, we did not find support for the proposition, and our initial belief is rejected. On the other hand, the proposition is based on a thorough review of previous research by Goodenow (1992), Baumeister and Leary (1995), Tapscott (2008), Meister and Willyerd (2010), Korzynski (2015), Batenburg and Bartels (2017), Robertson and Kee (2017) and others, as well as on practical observations of a respected professional whom we have interviewed (Anonymous, 2019). Thus, the results were surprising for us. We believe it is fair to argue that the results of our analysis might not have shown significance due to the small data sample. Because of this, we are highly interested in conducting further research and testing the proposition on a large sample in order to make sure that the conclusions are justified and that if there is lack of significance, then it is because of the absence of

the relationship and not because of the limitations or a small number of survey participants.

6.2 Moderating Effects

Our initial idea was to test for the moderating effects on the relationship between the independent and dependent variables. In chapter 5.4.2 we showed that there was no support for the second proposition either – meaning the data does not support the proposition that the employees' generation moderates the relationship between following a leader on social media and employees' feeling of belongingness to the organization. We were again surprised by the results since the proposition is built upon established research. Initially, we did not include employees' generations in the list of control variables, due to the belief that it would have an effect as a moderator. However, we still believe that employees' age difference matters, which is why we decided to eventually do the test where the generations would be a control variable rather than a moderating variable. We will discuss this further in detail in chapter 6.4.

The third proposition state that the relationship between following a leader on social media and employees' feeling of belongingness to the organization is moderated by the employees' perception of the authenticity of the content provided by the leader on social media. However, as mentioned in chapter 5.4.3, we were not able to do the regression with this as a moderator because there was no variance in employees' perception of authenticity of the content which their leaders publish on social media. Also, the majority of the participants answered the same alternative, resulting in too little variance. Another possible reason behind why the results are lacking variation could be the measure itself. As mentioned in chapter 4.4.3, we created a new measure to capture the perception of authenticity. This new measure could influence the validity of the data since it had not been tested beforehand. Thus, the measure might not yield the results it is aimed to produce.

On the other hand, we still find the proposition about the moderating effect of authenticity essential to investigate. We believe it is fair to argue that employees who perceive the content as authentic will feel a greater connection to the leader as they see similarities between themselves and the leader. We also believe that this

will have several beneficial effects on work performance. As previously mentioned, research shows that employees who feel a sense of belonging report higher enthusiasm, interest and enjoyment (Furrer & Skinner, 2003), and they also perform better (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Also, Osterman (2000) states that students who experience belonging have higher motivation, engagement and are more committed to the school. Seeing this in the context of a workplace, it is fair to say that increased belongingness to the organization will increase employees' motivation to engage, further enhancing organizational performance. That is why we suggest conducting further research, but with the implementation of an improved way of testing the perceived authenticity of the content, as, for example, using a 7-options Likert scale to have the variance in the answers. This will be further discussed in chapters 6.5 and 6.7.

6.3 Following Colleagues on Social Media

The two partially supported propositions were not related to the company leaders, but colleagues. The analysis has shown that employees who follow their colleagues on social media have a stronger feeling of belongingness to the whole company. Moreover, the analysis in chapter 5.4.5 supports the idea that the more colleagues an employee follows on social media, the higher the belongingness score he/she has. Both findings are pretty self-explanatory since the company consists of people, so if you feel closer to people, you usually feel closer to the company. However, we also understand that the direction of the relationship can be the opposite as well - the stronger belongingness an employee feels to the company, the more colleagues he/she starts following on social media. Thus, it would be interesting to conduct experimental research in order to find out the causality. Nevertheless, even without knowing what causes what in this relationship, the findings have practical importance in themselves – promoting active social media use among colleagues in the company can be a strategic tool to increase employees' engagement and belongingness to the organization.

6.4 Other Findings

During the process of conducting this research, we made some additional assumptions. Thus, we discovered findings which had not been a part of the

research scope defined in the introduction. We will discuss these additional findings in the following chapter.

6.4.1 Following the Official Company's Profile on Social Media

When it comes to the company's official profile on social media, the results of the analysis did not show any support for its relationship with the employees' feeling of belongingness. However, we still think that this tool is vital for the company since it has a strong correlation with following colleagues (r = .412, significance at 0.01 level). Such an official company's profile is likely to provide employees with new contacts among colleagues or make them more engaged through common photos and emotions shared on that profile. That is why we suggest that this should be used as a strategic tool to facilitate the creation of connections among people at the workplace.

6.4.2 Employees' Generations

It was also interesting and unexpecting to see that the youngest generation on average follows the lowest number of colleagues in the company (Figure 15). We argue that one of the reasons for such findings might be the fact that the young employees are newer to the company and have not had enough time to get to know more people and create networks yet. However, we are surprised by the results, since based on the previous research, we thought that the outcome would be the opposite. Moreover, based on our own experience of being Gen Z employees at work, we had the impression that we, as younger people, are more active on social media than our older colleagues. We feel that we, as Gen Z, are always the first to initiate those online friendships. However, we acknowledge that we might be biased in terms of the personality traits we possess, meaning that other employees of our age might be not as active or extraverted.

Further, we tested the control variables, namely: gender, number of years spent in the company, and the average frequency of social media use. None of the variables showed significance. However, as mentioned in chapter 6.2, we have decided to test generations which employees belong to as a control variable as well.

The regression analysis revealed that employees belonging to Generation X (41-55 years old now) on average have 0.423 points higher belongingness scores (P-value = 0.013 < 0.05). We do not know the exact factors causing such findings in the particular company (one would need to apply qualitative research methods, such as interviews, for example). However, there are various possible explanations found in the literature. For example, Davis, Pawlowski and Houston (2006) claim that GenX employees tend to stay with one company because it seems like the right way to do. Furthermore, Montana and Petit (2008) argue that one of the top work motivators for GenX employees is continuous employment. Thus, it might be that these employees prefer to stick to one company for many years, and therefore, be more loyal and feel stronger belongingness to the organization. However, D'Amato and Herzfeldt (2008) suggest that GenX employees are more committed not to the organization, but to the right leader, which again emphasizes the importance of conducting further research on our first proposition.

In contrast, employees belonging to Generation Y (26-40 years old now) on average have 0.372 points lower belongingness scores (P-value = 0.028 < 0.05). Furthermore, the correlation analysis shows a positive correlation of employees' feeling of belongingness with GenX ($r = .297$, significance at 0.05 level), and a negative correlation with GenY ($r = -.265$, significance at 0.05 level). These findings are very interesting and could be reasoned by many factors. For instance, the idea that younger generations will have many more careers in their lives compared to the older ones (Burmeister, 2009). Moreover, Kerslake (2005) argues that GenY employees tend to show loyalty only until it helps to achieve their goals, and then they move on in search of new challenges. Finally, Logan (2008) claims that job security is not a motivator for GenY employees. Thus, we might assume that the negative correlation between the feeling of belongingness to the workplace and GenY employees has its grounds in the research. Overall, it looks like there truly are some generational differences in the workplace, so testing on a larger sample would be interesting for future research on that topic.

6.4.3 Importance of Descriptive Statistics

Finally, we consider the descriptive statistics provided in chapter 5.3 to have interesting findings on their own. Being aware of the social media behaviour of

employees allows an understanding of how it could be used for the benefit of both sides – employees and the employer. For example, it was interesting to find out that such high shares of employees follow the CEO, top-managers, linear managers, colleagues and the official company's profile on social media (Figures 12 and 14) and check the content very often (Figure 11). That should not be disregarded but instead used as an opportunity to have this modern way of facilitation of engagement, belongingness, loyalty and interest via the digital means. This facilitation is especially crucial during such times as the COVID-19 pandemic or other situations when most employees start working remotely and do not meet physically in the office. Telenor ASA, for instance, has decided that their employees would have the choice to work from home even after the COVID-19 pandemic since they experienced that home office has had many positive outcomes for the company (Bie, 2020). If other companies follow this trend as well, the need to facilitate engagement, belongingness and loyalty through digital means will increase.

6.5 Challenges and Limitations

Researching this has presented some challenges, which essentially limit the scope of our results. We believe it is necessary to discuss some of the challenges we faced and explain how our study is limited due to some of these challenges.

Firstly, when initiating this research, we faced some challenges concerning the procurement of the data. To proceed with this specific study, we were dependent on cooperating with a company which has a CEO who actively posts content on social media. There are not many companies to choose from here in Norway, which resulted in some difficulties finding a company that would be willing to participate in our study. Few similar companies may also pose a challenge when trying to test the same propositions in another company.

Secondly, there is always a concern about the validity or generalizability of research done in a single organization. Often it is not representative (Bryman & Bell, 2011), meaning our research might yield findings that cannot be applied more generally to other cases. When evaluating the generalizability, we examined other companies that were similar to the company we investigated in our thesis. We can see that there were multiple Norwegian food production companies of approximately the same

size as the company we investigated. The same size includes roughly the same turnover, a similar number of employees and the production of similar products. Also, all of them were Norwegian companies producing in Norway. Further, several of the companies we compared our organization to, have been producing for nearly a hundred years, making them all fairly established companies. Thus, it is fair to say that the results found for the company we examine in our thesis might be generalizable to other similar companies. However, there is still a lack of social media activity among the CEOs of the other companies, making it potentially hard to test.

Further, our results may be affected by the measures we used as the underlying construct in the analysis. One of our challenges was to ensure the reliability of survey data, which is very dependent on the survey structure and the accuracy of the answers provided by the respondents. Thus, we aimed to ensure that the questions were as clear as possible for the participants to understand everything correctly. The language used in our survey may also be a limitation in this study and could potentially influence the internal validity of the results (Bryman & Bell, 2011). When constructing the survey, we chose to preserve the previous verification of the measurement we used, at the expense of keeping the survey in English. However, the main language in the company we examined is Norwegian. We had a dialogue with our contact person in the company regarding this issue. Still, we decided to proceed with the original language due to the reliability of the measurement. Nevertheless, research indicates that answering in a second language might impact the way the respondents interpret and respond to the questions (Harzing, 2006; Ralston et al., 1995).

Lastly, as explained in chapter 5.4.3, we experienced a lack of variation in responses regarding perceived authenticity. The majority of the employees believed that the content posted by the CEO, linear manager and top-manager was personalized and – without a doubt – posted by themselves and not by an SMM/PR third party. As a result, we were not able to do the regression analysis on authenticity as a moderating variable, which further meant that we were not able to test whether authenticity moderated the relationship or not. We will further discuss this in chapter 6.5.

6.6 Practical Implications

We believe that our research extends organizational literature by shedding light on factors influencing the employees' feeling of belongingness to the organization, and there are some practical implications to our findings. As stated by Robertson and Kee (2017), there is empirical evidence that job satisfaction is positively related to time spent interacting with co-workers on Facebook (Robertson & Kee, 2017). The results from our research suggest that following colleagues on social media increase the feeling of belongingness to the organization. Furthermore, the results indicate that the feeling of belongingness increases with the number of colleagues an employee follows on social media. The results have also shown that following the official company's profile on social media is positively correlated with following colleagues on those media channels. Thus, the practical implications of these three findings are that companies should encourage employees to follow each other, as well as the company's profile, on social media. Social media channels such as Facebook or Instagram could be used as an organizational strategy to promote employees' feeling of belongingness to the workplace. Finally, as for the theoretical implications, the study contributes to the collection of empirical findings that are in favour of using social media at work, unlike some researchers who state it can be harmful.

6.7 Suggestions for Future Research

In addition to the practical and theoretical implications, there are also some limitations to our research, as discussed in 6.5. In light of these limitations, we have made some suggestions for further research which we believe could be very interesting.

Firstly, due to the limitations regarding language, future research should consider verifying the Basic Psychological Needs Scale in Norwegian (or another local language if the study is held in other countries). Using the official language in the country would enable the measure to be used in the first language of the employees. It is possible that a translated Basic Psychological Needs Scale, the relatedness dimension, in particular, could produce other results than we achieved (Harzing, 2006; Ralston et al., 1995).

Also, most surveys of only one case or organization are not representative (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Thus, it would be beneficial for future research to test the six presented propositions in other companies. However, the lack of relevant (in terms of leaders' social media activeness and company size) companies in Norway may pose a challenge when trying to test the same propositions in similar companies. That is why we would also suggest testing the propositions in countries that have multiple companies in which CEOs and other leaders are active on social media (e.g., the USA, Russia, the UK (Business Insider, 2019; CNBC, 2019; Forbes, 2018)).

Lastly, as mentioned, the moderator variable (authenticity) we planned to analyze did not have any variation. Thus, we could not produce conclusive findings (Fang et al., 2019). One possible solution, and a suggestion for future research, would be to construct a new measure for the perception of authenticity which would use continuous variables rather than dichotomous variables. Then it could be possible to test the highly relevant moderating effect stated in proposition 3.

7.0 Conclusion

Throughout this study, we have attempted to answer our initial research question and understand the relationship between following company's leaders or colleagues on social media and employees' feeling of belongingness. It is possible that due to the limitations present in the study, we did not find significance between some of the examined variables. However, two assumptions regarding following colleagues on social media, as well as some descriptive statistics, have eventually led to significant findings being established.

The present study has contributed to a gap in the current literature by exploring how following colleagues on social media can be a predictor of employees' feeling of belongingness to the workplace. This gap has not been examined previously. Furthermore, our findings suggest that the number of colleagues followed on social media is positively associated with employees' feeling of belongingness. This association means that the more colleagues an employee follow on social media, the higher the belongingness score he/she has. Moreover, the study highlights the

importance of having an active official company's social media profile and promoting it among employees, since following it is positively correlated with following colleagues on social media, which relevance and importance are described above. Thus, the study emphasizes the idea that companies consist of people, and employees become more personally attached to the company when feeling more connected to the colleagues, which can and should be executed through the modern digital ways of communication. This personal attachment is especially relevant when not having frequent real-life contact, such as during (and might be after) the COVID-19 pandemic, regular remote work, or just due to the hierarchical issues in the organization.

Initiating this research, we also stated that we aimed to use what is currently known about belongingness, social media and leadership, and further investigate whether there was a need for a new leadership role at the workplace – digital influencer – and if there was, how it would influence employees' feeling of belongingness to the workplace. Our research provides suggestions and arguments for the relevance and importance of conducting further investigation on our research question and the propositions which had not been supported by the analysis and their results. The importance of leaders' active use of social media, and the perceived authenticity of the provided content, and thus, the need for a new leadership role as a digital influencer is yet to be discovered.

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9.0 Appendix

Appendix A. Research survey (all names are deleted for confidentiality reasons):
See the attached "Survey questions.pdf" document.

Appendix B. The letter sent to the contact person of the examined organization:

Hi [Name],

Thank you very much for the answer!

You may copy the link below and send it to all the participants. The survey is created in Qualtrics, the program we are provided access to at BI. This program ensures that the participants cannot be identified in any way, meaning that they all will remain anonymous.

Survey: https://bino.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_eVPQlOiWl7sP4KF

You may attach the info above when you send the emails to the participants, however, all the information needed is also mentioned in the introduction text when starting the survey.

Also, we would like to set March the 24th as the deadline for completing the survey. We will send you a small reminder (as discussed on the phone) if we see that too few people respond. The more people participate in the survey, the better it is for the result.

Please do not hesitate to ask us questions.
Again, thank you very much for your help. It is very much appreciated! ☺

Best regards,
Daria and Lillian