

**Beyond the Age Filter: How Employer Branding on LinkedIn Represents
Young, Mid-Career, and Experienced Professionals**

A Qualitative Content Analysis of Age Representation in LinkedIn Employer Branding Posts

Student Name: Dewi Kamphuis
Student Number: 697121

Supervisor: Prof. Dr. Martine van Selm

Master Media Studies - Media & Business
Erasmus School of History, Culture and Communication
Erasmus University Rotterdam

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ABSTRACT

Given demographic changes and aging employees, age-inclusive employer branding is therefore relevant for organizations aiming to attract diverse talent. Although diversity and inclusion have been an important corporate communications topic, relatively little has been said about age. This thesis examines how various age categories; young professionals (18–34), mid-career professionals (35–54), and experienced professionals (55+), are presented in employer branding campaigns on LinkedIn. Although the platform offers the opportunity for inclusive storytelling, little research has been conducted analyzing age representation.

The central research question guiding this study is: *How do employers represent different age groups in employer branding campaigns on social media?* To answer this question, a qualitative content analysis was performed of 150 employer branding posts on LinkedIn from ten well-known companies in five different sectors: Communication Technology, Industry & Engineering, Financial Services, Transport & Infrastructure, and Fashion & Luxury. Using a coding framework based on the Stereotype Content Model (SCM), Dual-Process Model of Diversity Management (DPM), and Career Stages Theory, the posts were examined for visual and textual indicators of warmth, competence, and inclusivity.

Findings show that mid-career professionals dominate employer branding posts and that they are portrayed as competent and reliable. Young professionals also have a strong presence, especially in Communication Technology and Fashion & Luxury. Young professionals are frequently framed as emotionally warm and dynamic rather than professionally competent. Experienced professionals are mostly absent across all sectors and where they did appear they are depicted as mentors or support roles. This resembles the SCM stereotype of “high warmth, low competence”. These portrayals suggest that organizations may unintentionally perpetuate age-based biases, even while claiming to support inclusion.

While some companies, like Google, Stedin, Schiphol, and Rabobank, showed signs of structural inclusivity (e.g., mentorship programs, inclusive HR policies) most companies relied on symbolic representation. These companies showed diverse imagery but without tangible evidence of inclusion. Humor, which could serve as a bridge across generations, was notably absent in all analyzed content. Visual and tonal strategies varied by sector, but a

consistent pattern of marginalizing older professionals and idealizing youthful energy emerged.

This study contributes to the existing theory by applying stereotype and generational frameworks to the visual and discursive realm of employer branding. It highlights a disconnect between corporate diversity rhetoric and the reality of representation when it comes to age, thereby making a case for organizations to engage in more structurally inclusive and age-diverse practices in branding. Practically, the results offer applicable advice for communications professionals that want to target to multigenerational audiences in an authentic manner.

KEYWORDS: *Employer Branding, Age Diversity, LinkedIn, Stereotype Content Model, Inclusivity Communication*

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1. Introduction

In the competitive labor market of today, employer branding is a critical strategy employed by organizations to garner both interest in working for the organization and motivate talent to apply (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004, p. 502). Social media platforms are an essential tool for employer branding, enabling organizations to present and shape their employer image and deliver messages to potential workers directly (Itam et al., 2020, p. 2). In particular, LinkedIn has become one of the most prominent platforms for organizations to build and maintain their employer brand, offering a professional space to communicate values, culture, and diversity practices (Keppeler & Papenfuß, 2020, p. 763; Voorveld et al., 2024, p. 960).

However, while employer branding research has grown in recent years, the representation of different age groups in these campaigns remains underexplored, especially in the context of online communication. According to Xu (2020), older and younger workers are commonly stereotyped, communicating different images: older employees are represented as rigid and technologically outdated, while younger employees are represented as ambitious but not-yet-experienced (p. 5). Such stereotypes may affect hiring decisions and foster organizational culture in ways that go against diversity and inclusion imperatives (Xu, 2020, p. 3).

Organizations however are increasingly under pressure to reflect inclusive values in how their employer brand is perceived externally in the market. This implies that an employer branding is more than a talent attracting instrument, it is an outlet for communicating social responsibility and identity (Ćorić & Špoljarić, 2021, p. 31). However, whether age diversity is portrayed both visually and textually is seldom critically examined and so it remains an open question as to whether such adverts reinforce or challenge existing ageist stereotypes.

By looking critically at the broader discussion on age inclusivity in both social and academic domains, this research aims to gain a better understanding of how employers represent all age groups within employer branding in the social media domain. In doing so, it seeks to contribute to the visibility of age diversity in corporate storytelling, with particular attention to tone, framing, and inclusivity indicators.

1.1. Societal Relevance

Age stereotypes can shape hiring decisions, career advancement opportunities, and everyday workplace interactions in profound ways (Xu, 2020, p. 3). While diversity and inclusion (D&I) policies have become increasingly mainstream in corporate strategies, age

remains one of the least visible and most overlooked aspects of inclusion efforts. It has been found that older people are often misrepresented or stereotyped in traditional as well as digital media environments (Xu, 2020, p. 5). These portrayals all too frequently emphasize limitations. For example, reduced technological competence or adaptability instead of showing the value of experience, loyalty or mentoring capacity. Simultaneously, younger professionals are often described as energetic and innovative, but also as inexperienced or unqualified for leadership, which tends to heighten rather than lessen intergenerational divisions (Fiske et al., 2002, p. 881).

These risks are only intensified by the increasing significance of employer branding through social media. If the diversity of age does not get fairly and accurately represented in online employer communication, organizations within and without knowledge may continue to communicate exclusionary messages, while at the same time articulating inclusive values in public. As LinkedIn is the main arena for employer branding, its content is crucial in influencing what is imagined and normalized in terms of age diversity in organizations (Pandita, 2022, p. 16).

This research is socially relevant because it explores whether existing employer branding initiatives reinforce or contest age stereotypes. This is important in an era of rapid population ageing, increasing retirement ages and the growing centrality of intergenerational working for organizational effectiveness. Age-inclusive communication efforts may help level the hiring playing field while also influencing larger cultural shifts to define age diversity as a value, not a problem, for an organization. Insights from this study may support organizations in aligning their employer branding practices with the real-life diversity of their workforce and the values they seek to embody.

1.2. Academic Relevance

This research contributes to the academic discourse by addressing an underexamined intersection within communication, branding, and diversity studies: the representation of age in employer branding on social media. Although the employer branding literature has evolved since the foundational contribution from Backhaus and Tikoo (2004), researchers have mostly concentrated on determinants of employer branding (e.g., corporate reputation, job qualities or employer attractiveness) while neglecting demographic diversity, especially age-related biases (Ćorić & Špoljarić, 2021, p. 31). This study therefore fills a significant gap in the literature by

examining how different age groups are portrayed in external employer branding messages and whether these portrayals contradict or perpetuate age-based stereotypes.

The study extends Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) theory with regard to internal and external employer branding strategies. Internal branding occurs within the organization and deals with the motivation and retention of existing employees, external employer branding on the other hand deals with the perceptions among potential job applicants (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004, p. 504). This research extends on that framework by examining the extent to which those external branding narratives are ‘age-inclusive’ or ‘age-exclusive’ in their digital channel communications.

In addition, this thesis applies Stereotype Content Model (SCM) to examine the portrayal of age groups on warmth and competence. These are two fundamental dimensions in which social groups are evaluated (Fiske et al., 2002, p. 879). Stereotype Content Model has been widely used in social psychology, but not yet in branding and communication, particularly in digital employer branding. This study extends this theory by exploring how these stereotype dimensions are hegemonically constructed discourse-wise in visual and textual content found on the platforms, such as LinkedIn.

Furthermore, the Dual-Process Model of Diversity (DPM) help to distinguish symbolic and structural inclusiveness in employer branding (Benschop et al., 2015, p. 542). And while symbolic diversity may include imagery that appears diverse to the eye, structural diversity is about the policies and practices that are engrained within the organization. When applying this this model to social media content it offers possibilities to analyze in more detail how employer branding practices actually articulate inclusivity or merely a shallow representation (Benschop et al., 2015, p. 548).

Lastly, by integrating generational theory (Apolonio & Jubac, 2025, p. 499), this research contributes to our understanding of how generational identities are constructed and communicated in employer branding, and how these identities may align with or challenge existing age-based stereotypes.

1.3. Research Question

In this context, this thesis sets the objective to explore the representation of different age groups in employer branding campaigns on social media and especially on LinkedIn. Although previous research has looked at employer branding and organizational attractiveness (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004, p. 502) and at age stereotypes in the workplace (Xu, 2020, p. 3; Fiske et al., 2002, p. 881), the convergence of these elements is under-considered, particularly via how the employer brand can promote age inclusion through digital narratives. This is the major missing piece of information that this thesis aims to fill. Accordingly, the central research question of this study is:

"How do employers represent different age groups in employer branding campaigns on social media?"

In order to address this question, this study uses a qualitative content analysis based on a sample of 150 employer branding posts collected from LinkedIn. There were posts chosen from five major industry sectors namely, Communication Technology, Financial Services, Industry & Engineering, Transport & Infrastructure and Fashion & Luxury. These sectors aim to represent the diversity in behavior for employer branding. The coding framework based on the Stereotype Content Model (Fiske et al., 2002, p. 879), Career Stages Theory (Super, 1980, p. 284), and the Dual-Process Model of Diversity Management (Benschop et al., 2015, p. 542) interprets posts across dimensions of warmth, competence, inclusiveness, and tone.

This approach makes it possible to explore, in a systematic and theory-based way, how employer branding is used not only in marketing terms but also as a space where age-related social meanings are constructed and communicated.

2. Theoretical Framework

In this chapter theories and concepts that inform the empirical study will be presented. This chapter will provide insights from organizational communication, social psychology and media studies, with specific focus on stereotype theory, diversity management, generational identities and tone of voice. The following sections will discuss the Stereotype Content Model (SCM), the Dual-Process Model of Diversity Management (DPM), and Generational Theory, among others.

2.1. Employer Branding and the Role of Social Media

Employer branding refers to the strategies organizations use to market themselves as attractive employers to both current and potential employees (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004, p. 502). Grounded in marketing and human resource management theory, the more attractive an employer is, the better is the overall representation of the organization and the more appeal to appropriate talent an organization has (Ćorić & Špoljarić, 2021, p. 30). Social media are important for employer branding at the heart of today's digital landscape. (Itam et al., 2020, p. 3).

Employer branding process includes both internal and external branding. Internal employer branding addresses aspects such as employee motivation and retention, whereas external employer branding aims to influence job-seekers and the external labor market (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004, p. 504). Social media platforms play important roles on external employer branding; they help the company to display corporate culture, values and employee diversity (Itam et al, 2020, p. 6). But as the exploration of various age ranges in branding is relatively unexplored, it raises questions of whether the inclusivity is comprehensive enough or if ageist myths are simply being reiterated.

2.2. Age representation in Employer Branding

Xu (2020) conducted a visual content analysis of 1000 Facebook posts created by 33 Swedish local authorities, focusing on how older people were visually portrayed compared to other age groups (p. 1). Xu (2020) found out that age portrayals in social media posts often present older people as less physically and technologically competent, thereby reinforcing their distance from youth and working life (p. 18). This perpetuates a binary that diminishes the perceived contribution of professionals at either end of the age continuum and that does not accurately capture the complex reality of workforce diversity.

Ćorić & Špoljarić (2021) argue that employer branding campaigns often visually and textually prioritize youthfulness and digital skills, resulting in the implicit marginalization of older workers (p. 33). Instead of showing age-integrated teams or promoting the value of intergenerational cooperation, brand campaigns promote a dynamic, up-to-date image that is routinely associated with youth and youthfulness. Such discrimination is even more troubling in the face of the increasing number of mature workers in the workforce.

Media stereotypes research indicates that the problem is not limited to brands. Kroon et al. (2016b) find that mixed stereotypes for older workers which depict them as warm, but incompetent are activated and reinforced by media content and in turn, influence negative employability perceptions (p. 812). Also in a corporate communication setting, older employees are often portrayed symbolically as mentors or support staff rather than for their innovation and leadership (Kroon et al., 2016a, p. 819).

This negative identification is also reflected in the framing data. Kroon et al. (2017) found that the news is more likely to victimize older workers in structural labor market issues, whereas corporate media focus more on surface-level positivity while avoiding deeper structural accountability (p. 1170). These framing tactics might indicate an organizational struggle to publicly convey inclusion while internally managing demographic change in their workplace. Concerns about flexibility and trainability remain deeply embedded among employers and in their communication practices despite policy efforts to improve employability potential (van Selm & van der Heijden, 2013, p. 260).

The real-world impact of such representations is not just symbolic. Kroon et al. (2018) discovered that enhanced visibility of older workers in the news, especially in conjunction with negative health or competence stereotypes, was related to an increase in age discrimination claims in the Netherlands (p. 110). This highlights that the ways in which older professionals are framed in public discourse, including employer branding, may actually materialize ageist attitudes in disempowering ways.

2.3. The Stereotype Content Model and Age Representation

The Stereotype Content Model (SCM), initially introduced by Fiske et al. (2002), explains how social groups are perceived as based on two fundamental dimensions: warmth and competence (p. 878). These dimensions categorize groups into four stereotype clusters: high warmth-high competence (e.g. respected professionals), high warmth-low competence (e.g. elderly individuals), low warmth – high competence (e.g. business elites), and low

warmth – low competence (e.g. marginalized groups such as the homeless) (Fiske, 2018, p. 69). These stereotypes shape how different age groups are framed with older employees often being depicted as warm but less innovative, while younger professionals are seen as highly competent but lacking stability.

There are generational stereotypes for Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennials and Generation Z, demonstrating that generational identity plays a crucial role in how age is perceived (Fraser et al., 2022, p. 3184). Millennials (born 1981-1996) are frequently stereotyped as ‘entitled,’ ‘lazy,’ and ‘obsessed with work-life balance,’ often blamed for ‘killing industries’ due to shifting economic behaviors (Fraser et al., 2022, p. 3189). This aligns the low warmth-high competence quadrant of the SCM. In employer branding Millennials are portrayed as adaptable and digitally fluent, but these portrayals may still reinforce negative stereotypes rather than challenge them. Generation Z (1997-2012) is framed as ‘digitally native,’ ‘socially conscious,’ and ‘easily distracted,’ with strong associations with social media activism and cancel culture (Fraser et al., 2022, p. 3188). Generation Z is often perceived as innovators and digital natives (high competence), they are also described as ‘overly sensitive’ or as ‘lacking resilience’ (low warmth), underpinning an ambivalent stereotype, resembling descendants of Millennials (Fiske, 2018, p.71).

Generation X (1965-1980) is often described as ‘the forgotten generation’ due, in part, to being the smaller generational cohort before the Millennials and Generation Z cohorts (Fraser et al., 2022, p. 3188). As a result, it has received relatively less media and corporate attention than the larger cohorts. This group is stereotyped as ‘self-reliant,’ ‘pragmatic,’ and ‘cynical,’ often caught between the more idealistic Millennials and the wealthier Baby Boomers (Fraser et al., 2022, p. 3191). Generation X is often described as competent but disengaged, valuing independence over corporate loyalty. They are not perceived as digital natives like younger generations but are being considered ‘adoptable’ to technological changes, unlike Baby Boomers (Fraser et al., 2022, p. 3191). On the SCM framework gen X would be placed closer to a moderate competence – moderate warmth position, reflecting their stable but overlooked presence in discussions about workforce diversity (Fiske, 2018, p.71; Fraser et al., 2022, p. 3190).

These generational portrayals are not only culturally constructed but are also psychologically upheld by means of social categorization. As Dordoni et al. (2015) state, age stereotypes are constructed from both Social Identity Theory and Self-Categorization Theory, wherein people categorize themselves and others into social categories, such as “young” and “old”, according to perceived similarities (p. 396). This cognitive categorization forms the

foundation for in-group and out-group thinking, often leading to generalized assumptions about capabilities, values, and workplace fit.

Although some aspects of age stereotypes are positive (e.g., in terms of loyalty or reliability), many of them are centered around deficits (e.g., less flexible, resistant to change, and lacking ICT experience) even in the absence of empirical evidence to support them (Posthuma & Campion, as cited in Dordoni & Argentero, 2015, p. 396). These sociocultural processes perpetuate the warm-but-incompetent stereotype presented by the Stereotype Content Model and can influence workplace dynamics and branding communication internally and externally.

Importantly, what counts as an ‘older’ worker is always context-specific. Age thresholds can vary significantly from one sector to another, and in certain sectors, for example fashion or consulting, one could be already considered as ‘old’ even at 35 years of age (Bombelli & Finzi, as cited in Dordoni & Argentero, 2015, p. 397). This flexibility in the definition in age categorizations underlines the cultural and symbolic nature of generational stereotypes, which employer branding may reproduce if not critically examined.

2.4. The Paradox of Age-Friendliness and Employer Branding Exclusion

Although the discourse around “age-friendly” workplaces has gained momentum, recent research suggests a paradoxical development: while job characteristics have become more accommodating to older workers, employer branding strategies do not necessarily reflect this inclusivity (Baltes et al., 2020, p. 30-31). Acemoglu, Mühlbach, and Scott (2022) also emphasize that although the number of age-friendly jobs has significantly increased, older workers are structurally excluded from these roles. This indicates a disconnect between the realities of job design and communicative framing of inclusion (p. 19).

Baltes et al. (2020) studied the framing of older software developers in professional online communities and consistently identified an ageist framing (p. 27-28). Such representations highlight mental decay, an inability to master technology, and the apparent incongruity of ageing and innovation (Baltes et al., 2020, p. 30). This is particularly concerning in employer branding, where exposure on platforms like LinkedIn informs who we imagine “fits in” in high-tech, high-performing environments (Baltes et al., 2020, p. 31). And when middle-aged and older workers are reflected, they are typically presented as “exceptions” or “legacy holders,” further emphasizing they are out of step with today’s success stories (Baltes et al., 2020, p. 28-29).

At the same time, macroeconomic data indicates a steep rise in the number of “age-friendly” jobs in the job market. Acemoglu, Mühlbach and Scott (2022) developed an Age-Friendliness Index (AFI) and note that, from 1990 to 2020, over 75% of all occupations have become more age friendly and that employment in better than average AFI jobs grew by 49 million jobs (p. 23). The index is based on how occupational characteristics, such as schedule flexibility, physical demands, autonomy, and pace, are valued differently by older versus younger workers. It captures the relative desirability of jobs for workers aged 62 and older compared to those aged 25 to 34. This makes the AFI explicitly focused on the needs and preferences of older workers (Acemoglu et al., 2022, p. 6) But this increase has not been matched by a similar increase in the employment of older workers. But rather younger degree-holding, and particularly younger women have come to occupy these jobs, and older non-graduate men in particular were excluded (p. 24)

This highlights another structural issue. As Acemoglu et al. (2022) underscore, the mismatch between the rise in age-friendly job opportunities and the actual employment of older workers in those roles may be the result of a combination of low occupational mobility among older workers, structural discrimination in hiring, and employer preference for “higher-productive and/or more perceived productive groups, such as younger graduates” (p. 19-20). These findings indicate that even where positions are technically appropriate for older workers, systemic barriers exist blocking the uptake of these roles.

From the perspective of employer branding, this mismatch between the structural growth in age-friendly jobs and the underrepresentation of older workers in those roles creates a disconnect between the internal structure of the labor market and the external image organizations present (Acemoglu et al., 2022, p. 24). While companies may operate in increasingly age-friendly sectors, their branding rarely reflects this inclusivity (Ćorić & Špoljarić, 2021, p. 33). Instead, symbolic inclusivity remains dominant, with occasional portrayals of older professionals as mentors or in support roles. There are rarely presented as innovators, leaders or change agents (Xu, 2020, p.10). This serves to perpetuate the stereotype of the “high warmth, low competence” as delineated by the Stereotype Content Model and narrow work market potential of older professionals (Fiske et al., 2002, p.879).

Additionally, under-representation itself can also serve to reinforce under-participation (Xu, 2020, p. 10; Kroon et al., 2016a, p. 812). This in turn can lead to older workers being put off re-entering or moving laterally within other areas of the labor market, particularly for younger, forward-facing companies. In this way, branding is not just a representation of culture, it is a way of determining who gets to imagine that they belong in particular

professional spaces (Ćorić & Špoljarić, 2021, p. 31; Van Selm & Van der Heijden, 2013, p. 260).

In summary, Baltes et al. (2020) and Acemoglu et al. (2023) reveals that age-friendliness in job advertisement design does not imply automatically inclusive representation in employer branding. That disconnect exemplifies the importance of employer branding aligning with the structures of organizations. If companies are to reap the benefits of experienced talent, they would ideally not only create age-friendly opportunities, but also write this inclusivity into their branding stories, taking older workers from the periphery of employer identity, and placing them at the heart.

2.5. The Dual-Process Model of Diversity Management

A critical framework for understanding how employer branding campaigns engage with age diversity is the Dual-Process Model of Diversity Management (DPM) by Benschop et al. (2015), which differentiates between surface level (symbolic) inclusivity and deep-level (structural) inclusivity (p. 542). Organizations often adopt surface-level inclusivity, where diversity is emphasized in visual representation without substantive structural changes to workplace policies (Benschop et al., 2015, p. 544). Symbolic diversity is common in employer branding, where, for instance images of young and older employees may be included in recruitment while simultaneously maintaining age-biased hiring practices or offering limited career development opportunities for older professionals (Benschop et al., 2015, p. 544). In contrast, deep-level inclusivity involves organizations to embed diversity in organization- core policies, leadership development and career advancement frameworks, ensuring that age inclusivity extends beyond branding efforts into workplace culture and decision-making processes (Benschop et al., 2015, p. 548). Examples of structural inclusivity in the employer brand such as intergenerational mentorship programs, age-inclusive career development policies, and flexible work arrangements for older employees reinforce a real dedication to diversity rather than a marketing-driven diversity story (Benschop, 2015, p. 549).

2.6. Generational Differences and Age-Related Stereotypes in Employer Branding

Each generation e.g. Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennials (Gen Y), and Generation Z, has been shaped by unique historical, social, and economic contexts, resulting in intergenerational diversity within the workforce (Apolonio & Jubac, 2025, p. 499). According to the authors Baby Boomers are loyal and hierarchical, and the stability of the job

is important to them, whereas Generation X is independent and strive after a balance between work and life as they grew up during a time of economic shifts and increased individualism (p. 500). Millennials, however, are known to look for meaningful work, flexibility and teamwork, all associated with their digital upbringing and closer interaction with globalization (p. 500). Generation Z, the youngest members entering the workforce, is characterized by its high adaptability, sociopolitical consciousness, and technological prowess, and desires authenticity and inclusivity from employers (Apolonio & Jubac, 2025, p. 501).

Sansa et al. (2024) point out that such generational labels are not only demographic terminology, but also profoundly influence how inclusive practices are perceived and experienced in organizations (p. 114). They suggest that a sophisticated approach to managing diversity will need to take into account employee generational identities, because signals that emanate from employer branding, for example around flexibility, inclusion and growth, are likely to be interpreted through the value base and expectations of individual cohorts (Sansa et al., 2024, p. 117). The danger of not adapting a communication message is running the risk of perpetuating stereotypes or marginalizing some age groups. This theory enables a more nuanced investigation into how organizations construct age within their stories of hiring. It also allows to see if the communication that targets multigenerational audiences is relevant to the needs and values they hold, or if it is just a simple replication of generic one-fits-all portrayals. By integrating generational theory, therefore, this research advanced understanding by providing a context from which to examine the usefulness and inclusivity of age-targeted branding messages.

2.7. Humor used in Social Media

Yang (2022) illustrates how humoristic content, such as memes or playful text, generate significantly higher engagement than informative content. In the context of employer branding, this means humor can humanize the organization and create more apparent cultural alignment among younger generations that value informal and creative interactions (Yang, 2022, p. 950). However, Yang (2022) also cautions that inauthentic or forced humor can tarnish brand perception (p. 955).

In parallel to this, Elayan et al. (2022) emphasize more so the psychological and social aspects of humor on the likes of Twitter. They believe that humor is a coping mechanism as well as a form of self-expression in times of social uncertainty (p. 117). Especially during societal or organizational crises (such as political unrest, reputational scandals, or global

emergencies) users may use humor as resistance, solidarity, or emotional distancing (Elayan et al., 2022, p. 124). In the world of employer branding, organizations use it to represent cultural zeitgeist or express empathy and shared experience (Yang, 2022, p. 950; Elayan et al., 2022, p. 124).

Based on linguistic theory, Elayan et al. (2022) divide humor into four principal categories: jokes, anecdotes, wordplay, and irony (p. 120). Sarcasm and mock, while not standalone categories, are treated as functional variants often used to express aggression or build rapport, depending on context (p. 120). These forms are especially hard to mimic in written chat which is the medium of the internet (lacking tone and facial expression & other cues).

Both studies point out the contextual nature of humor. It is quite delicate with respect to expectations of a culture or audience, what is funny for one group might be inappropriate or meaningless for another. This becomes even more true for employer branding, and even more when multiple generations at work are being considered. Humor that is misunderstood may be used to repel target audiences or is likely to inadvertently reinforce age stereotypes (Yang, 2022, p. 955; Elayan et al., 2022, p. 121)

2.8. Gender Representation and the Role of Role Models in Employer Branding

Research by Lindner & Makarova (2024) emphasizes the importance for women of visible role models to challenge gendered occupational stereotypes. While their research was based on the educational field, the theoretical implications might apply to organizations wishing to appeal to female candidates. The authors argued that the underrepresentation of female scientists in school materials influences young women's ability to identify with science as a professional domain (Lindner & Makarova, 2024, p. 6). According to them female students face challenges in envisioning themselves in science-related professions if they do not see their own mirror image.

This concept of identification through representation, while not new, is rarely integrated into employer branding strategies. Instead, people and organizations think of their communication materials as inclusive if they have women in those materials. However, Lindner & Makarova (2024) stress that this representation only has value if the individuals are depicted in positions that indicate expertise, leadership, and a connection to the central work of the discipline (p. 6). When applying this insight to employer branding, this would indicate

that the image of (older) women should not be restricted to support functions or to a token presence but should instead convey real involvement in the core organization activities.

The implications of critically analyzing gender representation in employer branding is reinforced by Kele and Cassell (2023, p. 694). In their research about UK law firms, the authors demonstrate how organizations are all too often using diversity as a commercial brand, rather than a true representation of internal structural change. The authors argue that diversity is often used aesthetically to signal legitimacy to external stakeholders, such as clients and applicants, without corresponding changes in internal HR practices, recruitment structures, or career advancement pathways (Kele & Cassell, 2023, p. 694). Such a type of branding may be viewed as a symbolic gesture (symbolic inclusivity) (Benschop et al. 2015, as cited in Kele & Cassell, 2023, p. 694) in opposition to structural inclusion which denotes a more substantial shift in the organization.

These two perspectives of representation are brought together into tension (Lindner & Makarova, 2024, p. 6) and representation and legitimacy signaling (Kele & Cassell, 2023, p. 694). For employer branding to be elevated beyond the superficial, representation needs to be part of a larger inclusion strategy. Depicting women in technically critical or strategically significant roles, for example, is of little use if does not correspond to any practicable norms in the organization. Without visual representation being underpinned by inclusive recruitment, mentoring or leadership development policies, it can be easily dismissed as tokenistic rather than authentic.

Both studies also highlight the possible implications of spurious gender expression. Lindner & Makarova (2024) report that the absence of realistic, empowering female role models in some professions may discourage young women from pursuing careers in these sectors, even if they have the capability and the desire to work in them (p. 6). At the same time, providing ‘too aesthetically pleasing’ diversity narratives might not only be unable to appeal to the underrepresented, but can contribute to skepticism or mistrust of applicants who feel that there is a ‘disconnect between branding and reality’ (Kele & Cassell, 2023, p. 694).

Therefore, in the context of employer branding, age-and gender representation should not be treated as a visual checklist but as a meaningful component of broader inclusive positioning. This includes ensuring that (older) women are shown in roles that matter, that messaging aligns with actual practice, and that representation reflects lived organizational realities rather than externally oriented performance.

2.9. Sustainable Development, Gender, and the Employee Value Proposition for Generation Z

Drawn from a sample of 291 higher education students in Poland, Rzemieniak and Wawer (2021) findings have shown that women of Generation Z are significantly more ecologically inclined than men (p. 19). They also judge employer branding activities through a more sustainability-oriented lens, the likes of environmental work and ethical work. Young men and women identified sustainable development as important, yet the motive to apply for a job at a sustainability-conscious company was stronger for female responders (Rzemieniak & Wawer, 2021, p. 19).

These differences in the value placed on attributes for men and women have clear implications for the way in which organizations might develop their Employee Value Proposition (EVP). (Rzemieniak & Wawer, 2021, p. 20). EVP should not be perceived as a standard message but as an adjustable picture for different demographic groups, especially when gender diversity is reaching the level of occupational diversity (Rzemieniak & Wawer, 2021, p. 20) Results for male respondents indicate that employer branding strategies emphasizing quantitative data and traditionally “male” attributes, such as tangible, outcome-oriented benefits like remuneration, career development, and prestige. These attributes are more effective than those focusing on qualitative or value-based aspects. In contrast, the female respondents were more influenced by ‘soft’ values, including ethical climate, social responsibility, and pro-environmental practices (p. 18).

The factor analysis of the study also revealed three underlying dimensions of Gen Z’s values towards sustainable employer branding: (1) ecological and environment (2) work–life balance and job security, (3) and ethical culture and inclusivity. These clusters can help to guide the strategic creation of EVPs, that of course represent the company’s values, but also the expectations of different groups of the applicants (Rzemieniak & Wawer, 2021, p. 18).

Importantly, it is emphasized that the majority of the current research on sustainable employer branding primarily concerns managers and experienced subordinates. A gap that their study addresses, bringing forward the point of view of the new entrants in the labor market. It is a welcomed supplement to early career employer branding research and demonstrates that if companies remain dormant (or non-specific) to sustainability, they will lose traction among female Gen Z candidates (Rzemieniak & Wawer, 2021, p. 8). For companies aiming to attract a new generation of talent, acknowledging the nuances in how Gen Z responds to sustainability messaging can strengthen both authenticity and effectiveness in employer positioning.

Recent studies emphasize gender cannot be separated from age. Manzi et al. (2021) prove that women over 50 are especially likely to perceive a "double jeopardy" effect. They perceive both age and gender-based stereotype threat and this is detrimental to their authenticity, organizational identification and self-perceived performance at work (p.2). Xu and Previtali (2022) also argue that older women tend to be symbolically marginalized in corporate communication. The research on the LinkedIn pages of staffing agencies indicates that gendered ageism influences the visibility and identity construction of women in employer branding. These representations perpetuate a gendered division of labor in representing older women in circumscribed or stereotypical roles, if at all.(p. 1456)

2.10. Diversity and Inclusion Communication Across Platforms

The effectiveness of employer branding is not only determined by the content of diversity and inclusion (D&I) messaging, but also by the platforms through which these signals are communicated. Applying the signaling theory, Confetto et al. (2023) explore how diversity and inclusion values are communicated by European companies in their digital employer branding (in particular via their corporate websites and LinkedIn business pages). The study by Confetto et al. (2023) studies the sense-giving acts of 43 companies included in the Refinitiv Diversity & Inclusion Index. The study indicates that despite companies' expressed commitment to inclusivity, their communicated identity as inclusive tends to be notably not underpinned by specific and "platform sensitive" sense giving behaviors (p. 122). This suggests that many companies fail to adapt their communication style and content to the expectations and affordances of each platform, thereby weakening the credibility and impact of their employer brand.

Diversity & inclusion initiatives are also almost five times as likely to be written about on corporate websites, but three times less likely to be talked about on LinkedIn, even though these are some of the main channels through which organizations reach potential candidates (Confetto et al., 2023, p. 128). Types of dimensions, such as gender, sexual orientation were most commonly addressed. Others such as, age, religion, and organizational role were significantly underrepresented. Also, most of the LinkedIn content identified was "generic," making abstract references to diversity without articulating specific approaches, policies, or objectives (p. 128). It means that many organizations treat communication on diversity and inclusion as an image building exercise rather than an opportunity to have a meaningful conversation with future employees.

The under-use of LinkedIn as a diversity and inclusion signaling tool is especially noteworthy because job seekers (especially those from younger generations) are known to actively search social media as a means of evaluating organizational culture and inclusiveness. (Confetto et al., 2023, p. 122, 127). Job candidates interpret public communication as signals of underlying values and priorities, in accordance with the signaling theory (Uggerslev et al., 2012, as cited in Confetto et al., 2023, p. 123). When such signals are ambiguous, inconsistent, or lacking, candidates may infer negative impressions or judge the employer brand to be not credible.

Like any form of employer branding, diversity and inclusion message needs to be not only present, but also relevant and resonant to whatever platform it exists on. While corporate websites may offer more space for formal and policy-oriented communication, LinkedIn provides an opportunity for dynamic, relatable, and human-centered storytelling. The lack of platform specific adaptation as reported by Confetto et al. (2023) identifies a gap for organizations to make use of LinkedIn's reach and interactivity to demonstrate inclusiveness in practice (p. 132).

2.11. Conclusion

This theoretical framework has reviewed key concepts relevant to understanding how age is represented within employer branding, including the use of generational theory (Apolonio & Jubac, 2025, p. 499; Sansa et al., 2024, p. 114–121), the role of stereotypes as explained by the Stereotype Content Model (Fiske et al., 2002, p. 879), and intersectional considerations of age and gender (Manzi et al., 2021, p. 2; Xu & Previtali, 2022, p. 1456). There was also a focus on the communicative strategies through which inclusion, tone and humor are expressed across platforms (Yang et al., 2022, p. 950; Elayan et al., 2022, p. 124). These theories and empirical insights provide the foundation for the operationalization of the codebook, which aims to capture how different age groups are visually and textually represented in employer branding content.

3. Methods

Qualitative content analysis enables a comprehensive examination of textual and visual materials (Neuendorf, 2017, p.203). Also, qualitative content analysis considers the deeper meanings of branding messages, which is important when exploring how age-related stereotypes are constructed and communicated (Hsieh & Shannon,2005, p. 1283). This research employed a qualitative content analysis. Qualitative content analysis is suitable for exploring textual and visual content in employer branding social media content. Content analysis is a widely used method for systematically identifying themes, patterns, and meanings in media and communication studies (Neuendorf, 2017, p. 201). A qualitative content analysis has an exploratory nature. Qualitative content analysis allows for an in-depth exploration of implicit and explicit messages (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p.1281).

3.1. Sample and Sampling Strategy

A purposive sample was used to select 150 employer branding posts for analysis. The aim was to cover a broad range of employer branding strategies across different professional contexts. The study selected 30 posts per sector ($5 \times 30 = 150$), in order to allow for both within-sector and cross-sector comparisons. These posts were selected based on the following criteria:

- **Sector diversity** Posts were collected from five distinct sectors to ensure labor market variety:
 1. Communication Technology (Google, Meta)
 2. Industry & Engineering (BMW, Stedin)
 3. Financial Services (Rabobank, ING)
 4. Transport & Infrastructure (NS, Schiphol)
 5. Fashion & Luxury (Dior, Gucci)

These companies were selected based on their (inter)national visibility, relevance to employer branding research, and active LinkedIn presence. These companies use LinkedIn promote organizational values, work culture and talent attraction and their consistent posting of employer branding content is aimed at external audiences.

- **Company-generated content** All selected posts were published by the companies themselves on their official LinkedIn pages. Excluded from the dataset were user-generated posts, employee reshared content, or posts made by affiliated organizations (e.g., recruitment agencies or third-party media platforms).

- **Employer branding focus** Posts had to focus explicitly on employer branding topics, including (but not limited to): organizational culture, diversity and inclusion (D&I), employee development, leadership, intergenerational collaboration, recruitment messaging, or career growth. Posts that were purely commercial, product-focused, or not related to working at the company were excluded.

3.2. Post selection process

Posts were retrieved using the profiles of the companies via LinkedIn. Only posts from the previous 12 months were included to ensure the relevance and contemporaneity of the sample. This one-year period ensures that all four seasons and key communication moments are represented across sectors. Moreover, analyzing the most recent year reflects the current empirical status of LinkedIn employer branding strategies and allows for consistent comparison across all companies in the sample.

3.3. Operationalization of Key Constructs

The study used Career Stages Theory by Donald Super (1980) to classify employees into the three age groups, which suggests career development is a lifelong process of multiple life roles and work (p. 284). According to the Life-Span, Life-Space Theory, individuals perform all nine essential roles (i.e. child, student, leisurite, citizen, worker, spouse, homemaker, parent, and pensioner) as they advance through their lives (Super, 1980, p. 283). These roles have a natural progression and inform perceptions of professionals through the lens of employer branding. Despite the fact that Donald Super's Career Stages Theory dates from 1980 (and seems traditional in its focus), it remains relevant in contemporary career research. Super's theory emphasizes that career development is a lifelong process, with individuals passing through different stages that reflect their professional growth and self-concept. This approach is still applicable today, as people perform multiple roles throughout their lives and their career path is constantly evolving (Frisch, 2023).

Young professionals (18-34) fall into Super's student, leisurite, and early worker career roles, a period of exploration, mastery of skills, and initial stages of work/scholarship (Super, 1980, p. 289). Employer branding campaigns typically portray this group as spontaneous, creative, early adopters who embrace technological change and thrive through digital literacy. But such imagery might perpetuate stereotypes of competence without

warmth, painting younger workers as capable yet inexperienced leaders (Fiske et al., 2002, p. 881).

Middle-aged workers (35–54), mapping to Super's worker, citizen, spouse, and parent roles, are often portrayed as experienced professionals, managers, or industry specialists (Super, 1980, p. 290). According to Super (1980), this period is typically characterized by career consolidation, stability and the fulfillment of multiple life roles. This reflects a focus on maintain gains and ensuring continuity in both personal and professional domains (Super, 1980, p. 284-285)

Finally, those in the last age group of experienced professionals (55+) who were associated with Super's worker, citizen, housewife, and pensioner roles (Super, 1980, p. 293). Employer branding recruits tend to be depicted as knowledgeable and reliable, but less innovative or technologically minded (Fiske et al., 2002, p. 882). This focus on mentorship and legacy-building, though important, can add to implicit messages that older workers should begin to exit active leadership roles (North & Fiske, p. 994).

This study examines how the age groups are represented and in what ways they reflect age-related stereotypes if at all, using Super's Career Stages Theory coupled with the Stereotype Content Model (Fiske et al., 2002, p. 878). The results will shed light on how age inclusivity is framed in corporate branding, and what the implications might be for diversity in the workforce and recruitment messaging.

3.4. Coding and Thematic Analysis

Identification of themes from employer branding content followed a thematic analysis approach (Braun & Clarke, 2008 p. 79) . This approach involved getting to know the data, which will include reviewing all of the 150 LinkedIn employer branding posts to see which themes most commonly arise with respect to age representation. This was followed by the initial coding phase in which deductive and inductive coding is used (Neuendorf, 2017, p. 227). Deductive coding will be informed by Career Stages Theory (Super, 1980, p. 284) and the Stereotype Content Model (Fiske et al., 2002, p. 878) and will make use of pre-established categories including “Young Professional – Innovation” and “Older Worker – Reliability”. Where employees were named, if possible, their publicly accessible LinkedIn profiles were used to ascertain the group to which they most likely belong based on their job history, the year in which they graduated, or their explicitly given age. Where no profile could be traced, age was judged by physical appearance and clothing, and some knowledge of the setting in

which they operated. Staff were invariably sorted into three categories: young professional (18–34), mid-career professional (35–54) and experienced professional (55+).

With inductive coding, the data drove the emergence of additional codes, such as “Diversity Messaging” and “Career Growth Emphasis”. To assess whether employer branding campaigns genuinely promote age diversity or merely offer symbolic representation, this study incorporates the Dual-Process Model of Diversity Management (DPM) by Benschop et al. (2015, p. 542). To operationalize this, the qualitative content analysis went beyond surface-level descriptions by critically examining the implicit and explicit messaging within employer branding campaigns. This thematic analysis examined whether branding messages included only visual diversity markers (e.g., images of different age groups) or whether they also referenced inclusive career policies, such as intergenerational mentorship programs and age-friendly workplace initiatives. Particular attention was given to the captions of employer branding posts, analyzing their content, tone of voice, structure, and engagement strategies to determine how different age groups are represented. After coding, a pattern identification was carried out to determine which age groups come up most prominently, and how these are framed in employer branding messages. Finally, a cross-sector analysis was performed of age representation, which will appraise the difference in age representation between industry sectors and cast a spotlight on how industry-wide trends influence employer branding. Over several phases, this ensured an iterative, guided process with an eventual analysis of age specific findings (employer branding messages) and wider employer branding implications. Figure 1 visualizes what the research looked like in a nutshell.

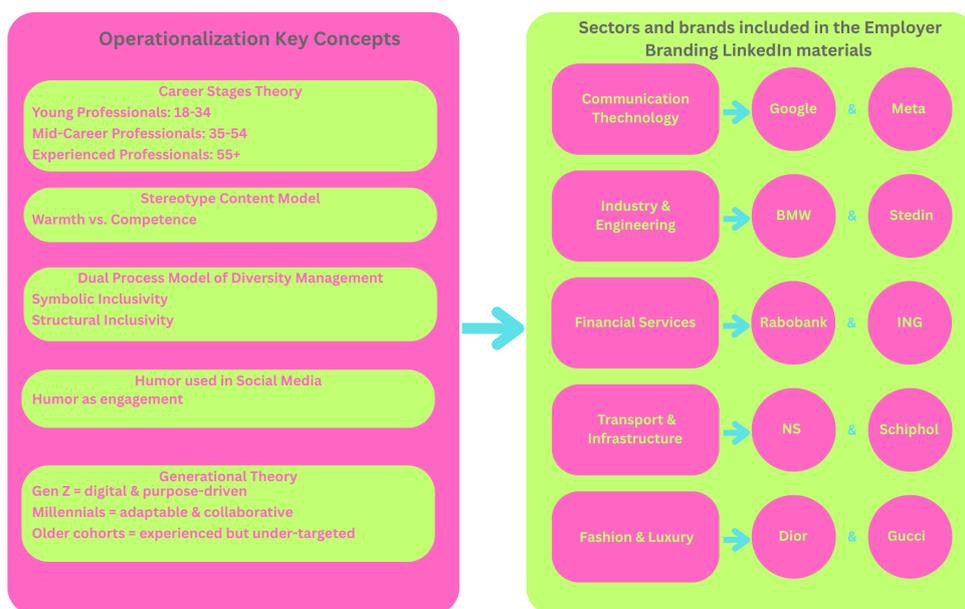


Figure 1 Employer Branding Study

3.5. Ethical Considerations

This study was conducted in accordance with standard ethical guidelines for qualitative research using publicly available online content. All data were obtained from LinkedIn posts on the official company pages of the selected companies and were available without log in or consent. The posts were part of corporate messages directed toward the public, for which there was no permission needed to analyze or quote.

For preserving privacy of people featured in the posts, the names were anonymized in the results section. It only contains paraphrased content or job titles, and it does not disclose confidential or proprietary information. Visuals such as photographs of employees featured in the posts, were not blurred or altered, as they were already part of publicly accessible corporate communication. These images were analyzed only in relation to employer branding and not evaluated on individual appearance or identity.

No personal information was collected, and no contact was made with employees or businesses, and personal data was not written down or processed beyond what was written in the posts or could be viewed on LinkedIn profiles. All data were strictly used for academic purposes and analyzed in a way that fully respect the individuals and organizations who contributed the data.

4. Results

The following chapter presents the findings of the qualitative content analysis of 150 LinkedIn employer branding posts from companies in five sectors: Communication Technology, Industry & Engineering, Financial Services, Transport & Infrastructure, Fashion & Luxury. The results are structured per sector and explore how different age groups (young professionals, mid-career professionals, and experienced professionals) are represented in visual and textual employer branding content. For each industry, the study considers the presence of age groups, how they are framed in terms of competence and warmth, and how their inclusion is symbolically or structurally projected. Attention is also paid to tone of voice, visual strategies, and the (non-)use of humor. Sector-specific patterns and disparities are emphasized to illustrate how organizational setting shapes age representation and age-inclusive branding practices.

4.1. Communication Technology

In order to assess age representation in two brands representing the Communication Technology sector, LinkedIn posts were analyzed based on the presence of different age groups and their framing in terms of competence and warmth. The results reveal a clear emphasis on younger and mid-career professionals, although the distribution and portrayal varied between the two companies see Table 1 & Table 2.

Table 1 Age Group Representation and Stereotype Dimensions in Google's Employer Branding Posts

Google	N ¹	Portrayals	
		Warmth	Competence
Young Professionals (18-34)	10	7	5
Mid-Career Professionals (35-54)	7	5	7
Experienced Professionals (55+)	1	0	0

¹The total number of portrayals for competence and warmth may differ from the total number of appearances, as individuals could be portrayed in both dimensions simultaneously, or not assessed for either dimension if they did not play a central role in the post.

Table 2 Age Group Representation and Stereotype Dimensions in Meta's Employer Branding Posts

Meta	N ²	Portrayals	
		Warmth	Competence
Young Professionals (18-34)	3	3	0
Mid-Career Professionals (35-54)	12	6	9
Experienced Professionals (55+)	4	2	3

²The total number of portrayals for competence and warmth may differ from the total number of appearances, as individuals could be portrayed in both dimensions simultaneously, or not assessed for either dimension if they did not play a central role in the post.

Google features young professionals more frequently and emphasizes their competence, while Meta focuses more on mid-career professionals, portraying them with a combination of competence and warmth. They were present in ten of the fifteen posts that are analyzed. They were often depicted in dynamic, high-velocity jobs, like innovation labs, AI development, or sustainability projects. In one example, a young female software engineer described her relocation to a different country to join Google, highlighting the adventure and growth opportunities that come with early-career positions at the company. The language and imagery in these posts seemed to stress curiosity, discovery, and impact, hinting that Google brands itself as a launchpad for the idealistic young talent. This is further emphasized by a senior leader at Google Singapore, who explains: *“The tech industry is not just for software engineers! The process of bringing a product to life requires a village of people.”* (Google, Post 1; see Appendix A, Figure A1)

Meta, in contrast, focused more consistently on mid-career professionals between the ages of 35 and 54, who appeared in twelve of its posts. were frequently depicted thinking about their professional growth, managing a team or their responsibilities as a mentor. One of its posts showcased a senior product manager sharing the fulfillment of mentoring junior teammates and having the chance to work on projects with long-term societal significance. Young professionals were not absent from Meta’s posts, by any means, but they were also clearly not as dominant as they were at Google. Experienced workers aged 55 and older were similarly underrepresented in both companies. They were only present in two posts at Google and not in a foreground role, and were still somewhat uncommon at Meta, although they appeared a bit more frequently, especially in reflective and leadership settings. Overall, for

both Google and Meta it can be concluded that age diversity existed but was not as evenly balanced, particularly among older workers

When examining inclusivity, both companies showcased a strong commitment to diversity, but the way this was communicated differed in emphasis. Google was clear in terms of its commitment to inclusivity of structure, as Google specifically mentioned internal programs, such as employee resource groups, flexible work practices and international mobility support. For example, a caption below a video post alluded to the company's onboarding program for new employees and how the program had helped a young employee from Brazil become part of the team and feel "at home." Messages like these suggest that inclusiveness at Google is hardwired into the fabric of its leadership, not just its external messages.

Meta also expressed inclusivity, but in a more symbolic and narrative-driven way. Posts commonly included quotes from employees about how they "felt seen" or "empowered," accompanied by visual indicators like varying skin tones, gender presentations and personal backgrounds. In contrast these messages were generally not related to any formal in-house policies. This indicates that while Meta emphasizes belonging and emotional safety, it tends to rely more on storytelling than on showcasing tangible inclusive structures. As a result, Meta may appear more emotionally inclusive, whereas Google positions itself as structurally inclusive.

Another important aspect of how different age groups are represented is the balance between competence and warmth. Contrary to what might be expected, young professionals (18–34) were more often associated with warmth than with competence. In the combined data from Google and Meta, young professionals were portrayed as warm in 10 instances. For example, in Meta Post 11, an employee from Meta shared how Meta's support networks helped him grow (Meta, Post 11; see Appendix A, Figure A2)

. This highlights community and emotional connection. In contrast, competence-focused portrayals were less frequent (5 instances). For example, Google Post 2 featured a young marketing manager offering strategic career advice, framing him as a high-performing, capable young professional (Google, Post 2; see Appendix A, Figure A3). Looking at how they are portrayed as warm and or competent may suggest that tech companies aim to present young employees as approachable, enthusiastic, and emotionally engaged, rather than simply as high-performing individuals.

Mid-career professionals (35–54), in contrast, were most heavily linked to competence. The posts were often about what they do within the company and their skills.

They were described as competent in 16 instances, a lot more than the 11 instances of warmth. This cements their reputation as seasoned professionals, frequently finding themselves in product development, leadership, or strategic positions.

Older professionals (55-plus) were infrequently depicted, but when they did make an appearance, they were most likely depicted positively e.g. as a mentor or advice-giver within the company. Looking at the warmth/ competence scale, the experienced professionals are portrayed as competent more than warm. All of these patterns demonstrate that the representation of age groups is not only about *who* appears in the posts but also *how* they are presented. Warmth is the main factor utilized to make young professionals come across as human, with competence still an important base for portraying mid-career employees.

In terms of the tone of voice, both companies used an informal and engaging style, though there were subtle differences. Google's captions often blended an inspiring tone with playfulness. For instance, phrases like "Meet [Name], who's coding the future" or "This Googler is building more than apps she's building bridges" were widespread. This tone reflects an identity that is both ambitious and approachable. Meta, on the other hand, adopted a more reflective and personal tone. Captions often contained direct quotes from employees or highlighted emotional journeys, like moving past imposter syndrome or being proud of a product launch that mattered. The overall tone at Meta suggested emotional intelligence and social impact as core values. Humor was absent in both companies' posts.

Google made use of a mix of carousel posts, photo essays, and videos. The content often featured real-life scenarios, such as a day-in-the-life of an engineer, or behind-the-scenes moments from team projects. Meta relied heavily on carousel posts with high-quality portraits of individual employees. These images were often accompanied by consistent brand aesthetics and detailed personal stories. The visual strategies of both companies were people-focused, but Google's approach was slightly more dynamic and action-oriented, while Meta's leaned toward emotional depth and narrative continuity.

In conclusion, employer branding in the Communication Technology sector shows a strong focus on portraying both young and mid-career professionals in relatable, positive ways. Google stands out for its structural approach to inclusivity, its playful yet inspirational tone, and its emphasis on early-career growth. Meta distinguishes itself through emotional storytelling, a focus on mid-career expertise, and a warm, reflective tone. However, both companies could improve in representing experienced professionals more consistently and in exploring the strategic use of humor to enhance engagement. These findings reflect a broader trend in the Communication Technology sector, where employer branding often emphasizes

youthfulness, innovation, and emotional connection, but tends to underrepresent experienced professionals and rarely uses humor as a means of engagement or differentiation.

4.2. Industry & Engineering

In both companies, all age groups were represented, but the distribution and framing varied. Stedin consistently showcased a wide mix of young, mid-career, and experienced professionals, often within the same post (see Table 3). These age groups were portrayed as collaborating equally and energetically, especially in posts about training programs, internal events, or celebrations. BMW, by contrast, placed slightly more emphasis on young professionals, though mid-career professionals also appeared regularly. Experienced professionals were visible but somewhat less prominent in BMW’s posts (see Table 4).

Table 3 Age Group Representation and Stereotype Dimensions in BMW’s Employer Branding Posts

BMW	N ³	Portrayals	
		Warmth	Competence
Young Professionals (18-34)	11	8	7
Mid-Career Professionals (35-54)	6	4	6
Experienced Professionals (55+)	2	1	2

³The total number of portrayals for competence and warmth may differ from the total number of appearances, as individuals could be portrayed in both dimensions simultaneously, or not assessed for either dimension if they did not play a central role in the post.

Table 4 Age Group Representation and Stereotype Dimensions in Stedin’s Employer Branding Posts

Stedin	N ⁴	Portrayals	
		Warmth	Competence
Young Professionals (18-34)	14	10	5
Mid-Career Professionals (35-54)	13	10	5

⁴The total number of portrayals for competence and warmth may differ from the total number of appearances, as individuals could be portrayed in both dimensions simultaneously, or not assessed for either dimension if they did not play a central role in the post.

Warmth was the most frequently shown in all age groups at Stedin. Young professionals were often pictured laughing, doing “team-building” exercises, and consoling one another. Captions frequently alluded to “*team spirit*”, “*fun at work*” or “*growing*

together”, hinting at an organizational culture that values emotional connection and cooperation. But competence also appeared. Especially when workers were depicted receiving diplomas, mentoring younger colleagues and contributing to operations projects. In such instances, tone was modified to become slightly more expert and responsible, particularly the mid-career and experience levels. BMW was a bit more balanced in its depiction when it comes to emphasis on warmth and competence. Sometimes young professionals were described as eager and demanding, sometimes by way of a competence ideal, as when they were referred to as “shaping the future” or working on “cutting-edge innovations.” The mid-career professionals were largely depicted as confident and accomplished, with captions that emphasized leadership, pride and problem-solving. Their accomplishments were typically framed in terms of leading innovation, managing technical challenges, or contributing to large-scale transformation within the company. But while there was warmth (at least in group shots, or internal celebrations) the competence framing was more overt than in Stedin’s posts.

When it comes to inclusivity, BMW leaned more toward symbolic inclusion. Posts often showed diverse age groups or people of different genders and ethnicities, but rarely included specific mentions of inclusive policies, support systems, or employee initiatives. The posts show symbolic inclusivity but the text on the images typically promoted an individual accomplishment or the corporate culture overall. Stedin, on the other hand, made a clear statement about structural inclusivity. A number of posts mentioned internal training and mentorship, or intergenerational learning, such as “young employees receiving guidance from seasoned professionals” or “employees celebrating completion of joint development programs”. One post featured the launch of Stedin’s in-house training center, where the director stated: “*Voor onze leerlingen hebben we gegarandeerd werk, bieden we goede arbeidsvoorwaarden en alle mogelijkheden om jezelf verder te ontwikkelen.*” [English translation: “*For our apprentices, we have guaranteed work, offer good working conditions and every opportunity for self-development*”] (Stedin, Post 2; see Appendix A, Figure A2). This indicates that with social media Stedin tries not just to picture diversity, but to make internal processes visible that work towards inclusion.

Both used mostly informal and lively tone of voice. At Stedin, the tone tended to be upbeat and team-oriented, with excited language and calls to action (CTA). The CTA’s sometimes were questions or celebratory hashtags. BMW’s diction ranged from inspirational to meditative, but was moderately more formal in some posts, especially when drawing attention to corporate pride or innovation. The voice in both cases had the effect of

humanizing the brand and of making the posts broadly relatable. Humor, however, was notably absent.

Stedin actively challenged stereotypical imagery. Older professionals were often depicted in modern open office environments, dressed casually and associating with younger colleagues, defying the notion of the mature worker as aloof or old school. Young professionals were not only depicted as energetic and social, but also as upstanding and involved in decision making. This representation offers a counterpoint to the common stereotype of young professionals as inexperienced, by depicting them in roles that suggest responsibility and involvement. BMW's visual representations were slightly more conventional. They portrayed young professionals in creative or futuristic settings, and older professionals (if any were shown) in more conservative clothing and in authoritative or supervisory positions. Yet neither company appeared to overtly promote negative or exclusionary age stereotypes on their posts.

Format-wise both of these companies used a combination of carousels, photos and video. BMW tended to go for polished visuals, which could frequently be seen featuring individuals or small groups in office and workplace scenarios. The composition emphasized professionalism and control. Stedin, meanwhile, had opted for more group shots and casual pictures of people laughing together, celebrating team successes and taking part in events. These decisions also reinforced their respective brand personalities: BMW competent and innovative; Stedin warm, inclusive, and people centric.

In conclusion, the selected posts from the brands representing the Industry & Engineering sector offer a diverse but distinct approach to age representation in employer branding. Stedin places strong emphasis on intergenerational collaboration, emotional warmth, and structural inclusivity, with visuals that disrupt common stereotypes. BMW, although featuring diversity, stresses competency and professionalism and symbolic inclusion through visual (rather than policy) diversity. Both companies feature age groups in a generally positive way. However, the way they interpret and communicate what it means to be an inclusive and attractive employer differs. Stedin leans more into emotional warmth and collaboration, while BMW emphasizes performance, professionalism, and innovation.

4.3. Financial Services

The age representation in the posts from both companies that were selected to represent the Financial Services sector is rather varied (see Table 5 & 6). Rabobank presented a relatively even spread, with a high frequency of multigenerational collaboration within the same post. This was where senior leaders were getting to feature alongside both junior leaders and even younger associate's in social media stories. ING, on the other hand, focused on intermediate and experienced professionals with comparably fewer messages geared to younger employees. This focus suggests an intent to highlight expertise, credibility, and leadership linked to more seasoned employees.

Table 5 Age Group Representation and Stereotype Dimensions in Rabobank's Employer Branding Posts

Rabobank	N ⁵	Portrayals	
		Warmth	Competence
Young Professionals (18-34)	6	6	1
Mid-Career Professionals (35-54)	11	4	5
Experienced Professionals (55+)	4	4	3

⁵The total number of portrayals for competence and warmth may differ from the total number of appearances, as individuals could be portrayed in both dimensions simultaneously, or not assessed for either dimension if they did not play a central role in the post.

Table 6 Age Group Representation and Stereotype Dimensions ING's Employer Branding Posts

ING	N ⁶	Portrayed as Warmth	Portrayed as Competence
Young Professionals (18-34)	0	0	0
Mid-Career Professionals (35-54)	9	7	7
Experienced Professionals (55+)	6	3	3

⁶The total number of portrayals for competence and warmth may differ from the total number of appearances, as individuals could be portrayed in both dimensions simultaneously, or not assessed for either dimension if they did not play a central role in the post.

A key finding concerns how different age groups are portrayed in terms of competence and warmth. Across both companies, mid-career professionals were most frequently portrayed as both competent and warm. ING, for example, featured several mid-career women in leadership roles who were described as visionary, resilient, and inclusive. In one post, a manager discusses leading a digital transformation team, while also being appreciated for her authenticity and mentorship, balancing competence with warmth.

Experienced professionals were depicted more selectively, but when they were, they typically were shown as competent and also often as warm. An older ING bank worker in a wheelchair spoke about personal resilience and trust in the organization. He emphasized emotional intelligence and empathy and actively challenging negative stereotypes of ageing in the workplace. Rabobank featured mature individuals in numerous roles, frequently portrayed as experts or mentors who personify age and experience.

Interestingly, young professionals were portrayed with a surprising level of warmth across both companies. Rabobank, for instance, showcased a young professional in a contemporary office environment discussing personal growth and her passion for sustainable finance. Competence was mentioned but the tone was closer to human connection and optimism. This suggests that, in contrast to its traditionally serious image, the financial sector may be making an effort to present young employees as both capable and emotionally engaged in its employer branding content. In terms of inclusivity, both banks tried to display diversity, but there was a difference in approach. Rabobank demonstrated a clear form of structural inclusivity by mentioning internal development and inclusive leadership in a few posts. One post showed how an executive promotes inclusion in the training and awareness that she helps foster. ING on the other hand was more prone to symbolic inclusivity: diversity with respect to gender, age, and ethnicity was evident in the posts, but seldom neatly tied to specific HR policies or internal practices. Visual representation across both companies was diverse, but structural support for different age groups was inconsistently reflected in the captions.

The tone of voice was consistently inspiring and personal, though the exact register varied slightly by company. Rabobank took a warm, community-building approach, with posts about working together, pride, and local benefit. Sentences like “together we grow,” and “proud to be part of the team,” were common. ING was a bit more authoritative and less personal in tone, particularly in posts about senior figures, but also tried to humanize itself. One example of this humanizing tone comes from a mid-career female employee at ING, who stated: *“Look at yourself as you would be looking at a different person and assess weaknesses*

that could be transformed into advantages.” (ING, Post 2; see Appendix A, Figure A5). In the context of ING’s #WomenInTech series, this quote encourages self-reflection and reframing of perceived personal shortcomings, especially relevant in a male-dominated sector where women often face confidence gaps or bias. It illustrates ING’s reflective and empowering messaging style, aimed at supporting female professionals by promoting resilience and self-belief. Both organizations relied heavily on storytelling and actual employee quotes to create a sense of authenticity. Humor was again notably absent in both companies’ content. Rabobank frequently turned to visuals that disrupted traditional stereotypes. For example, a woman climbing the corporate ranks at a young age was shown in one of the posts. These images avoided rigid role assignments and promoted inclusivity through setting and composition. ING did the same, only with a more formal presentation. For instance, people who had years of work experience were typically depicted in staged photos with laptops or in an office, emphasizing their authority and control. Still, several posts consciously challenged age norms. For example, they show a senior executive with visible disabilities, or a woman leading a tech team in casual attire.

The formats used by both banks supported their narrative styles. Rabobank relied on a mix of video posts, group photos, and dynamic carousels to create a relatable and human atmosphere. ING, meanwhile, used mostly carousel posts and portraits, often with a strong visual focus on the individual. This reflected its emphasis on leadership, professional identity, and personal storytelling.

In conclusion, the examined brands from Financial Services sector show a sophisticated approach to employer branding, with careful attention to age representation and emotional appeal. At Rabobank, the focus is on inclusion and warmth and multigenerational teamwork, but all presented in a way that the bank is really humanized in visuals and tone. ING tends to represent professionalism, competence and inspiration, especially when it comes to presenting experienced and mid-career employees. Both companies avoid age-based stereotyping and instead highlight the personal value of each age group, using visuals and language that support a culture of respect and progress. References to internal development or inclusion policies are less common in posts by ING compared to Rabobank, whereas posts more frequently refer to leadership training and inclusive practices. Whilst the content of the posts examined features a variety of age ranges, ING materials are more about experienced and mid-career professionals in formal or expert roles, and Rabobank materials more often portrays intergenerational teamwork and underlines the emotional side of working together including a sense of solidarity.

4.4. Transport & Infrastructure

Both NS and Schiphol portray in the LinkedIn posts analyzed a varied group of employees in terms of age, and the number of individuals is fairly proportional (see Table 7 & Table 8). NS presents young, middle aged, and old employees somewhat evenly. At Schiphol this also applies but this brand has a slightly stronger orientation towards mid-career employees. The experienced professional category features less prominently in Schiphol's posts, with a mix between young and mid-career groups.

Table 7 Age Group Representation and Stereotype Dimensions NS' Employer Branding Posts

NS	N ⁷	Portrayals	
		Warmth	Competence
Young Professionals (18-34)	8	7	3
Mid-Career Professionals (35-54)	5	2	4
Experienced Professionals (55+)	4	4	1

⁷The total number of portrayals for competence and warmth may differ from the total number of appearances, as individuals could be portrayed in both dimensions simultaneously, or not assessed for either dimension if they did not play a central role in the post.

Table 8 Age Group Representation and Stereotype Dimensions Schiphols Employer Branding Posts

Schiphol	N ⁸	Portrayed as Warmth	Portayed as Competence
Young Professionals (18-34)	8	4	5
Mid-Career Professionals (35-54)	10	6	8
Experienced Professionals (55+)	3	0	1

⁸The total number of portrayals for competence and warmth may differ from the total number of appearances, as individuals could be portrayed in both dimensions simultaneously, or not assessed for either dimension if they did not play a central role in the post.

In terms of competence and warmth, the tone across both organizations is predominantly warm, but competence plays a significant role as well specially at Schiphol. NS showcases warmth in posts featuring young employees in casual settings, joking around or engaging in lighthearted interviews. An example is one post, featuring a young and senior employee in a game-based video format, and the key elements in it are warmth and mutual respect. But warmth is also emphasized among older professionals. For instance, a 57-year-old head conductor and team leader, stated: *"Ik ben nu blij met mijn leven én met mijn werk."*

Ik denk dat ik zomaar tot mijn pensioen bij NS blijf werken.” [English translation: *I am now happy with my life and with my job. I think I will just keep working at NS until I retire*] (NS, Post 1; see Appendix A, Figure A6). This quote conveys a strong sense of loyalty and life satisfaction, reinforcing the inclusive and appreciative tone of NS’s employer branding. Competence, on the other hand, is less clearly articulated in the NS posts analyzed and experienced professionals generally are less visible. Schiphol frequently depicts workers from all age groups as competent and warm. For example, an item showcasing a mid-career woman in a double organizational-role (aviation and fire service) emphasizes her strategic thinking and supportive team presence. Experienced professionals are portrayed as trustworthy, cooperative and in charge. One post features a senior technician besides a younger colleague, demonstrating that knowledge is passed between generations and respect is reciprocal.

In terms of inclusivity, Schiphol demonstrates both symbolic and structural inclusivity. There are a number of posts about internal promotions, team spirit and inclusive leadership. The diversity of visuals is matched with real messages that emphasize concepts such as collaboration, pride, and recognition. NS, on the other hand, tends to show symbolic inclusivity: images of a wide range of diverse faces and positive feelings, without explicitly acknowledging internal programs, policies, or inclusive practices. Posts usually speak of people’s energy or attitude instead of organizations policies.

The tone of voice in this sector is notably positive, informal and encouraging, particularly in content aimed at external audiences. NS uses cheerful and playful captions, to have rapport with their younger followers. For instance, employees are queried “What would you say to your younger self?” or seen laughing off camera. Schiphol is also warm, casual in its tone, although it now and then takes on a more formal and respectful tone when featuring cross functional leadership or safety positions. Overall, it can be said that both companies are authentic and human centered image, but the variation is best observable within Schiphol depending on the employee or character in the story.

Humor appears more visibly in NS content than in the posts analyzed for previous sectors, particularly in the form of playful questions, light interactions, or quirky formats. However, it is still limited in scope and generally used to increase relatability rather than as a central branding strategy.

At NS, posts often feature young professionals in their casual attire at work, breaking away from more formal, hierarchical images. One post features a young female train driver in a hoodie confidently managing ultra-modern machinery. It challenges stereotypes that technical roles only belong to men or can only be occupied by certain age groups. Schiphol

visuals women in operational roles, older professionals laboring in safety gear, and teams of mixed ages celebrating a shared accomplishment. One of the posts, shared on International Women's Day, features a group of women at work in a tech operation portrayed in a casual and approachable way. The photo challenges both gender and age stereotypes, showing women of varying ages doing manual labor in jobs traditionally seen as male-dominated or physically demanding. Another post shows a mid-career employee, dressed casually while building out high-tech infrastructure, which reinforces the idea that professionalism is defined more by skill and accountability than formal attire.

In terms of format, NS favors dynamic videos and casual carousels, often including behind-the-scenes footage or employee testimonials. These formats support an approachable, energetic employer image. Schiphol uses a wider mix, from group photos to story-driven carousels, and frequently includes detailed employee quotes. The focus lies on storytelling, achievement, and internal culture, with visuals that reinforce competence, emotional warmth, and team spirit.

In conclusion, employer branding in the posts analyzed of two brands representing the Transport & Infrastructure sector shows a clear image toward positive, inclusive, and emotionally engaging content, with visible attention to age diversity. The NS posts analyzed tend to lean more to youthful energy in an informal way and symbolic inclusion, when compared to the Schiphol posts analyzed, who are more all-rounded and portray competence, warmth and structural inclusion across generations. Both companies try to dismantle visual stereotypes. While humor is used selectively and structural inclusivity is not always explicit at NS, the sector overall demonstrates a strong commitment to human-centered storytelling and respectful age representation.

4.5. Fashion & Luxury

The age representation across the posts of both brands representing the Fashion and Luxury sector show a clear dominance of young professionals, especially at Dior (see Table 9). Most Dior posts feature young or mid-career individuals, with very few older professionals. Gucci is a bit more balanced when it comes to age distribution. Although, young professionals dominate, mid-career professionals are also well represented and a few posts featured experienced professionals (See Table 10). Notably, both Gucci and Dior often show different generations in a single image.

Table 9 Age Group Representation and Stereotype Dimensions Dior's Employer Branding Posts

Dior	N ⁹	Portrayals	
		Warmth	Competence
Young Professionals (18-34)	13	7	6
Mid-Career Professionals (35-54)	11	4	6
Experienced Professionals (55+)	4	1	2

⁹The total number of portrayals for competence and warmth may differ from the total number of appearances, as individuals could be portrayed in both dimensions simultaneously, or not assessed for either dimension if they did not play a central role in the post.

Table 10 Age Group Representation and Stereotype Dimensions Gucci's Employer Branding Posts

Gucci	N ¹⁰	Portrayals	
		Warmth	Competence
Young Professionals (18-34)	8	6	4
Mid-Career Professionals (35-54)	12	6	11
Experienced Professionals (55+)	3	2	3

¹⁰The total number of portrayals for competence and warmth may differ from the total number of appearances, as individuals could be portrayed in both dimensions simultaneously, or not assessed for either dimension if they did not play a central role in the post.

In terms of competence and warmth, both brands heavily emphasize competence, particularly when portraying mid-career professionals. This is certainly the case of Gucci, for which people are particularly depicted with the image of the expert, leader or innovator. One example is Angela, a mid-career employee portrayed with strong references to performance and leadership. Most of the Gucci posts rated high on both competence and warmth. This seems to indicate a dual message of capability and approachability. Dior also focuses on competence, particularly when displaying professional women in creative or technical jobs. But warmth is not consistently communicated in Dior's content. Young professionals are often being given more neutral or aestheticized depictions instead of being placed in emotionally engaging contexts.

Young professionals in the sector are many times framed through aspirational narratives. At Gucci, young professionals are depicted as "eager to learn," "tech-savvy" or "driven," alongside images of them almost invariably engaged in some kind of collaborative learning or project work. Dior presents new talent in more stylized, visually glossy formats. At Dior the emphasis is more often on visual impact than it is on either interpersonal warmth or emotional storytelling. In both brands, warmth does appear in a few posts, especially when teamwork, support, or community is highlighted, but competence remains the dominant trait.

When it comes to inclusivity, most of the content in this sector leans toward symbolic inclusion. Diversity is visually apparent in terms of age, ethnicity, and gender. But experienced professionals are relatively absent. Structural inclusivity (such as references to internal development programs, inclusive leadership, or mentorship initiatives) is largely absent. Gucci does somewhat better in this regard, with several posts referencing learning environments, mentoring, and career growth. Dior's posts, on the other hand, emphasize aesthetic representation and personal stories, but do not clearly communicate internal inclusivity measures.

The tone of voice across both brands is mostly formal, inspiring, and aspirational. Gucci employs more consistently emotive language. For example, an employee describes his Journey at Gucci as "*transformative*" and speaks about "*dedication to excellence*" (Gucci, Post 3; see Appendix A, Figure A7). Dior's language is more distant. For example, in Dior post 1 where an employee explains how Dior enriches client experiences but offers no personal reflection or emotion narrative (Dior, Post 1; see Appendix A, Figure A8). Both brands consistently use highly stylized and aspirational language that reinforces the cultured and exclusive image of the high fashion industry. Humor was again notably absent in both companies' content.

A key strength for the brands representing the Fashion and Luxury sector lies in the use of visuals, particularly in how stereotypes are either reinforced or challenged. Gucci makes notable efforts to challenge visual stereotypes, particularly when it comes to age or roles. One post of a group of women in leadership positions does not show posed portraits, but women focused in strategy sessions or engaged in technical work. Another post shows young professionals not as passive students but as active participants, asserting competency and belonging. The visuals in Dior's posts lean towards exaggerated and highly aestheticized portrayals, unlike the more narrative or contextual visuals used in posts of brands representing other sectors. Young professionals are frequently depicted in carefully styled settings, dressed impeccably, gazing directly into the camera, and radiating ambition, yet with little reference to their actual work or interpersonal dynamics. Experienced professionals are rarely featured, and when they do appear, they are shown in static, formal poses, such as standing still or dressed in classic business attire, without contextual cues of action or interaction. This visual formality signals symbolic inclusion, as it suggests that their presence is acknowledged but not meaningfully integrated into the narrative of everyday work or professional contribution. Both brands use carousel posts and portrait-style photography, often paired with short narratives or quotes. Gucci frequently includes dynamic, multi-character storytelling,

allowing for intergenerational representation and a stronger narrative of teamwork and learning. This is well illustrated by a coworker that started as a Sales Associate in 2011 and grew into the role of Senior Retail Operations Manager. He describes his experience as “transformative,” explaining: “Joining Gucci has been a transformative experience that pushed me beyond my comfort zone, allowing me to grow both personally and professionally.” (Gucci, Post 3; see Appendix A, Figure A7). Dior tends to highlight individuals in isolation, which can emphasize personal achievement but may also reduce the sense of belonging or collective identity.

In conclusion, the Fashion & Luxury sector presents age groups in carefully curated and visually rich ways, with clear distinctions between the two brands. Gucci is unique with a more balanced age representation, emotional style evocation and attempts to interrupt visual stereotypes with inclusive team imagery and diverse leadership. Dior focuses much more on visual perfection and symbolic representation rather than structural inclusivity or emotional warmth. Competence is seen the most in the posts for both brands, particularly for mid-career professionals, while young professionals are framed in terms of ambition and potential. Experienced professionals are underrepresented, suggesting there was scope for a wider age demographic representation in high-end fashion employer branding.

4.6. Comparison of sectors

So far, the analyses of posts from brands representing five different sectors have been presented per sector. In the following paragraph, a cross-sectoral comparison will be presented. This cross-sectoral comparison highlights both consistent patterns and notable differences in how age groups are represented in employer branding campaigns across five sectors: Communication Technology, Industry & Engineering, Financial Services, Transport & Infrastructure, and Fashion & Luxury.

Across all sectors, mid-career professionals (35–54) are the most frequently represented age group. They appear prominently in all five sectors, often portrayed as capable, experienced, and central to the company’s operations. However, young professionals (18–34) are also strongly featured, especially in Communication Technology, Transport & Infrastructure, and Fashion & Luxury, where they dominate visual narratives and are often framed as energetic, enthusiastic, and full of potential. Experienced professionals (55+), in contrast, are underrepresented across all sectors, with slightly more visibility in Industry, Finance, and Transport. Fashion & Luxury stands out as the least age-diverse sector in this respect, with only a handful of posts featuring older professionals.

Based on the presented content analysis of a selection of employer branding social media posts, Communication Technology and Industry & Engineering pay more attention to structural inclusivity, via specific programs, support systems and development opportunities. For instance, Google and Stedin emphasize their structure for internal onboarding, coaching and career development. Financial Services presents a more balanced picture, mixing in symbolic images with intermittent references to internal policy. Transport tends to be more symbolic at NS but more structural at Schiphol, while Fashion relies almost entirely on symbolic inclusivity, using diversity in visuals but not in messaging about workplace structures or policies.

The tone of voice varies noticeably between sectors and aligns closely with each sector's identity. Communication Technology companies use an inspirational and informal tone to highlight innovation and growth. Industry & Engineering and Transport & Infrastructure lean into warmth, enthusiasm, and teamwork, while Financial Services combines authenticity with reflection to showcase emotional intelligence and purpose. Fashion & Luxury remains the most formal and aspirational, portraying luxury brand values and status-driven communication.

Traditional visual stereotypes are directly challenged in Industry & Engineering, Financial Services and Transport & Infrastructure, where posts depict women in power, experienced workers in dynamic scenes, and teams of multiple generations working collaboratively. In the Communication Technology sector, especially at Meta, there appears to be more diversity in age representation across posts. Nevertheless, common stereotypes persist such as the tendency to associate young professionals with innovation. The Fashion & Luxury sector shows an inconsistent approach, balancing between inclusive imagery and traditional stylized depictions. Gucci actively resists stereotypes and strives for inclusiveness in their portrayal of age and gender, whereas Dior tends to represent more of the aestheticized, idealized imagery that adheres to traditional fashion imagery. Intergenerational representation is common in Transport & Infrastructure and Industry & Engineering, but infrequent in Communication Technology, Financial Services, and in Fashion & Luxury.

Despite differences, a few common threads are evident. Employees of all industries are personified in a positive or humanizing manner to strike a balance between emotional connection and competence. However, humor is largely absent in all sectors. This could suggest that employer branding communication still mainly relies on seriousness and inspiration. Table 11 illustrates how often age groups were present in posts and how they were then portrayed.

Table 11 Overall Age Group Representation and Stereotypical Portrayals across All Companies

All companies combined	N ¹¹	Portrayals	
		Warmth	Competence
Young Professionals (18-34)	81	58	36
Mid-Career Professionals (35-54)	96	54	68
Experienced Professionals (55+)	41	23	21

¹¹The total number of portrayals for competence and warmth may differ from the total number of appearances, as individuals could be portrayed in both dimensions simultaneously, or not assessed for either dimension if they did not play a central role in the post.

Table 11 shows that mid-career professionals (35–54) were the most frequently represented age group in all companies and they were most associated with competence. This indicates that employer branding frequently depends on this category to project professionalism, leadership and reliability. Young professionals (18–34) were the next most frequent group, and people in this cohort were more likely to be represented as warm rather than competent, indicating a strategic focus on enthusiasm, energy, and team spirit. On the other hand, experienced professionals (55+) were visually and with attributed qualities underrepresented. While they were represented quite equally in terms of competence versus warmth, the fact that they appeared less often means that organizations may still find it difficult to integrate older workers into their employer brand story. These patterns point to an implicit generational hierarchy in employer branding, with mid-career professionals at the center, youth as relatable energy, and seniors as symbolic outliers.

4.7. Conclusion

In conclusion, the results indicate that employer branding strategies vary across sectors in terms of how age groups are portrayed and how tone and inclusivity are communicated. Although all sectors are working to offer a friendly and competent workforce, there is a greater advance in age inclusivity and stereotype-breaking images, particularly in Industry & Engineering, Financial Services and Transport & Infrastructure. Fashion & Luxury is still the most visually stylized and aspirational, and Communication Technology is youthful and forward-leaning thinking but could benefit from broader age representation and more

balanced portrayals. These findings indicate that the sector specificity of values and the greater adoption of more intergenerational and structurally inclusive employer branding strategies would increase the employer brand authenticity and appeal on all audiences.

5. Discussion & Conclusion

5.1. Answer to the Research Question

This thesis set out to answer the central research question: “How do employers represent different age groups in employer branding campaigns on social media?” Through a qualitative content analysis of 150 LinkedIn posts from organizations across five sectors (Communication Technology, Industry & Engineering, Financial Services, Transport & Infrastructure, and Fashion & Luxury) the study has shown that age representation in employer branding is uneven, with notable differences in tone, framing, and inclusivity practices across both sectors and companies.

Mid-career professionals (35-54) are the most common age group across all industry sectors. They are depicted as extremely competent. They are often shown in leadership or decision-making roles. Mid-career professionals are seen as reliable contributors to the success of the work. This supports the dominance of mid-career identity as the visual and narrative “anchor” of employer branding content.

Young professionals (18-34) were well represented in Communication Technology, Transport & Infrastructure, and Fashion & Luxury. These young professionals were typically described as energetic, flexible and digitally-competent. But generally, their framing demonstrated warmth and enthusiasm more than competence, and this is particularly the case within the Communication Technology sector. Whilst this can make younger employees feel more relatable, it can also perpetuate the message that they are not authoritative or experienced.

Experienced professionals (55+) were significantly underrepresented most sectors with the exception of a few posts in Financial Services, Industry & Engineering and Transport & Infrastructure. When they were depicted, it was usually as mentors or figures of stability and trust. In these cases, their portrayal reflects the stereotype “high warmth, moderate competence” according to the Stereotype Content Model. Very few of the posts questioned this stereotype to embrace the concept of older professionals as active innovators and leaders.

Symbolic versus structural inclusivity was also mixed in all sectors. References to internal mechanisms (e.g., onboarding program intergenerational mentoring inclusive leadership development) made by organizations such as Google, Stedin, Schiphol and Rabobank suggest a structural form of inclusivity. Others, such as Dior, Meta or ING, were

more heavily leaning on visual diversity without acknowledging internal policies or processes, which is the core of symbolic inclusion.

Visual strategies and tone of voice also framed how age groups were positioned. Posts emphasizing warmth and storytelling were more likely to appear inclusive and human-centered. But when it came to humor, so often a conduit to intergenerational connection and to relatability, it was practically nonexistent in the posts analyzed. This appears to be a missed opportunity, as humorous content has been shown to increase engagement, create a humanized brand image, and appeal to younger generations, particularly when it is perceived as authentic and culturally relevant (Yang, 2022, p. 960).

Altogether, employer branding on LinkedIn provides a fairly favorable picture for middle-aged professionals; while young professionals are portrayed as warmth, the age group suffers from the framing of their competence and knowledge; experienced professionals are marginalized and primarily depicted in static, legacy-oriented roles such as mentors or retiring advisors rather than in positions that reflect strategic input, innovation, or future growth. Though some organizations show hopeful signs of structural age inclusiveness, symbolic diversity is very much leading the way ahead of substantive inclusion on social media employer branding.

Overall, the results of this research indicate that the current approach to employer branding might not be representative of the diversity of the current labor force, specifically when it comes to age. The predominance of mid-career professionals and the underrepresentation of experienced professionals would suggest an area of blind spot in the way organizations articulate their values and inclusiveness. This can inadvertently signal that older workers are not a part of the picture-perfect workforce in industries where innovation, style, and youth matter most. Similarly, young professionals are often presented as emotionally intelligent, but not necessarily competent which might serve to confirm suspicions about their capability to lead. These patterns are important, because employer branding is not just a reflection of organizational culture; it is a design of who feels invited to apply, to grow, to belong. For communications professionals, it underscores the importance of taking a hard look at whether their employer branding is truly accommodating to persons of all ages or if it is inadvertently perpetuating generational stereotypes. Generational signals in employer communication are often interpreted through the value systems of different cohorts and may otherwise risk reinforcing age-based assumptions (Sansa et al., 2024, p. 114). What else it can mean for communication professionals is discussed further at practical implications.

5.2. Critical Analysis and Limitations of the Study

While the findings offer valuable insights into the representation of different age groups in employer branding campaigns on LinkedIn, this study also faces several limitations that must be critically acknowledged.

5.2.1. Methodological Considerations

The qualitative content analysis was chosen for the exploration of visuals and texts with the possibility of intensifying analysis through portrayal. This approach made it possible to interpret tone, imagery, symbolism, and implicit stereotypes, all of which a quantitative content analysis might well have missed. Regardless, the limitation of subjectivity in interpretation is intrinsic to qualitative research. Although a coding framework that was based on theoretical constructs of the SCM, DPM, and Career Stages Theory was utilized, it is possible that research bias impacted judgments of tone, warmth or competence.

In order to address this concern, the deductive categories were supplemented with inductive coding to maintain focus on novel patterns. In addition, examples of how posts are coded were discussed between researcher and supervisor. However, the lack of intercoder reliability testing could have implications for the reproducibility of the results. In future research it might be useful to employ two or three coders and intercoder agreement statistics to ensure coding reliability.

5.2.2. Platform and Sample Scope

Another limitation is sample restriction to LinkedIn posts only. LinkedIn is a powerful channel for employer branding and is especially relevant professional identity signaling. However, it does not represent the full spectrum of organizations' branding strategy. Employer branding efforts on other platforms (e.g. TikTok, Instagram, or company's websites) may follow different stylistic and is representational choices, especially if the aim is to capture a younger audience or wider consumer circles (Confetto et al., 2023, p. 132). Because LinkedIn data were the sole focus, the findings might be skewed toward formal/professional ways of projecting a self (and away, for instance, from informality, humor, or aesthetic endeavors elsewhere).

The sample size of 150 posts was considered sufficient to capture a broad range of patterns in age representation across sectors. Each employer branding post was analyzed systematically using the same predefined set of twelve questions. This ensured consistent

thematic exploration across all posts. Within individual companies, saturation was likely achieved. However, the researcher acknowledges that saturation may not have been reached across different companies or sectors. Organizations were purposively chosen across five different industries, which enhances the development of an inclusive understanding of the phenomenon under study. A geographic bias may exist as well, as the majority of the companies in the sample were European or multinational corporations operating within Western cultural frameworks, the findings may not be generalizable to non-Western contexts. In other cultural environments such as East Asian or Middle Eastern markets age may be associated with greater authority, respect, or hierarchy, potentially leading to more frequent and positive portrayals of older professionals in employer branding (Dordoni & Argentero, 2015, p. 397). Similarly, visual communication norms may place greater emphasis on seniority or collective identity, rather than individuality or youthfulness.

5.2.3. Representation vs. Experience

The study centered on representation on how age groups are visually and textually represented. It is not about perception or reception. It therefore does not describe how messages on employer branding are perceived by job applicants or how they affect actual recruitment choices or satisfaction with the job. Without an audience perspective (e.g., surveys or interviews with applicants or employees), it is difficult to assess the impact of symbolic versus structural inclusivity on employer attractiveness.

Similarly, it was not possible to empirically verify whether references to structural inclusivity in posts such as mentions of mentoring programs or internal policies reflect actual organizational practices or are merely part of the branding narrative. Posts that reference inclusion policies may be true and may not be true, but they still symbolize. This distinction between intent and implementation remains ambiguous in visual employer branding research and points to a potential blind spot in this study.

5.2.4. Theoretical Boundaries

This research is based on previously developed theories such as SCM, DPM and generational theory but these theories also have their limitations. For example, SCM assumes universal associations between age and perceived competence/warmth which may be contextualized, culture-bound or moderated by job role, gender and ethnicity (Fiske et al., 2018, p. 69). Likewise, the generational theory is conducive toward useful generalizations but

runs the risk of seeming to essentialize people based upon fixed generational traits, and in doing so can mask variation within cohorts (Sansa, 2024, p. 113).

Furthermore, the framework did not fully address intersectional issues such as age with gender, race, or disability in terms of visual representation. Although present in the data at times, these attributes were not as prominent in the analysis. A more intersectional approach would also be valuable in future research.

5.3. New Theoretical Insights and Academic Implications

This study contributes to academic discourse in several significant ways. By examining how different age groups are portrayed in LinkedIn-based employer branding across sectors, it advances theoretical understanding in three main areas: (1) the evolving application of the Stereotype Content Model (SCM), (2) the operational relevance of the Dual-Process Model of Diversity Management (DPM), and (3) the contextual specificity of generational representation within employer branding narratives.

5.3.1. Recontextualizing the Stereotype Content Model (SCM) in Employer Branding

The Stereotype Content Model, developed by Fiske et al. (2002) suggests that social perceptions of groups are defined by two fundamental dimensions, warmth and competence. This study contributes to empirical evidence on how elements of employer branding in job posts on LinkedIn are being strategically used differently in relation to age group. The findings show that warmth and competence are not applied uniformly but are selectively emphasized depending on the portrayed age group. This suggests a deliberate branding strategy rather than a neutral reflection of age-based traits.

Also noteworthy was the frequent portrayal of young professionals SCM. According to classical SCM, young professionals are placed high on the competence scale and low on the warmth scale (Fiske et al., 2002, p. 879). However, the findings in this study contrasts with classical SCM. Young professionals were often portrayed as high in warmth without necessarily being framed as highly competent. They were frequently positioned as enthusiastic, emotionally expressive, and socially engaged, rather than primarily competent. This may indicate that organizations are deliberately humanizing early-career talent to foster emotional identification with the employer brand and counter common criticisms of members of Generation Z as entitled (i.e., having an inflated sense of deservingness or privilege) or transactional in the workplace.

In contrast, only mid-career professionals were portrayed as high in competence and moderate in warmth across all groups, leading to an effective placement in the quadrant characterized by the stereotype of the “ideal employee”. This confirms their strategic value for organizations and asserts SCM assumptions. Meanwhile, experienced professionals were underrepresented, and when visible, often portrayed in high-warmth but low-competence frames. They were portrayed as nurturing mentors, legacy keepers, or background supporters. This corroborates that the ageist stereotype of equating aging with loss of productivity or innovation are enduring.

By applying the SCM in the context of this study shows that age-related stereotypes are not always reproduced in their classical form. For example, young professionals are not primarily portrayed as highly competent but cold (as the SCM might predict), but rather as warm, enthusiastic, and socially engaged. This suggests a subtle reframing of generational stereotypes, likely shaped by employer branding goals that prioritize emotional relatability and cultural fit. It also emphasizes that competence and warmth are not just fixed perceptions but are actively shaped through employer branding narratives to appeal to specific audiences particularly early-career job seekers and to serve organizational goals such as attracting young talent, promoting cultural fit, and reinforcing a progressive employer image.

The Stereotype Content Model (Fiske et al., 2002) is a valuable framework for general warmth and competence perceptions, but it is important to recognize the constraints of this framework in other contexts. Quite a number of the studies have demonstrated that associations between age and these characteristics exist, but are not universal and can be situation, occupation, and identity specific. For example, in collectivist cultures or in professions that place strong value on experience, older individuals may be perceived as more competent than the SCM typically predicts (Cuddy, et al., 2008, p. 90). This suggests that the model’s assumptions should be applied with caution in particular when examining the employer branding practices in diverse or global contexts.

5.3.2. Operationalizing the Dual-Process Model of Diversity Management (DPM)

Benschop et al.’s (2015) model of symbolic (surface-level) and structural (deep-level) diversity practices, has proven to be effective in evaluating the authenticity of inclusivity claims in employer branding (e.g., “we are inclusive because we have pictures of older employees or diverse teams”). Only a small proportion of the materials examined explicitly

referred to policies, mentoring systems, and developmental support structures that would be suggestive of more substantive structural inclusivity.

The contribution of this research is the use of the DPM in practice in the context of social media content analysis. It extends Benschop et al. (2015) concept for visible cues to differentiate symbolic and structural inclusion of LinkedIn branding.

For example:

- Symbolic: Posts that show age diversity in visuals but provide no information on intergenerational mentorship, leadership training, or career progression.
- Structural: Posts that reference internal programs, long-term development paths for older employees, or tangible inclusive HR policies.

This distinction allows researchers and practitioners to better assess not just whether diversity is shown, but how it is embedded, and to what extent that representation is aligned with organizational practices. Moreover, the limited presence of structural inclusivity cues in the posts may not only reflect branding choices, but also the nature of LinkedIn as a platform which tends to prioritize short-format, visually driven, and inspirational content over detailed organizational policy communication.

5.3.3. Refining Generational Theory through Visual Communication

Generational theory, often criticized for its simplifications, gains new relevance when integrated with visual and textual analysis of employer branding. Overall, the findings of this research suggest that generational cohorts are not merely demographic categories but are actively used as strategic segments in employer branding each associated with specific values, communication preferences, and visual styles.

For example, some employer branding posts used a casual, emotive tone, to focus on social impact or flexibility. These are elements that are often associated with the preferences of Generation Z (born 1997-2012). While not always explicitly targeted, such messaging may resonate more strongly with younger audiences and reflect an indirect effort to appeal to this group.

The positions Millennials were seen in tended to be just slightly more senior, with the adjectives of adaptability, collaboration or work-life balance receiving attention. However, the visual portrayal of younger employees often relied on stereotypical elements. Such as, laptops, modern office furniture, or casual dress codes. While these symbols are easily recognizable, they reduce the complexity of generational identity to a set of aesthetic cues. As

a result, they may unintentionally reinforce one-dimensional views of Generation Z as tech-savvy but lacking in depth, experience or professionalism.

This study illustrates that although generational theory can inform audience segmentation, its deployment in employer branding is often prescriptive and threatens to flatten diversity. Crucially, the study is in line with Sansa et al. (2024) in which was found that generational values are not assumed but need to be investigated in perspective to brand context, and sector identity. In this respect, this study promotes a looser, interpretative application of generational categories in branding research (p. 121).

This interpretation also highlights which generations are favored in employer branding, and which overlooked. The visual narratives tend to feature Gen Z and Millennials as fresh, dynamic and culturally connected, with the eldest demographic (55+) portrayed as either marginally represented or confined to static, legacy-related roles. The fact that they are hardly even mentioned in strategic or forward-looking discussions indicates that they are not being actively pursued as part of the employer brand's target audience. Their career trajectory, and therefore their brand potential, goes is often overlook or insufficiently communicated reinforcing the notion that branding primarily serves those that are "in motion" rather than those that are perceived as being there or on their way out. This gap underlines the importance of employer branding efforts to acknowledge and embrace the full generational demographic as a place-worthy contributor.

5.3.4. Expanding the Discourse on Age Diversity in Employer Branding

Although dimensions such as organizational culture, corporate values, or employee motivation have been addressed extensively by existing employer branding literature (Ćorić & Špoljarić, 2021, p. 31). Age diversity has not yet fully attracted scholarly and practitioner attention. This thesis responds to that gap, and documents full polarities, where age is rarely presented in content, and where older people are the most unseeable across sectors. This absence is most pronounced in highly visible and innovation-driven sectors such as Fashion and Communication Technology, where older professionals are almost entirely missing from employer branding content on LinkedIn.

Cross-cultural research has demonstrated the link between age-related perceptions in the workplace and rooted cultural values. For instance, in collectivist societies such as many East Asian countries, older individuals are often associated with wisdom and respect, which contrasts with the more competence-driven and youth-focused perceptions common in

Western, individualistic cultures (North & Fiske, 2015, p. 986; Posthuma & Campion, 2009, p. 171). Though these cultural frameworks have been considered with respect to workplace attitudes and perceptions of leadership, little has been done to analyze their effect on the visual and textual discursive strategies of employer branding. It will be interesting in future studies to further tackle if and how age representation is different in employer branding across different cultural contexts and media types.

In conclusion, this study extends existing theories (SCM, DPM, generational theories) by adapting these models to describe digital employer branding on social media (LinkedIn) and suggesting practical implications that further advance their applicability in the context of content analysis of the digital media sphere. These findings provide a strong foundation for supporting future empirical research, such as mixed-methods work that pairs content analysis with employee interviews, surveys, or platform metrics to understand real-world reception and consequences.

5.3.5. The underuse of humor

One finding that stands out across all industries is the lack of humor in employer branding posts. Humor has been found to humanize companies and increase engagement via social media (Yang, 2022, p. 950). Yet it was not employed as an explicit primary strategy in any of the posts studied. Its absence begs the question of how, if at all, humor functions in relation to professional identity and age discourse.

A possible, yet to be tested explanation, could be that humor and being taken seriously do not necessarily go hand in hand in more formal industries such as Financial Services or Communications Technology. But there is another layer to consider, and that is age: humor is culturally situated and generationally specific, and what is funny or appropriate can vary across age groups. This presents a challenge for employer branding initiatives attempting to reach people from different generations. Some communication professionals may be apprehensive about employing humor because of alienating certain age groups or risking misinterpretation. In doing so, the decision to eschew humor all together may be indicative of a latent bias in favor of seriousness and inspiration as “safer” types of emotional appeal (Yang, 2022, p. 955).

Yet, this cautiousness may come at a cost: the potential for humor to bridge generational divides, increase relatability, and disrupt stereotypes is left untapped (Yang, 2022, p. 954). Future research could investigate if humor would be suitable to strengthen age-

inclusive employer branding, for example by using intergenerational storytelling or funny role reversals to equally humanize all age groups.

5.4 Practical Implications

The findings of this study are not only academically relevant but also highly important for practitioners involved in employer branding, recruitment marketing, and diversity and inclusion (D&I) strategy. Organizations increasingly turn to social media platforms such as LinkedIn to design and disseminate their employer brand identity, yet the execution of these efforts often reflects a limited understanding of how age representation can shape candidate perception and organizational credibility. This study offers several practical recommendations in this regard.

5.4.1. Rethinking Age Representation in Employer Branding

One of the most immediate consequences is that employer branding will need to be reimagined in terms of 55+ professionals. This age group was underrepresented in all of the industries that was researched, despite being an active and growing segment of the labor force. Due to ongoing pension reforms and rising life expectancy, the Dutch state pension is increasing (from 65 to 67 by 2021) and will be linked to life expectancy from 2022 onward (Van den Heijkant et al., 2019, p. 1890). This demographic shift underlines the need for employer branding strategies that reflect the evolving reality of longer working lives.

The underrepresentation found could indicate, on purpose or unwittingly, that employer brands are designed mainly for younger job seekers. From a labor market communication point of view, this means reducing the attractiveness and the perceived inclusiveness of the company. It might also discourage experienced applicants from applying, even if the value of their expertise is very high, particularly in light of current labor market shortages.

To create a truly age-inclusive employer brand, organizations must more frequently and meaningfully incorporate older professionals into the stories they tell. These depictions would need to move beyond “legacy” or “mentoring” and position older workers as creators, deciders, active participants in the company’s future. For example, one of a 60-year-old product designer leading a tech innovation lab or a senior operations employee transforming a business digitally, in order to break stereotypes and build an age inclusive employer brand.

Similarly, young professionals should not be homogenized into symbols of energy, agility, or digital nativeness. These qualities, so common to us all, may flatten character differences. To counteract this trend, organizations can also present early-career employees as capable project leaders, legitimate experts, or valuable contributors to organizational learning.

5.4.2. Make Inclusivity Tangible, Not Just Visible

The difference between symbolic inclusivity and structural inclusivity has major practical consequences. Many of the companies in this study illustrated a visually diverse image of their brand, but only some supported the visuals with actual descriptions of policies, programs, or initiatives. In order to establish trust with candidates, especially from underrepresented age brackets, companies need to:

- Explicitly reference internal development paths (e.g., “Our cross-generational mentorship program linking junior analysts to senior strategists.”)
- Spotlight best-practice HR policies (e.g., phased retirement, age-friendly onboarding programs, lifelong learning programs) that treat older and younger workers equally.
- Share case studies that highlight nonlinear career paths or late career transitions, to help normalize stages of career into employer brand storytelling.

These kinds of efforts don't just feel authentic but are a clear way to stand out in a competitive hiring marketplace, where diversity is a leading decision-maker for candidates.

5.4.3. Sector-Specific Strategies for Age Inclusivity

This study demonstrates that sector identity shapes employer branding tone and framing, and therefore strategies to improve age representation should be context-sensitive:

- Communication Technology companies (e.g., Google, Meta) should actively resist imagery dominated by youth by demonstrating experienced professionals in contexts of innovation, without borrowing from “legacy” frames.
- Industry & Engineering companies (e.g., Stedin, BMW) are already doing well in that they already reflect a high degree of intergenerationally. These firms can play to this strength by visually highlighting these collaborative, age-diverse teams at the front lines, in R&D and in project leading roles.
- Financial Services companies (e.g., Rabobank & ING) should continue this more subtle narrative of mid-career leadership but make other staff more visible and more

vested by putting them in strategically relevant roles rather than simply a role that satisfies them personally or keeps the ship running.

- Transport & Infrastructure companies (e.g., NS, Schiphol) can function as examples of how to show emotional warmth and humor in employer branding. These companies would be well advised to further amplify this tone of emotional relatability and lightheartedness by embedding it into a more structured system of internal inclusivity communications.
- Fashion & Luxury companies (e.g., Dior, Gucci) could actively pull out of their visual comfort zones and represent a broader range of ages, with older professionals working not just in symbolic roles but visibly doing design, management and pioneering work.

Every industry should find a way to actively include underrepresented groups and not just because it aligns with brand values, but because it addresses real gaps in the current discourse. Rather than repeating safe narratives, companies should aim to fill those gaps with genuine and meaningful representation.

5.4.4. Optimizing Tone of Voice and Narrative Framing

Another practical insight lies in the communication tone and communication style of the employer branding. This research suggests that warmth and relatability resonate well across ages, whereas humor is under-leveraged, despite its proven ability by Yang (2022) to activate brands and encourage emotional engagement.

For example, organizations could try out intergenerational storytelling templates that highlight employees from different generations sharing experiences or “day in the life” series. And humor, when used delicately, can illustrate generational differences without resorting to stereotypes. For example, a lighthearted behind-the-scenes clip of a Gen Z intern showing a Baby Boomer manager how to use a new app (as long as it is done in a respectful way) could help cultivate relatability and age-inclusive appeal. The reverse scenario (an older employee sharing professional wisdom with a younger colleague) can be equally effective in fostering mutual respect and connection.

5.4.5. Strengthen Employer Brand Consistency Across Platforms

Finally, this research is limited to LinkedIn only, however with the results it can be deduced that across different platforms the employer brand storytelling should be coherent and not age restricted. Many companies may rely on visual diversity for LinkedIn but fall

short on Instagram or TikTok where aesthetic representation may lean toward younger demographics. This kind of dissonance could be contributing to trust deprivation from prospective applicants, since their over age candidates are not present on a less formal platform.

Employer branding teams, then, should be auditing the brand intermittently and across platforms in order to make sure that their representation of diversity is not just visible, but is also visible purposefully and consistently, regardless of the medium, or even the specific audience.

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Appendix

Appendix A – Figure 1 – Google post 1

 **Google**
36.893.497 volgers
4 mnd · 

Meet Yolyn, Vice President of Knowledge and Information Partnerships at Google's Singapore office – and a product partnerships veteran with over a decade of experience.

"I manage the product partnerships teams in APAC that cover all of our major consumer products like Search, Maps, Payments, and Shopping, and also the teams that cover partnerships for Research and AI data and Ads Partnerships," she says.

One thing Yolyn wants people to know? "The tech industry is not just for software engineers! The process of bringing a product to life requires a village of people from business development practitioners to UX designers to lawyers to members of our finance team and of course our product and engineering teams."

Interested in learning more about #LifeAtGoogle Singapore? Visit our careers site → <https://goo.gle/40qeu2c>

Vertaling weergeven

 1.260 131 commentaren · 26 reposts

Appendix A – Figure 2 – Meta Post 11

 **Meta**
10.870.051 volgers
6 mnd · 

+ Volgen ...

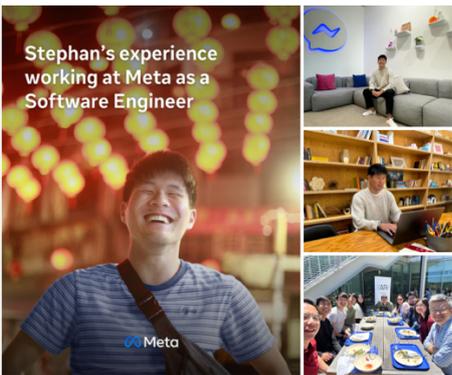
Stephan L., AI Software Engineer at Meta, shares what has made a difference in his journey from intern to full-time engineer.

“One of the things that I think sets this company apart is the presence and support for Meta Resource Groups (MRGs). Whether it’s meeting monthly to play mahjong, hosting film screenings to see our culture represented on the big screen, or organizing Q&A panels to help people grow in their career, having this community and consistency outside my team has been integral to my experience here at Meta.”

Stephan also emphasizes mentorship, crediting senior engineers for guiding his career growth. [#LifeatMeta](#)

Learn more about our engineering teams and culture: <https://bit.ly/3TQy9EI>

Vertaling weergeven



Stephan's experience working at Meta as a Software Engineer

 Meta

 384

45 commentaren · 8 reposts

Appendix A – Figure 3 – Google Post 2

 **Google**
36.893.499 volgers
4 mnd • 

Brie — a San Francisco-based associate product marketing manager — shared his top pieces of advice for students interested in applying to Google. Explore our open roles and opportunities for students

 <https://goo.gl/4fLm38J>

Vertaling weergeven



Advice for students applying to Google

  2.533

124 commentaren • 78 reposts

Appendix A – Figure 4 – Stedin Post 2

Stedin
42.927 volgers
1 mnd · Bewerkt ·

Nieuwe bedrijfsschool in Goes: leren en werken aan de energietransitie

Met trots hebben we gisteren onze nieuwe Stedin-bedrijfsschool geopend in Goes. Hier krijgen huidige en toekomstige monteurs de kans om zich dichtbij huis te ontwikkelen tot vakmensen. In ons regiokantoor, nu voorzien van een modern leslokaal en praktijkruimte, leren zij alles over werken met elektra – van het installeren van slimme meters tot het aanleggen van nieuwe aansluitingen. Een belangrijke stap om de regio klaar te maken voor de energietransitie en de bijbehorende groei van zonnepanelen, laadpalen en warmtepompen!

De energietransitie vraagt om technisch talent. Bij Stedin draait het niet alleen om opleidingen, maar ook om kennis delen, expertise ontwikkelen en samen bouwen aan de toekomst van ons elektriciteitsnet. Academiedirecteur Hannelies Boelhouwer licht toe: "Om die bouwopgave aan te kunnen hebben we veel nieuwe mensen nodig. Mensen die een passie hebben voor techniek én willen leren bij Stedin. Voor onze leerlingen hebben we gegarandeerd werk, bieden we goede arbeidsvoorwaarden en alle mogelijkheden om jezelf verder te ontwikkelen."

Een ding is zeker, de nieuwe bedrijfsschool is een aanwinst voor zowel Stedin als de regio Zeeland!

[#Stedin](#) [#StedinAcademie](#) [#Goes](#) [#RegioZeeland](#) [#Ene](#)



408 12 commentaren · 3 reposts

Appendix A – Figure 5 – ING Post 2

**ING**
574.164 volgers
2 w · Bewerkt · 

[+ Volgen](#) ...

“Sometimes we judge ourselves too critically and don’t notice the many skills that can be advantages because they are just ‘normal’ things for us. Look at yourself as you would be looking at a different person and assess weaknesses that could be transformed into advantages.”

Wise words from #ING product manager [Katarzyna Orantek](#)! In the last of our #WomenInTech series, we share Katarzyna’s journey in the ever-changing and dynamic world of Tech. Swipe through or click here to learn about her story: <https://lnkd.in/dNv8Hpc9>

#INGTrailblazers 🚀

Vertaling weergeven



A moment with...

Katarzyna Orantek
Product Manager at ING

Women in Tech: The trailblazers 🚀

 92

1 commentaar · 3 reposts

Appendix A – Figure 6 – NS Post 1

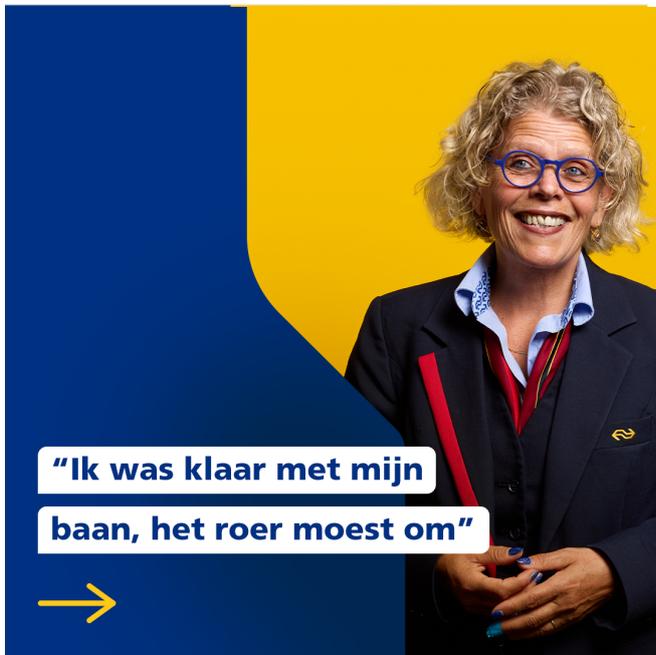


Heleen (57) werkt bij NS als hoofdconductor. "Ik ben oorspronkelijk opgeleid als logopedist en heb daarna een aantal leidinggevende functies gehad. Iets totaal anders. Opeens was ik helemaal klaar met mijn oude baan, het roer moest om. Ik sprak met wandelcoaches om te ontdekken waar ik nu écht blij van werd. Dat hielp, want nu zit ik al vijf jaar op mijn plek."

Heleen kijkt uit naar haar volgende stap: "Ik word teammanager conducteurs in Hoofddorp. Ik begeleid dan twintig conducteurs met hun professionele ontwikkeling." Als we haar vragen hoe het met haar werk-privébalans zit, antwoordt ze: "Ik heb een latrelatie, dit maakt het wel makkelijker om een leven te leiden met nachtdiensten. Na acht uur werken, laad ik ook acht uur weer bewust op: met voldoende slaap en gezond eten."

Heleen weet als geen ander hoe belangrijk het is om met plezier naar je werk te gaan. Daarom is ze ambassadeur van Werkgeluk binnen NS. "Als ambassadeur geef ik workshops over onderwerpen als energiegevers en Ikigai, je levensdoel. Ook trad ik op Happy Monday op als Brigitte Kaandorp. Ik zong 'Ik heb een heel zwaar leven' en eindigde positief. Want nu ben ik blij met mijn leven én met mijn werk. Ik denk dat ik zomaar tot mijn pensioen bij NS blijf werken."

#werkenbijns #dereisvanmorgen #vacatures



Appendix A – Figure 7 – Gucci Post 3

 **Gucci**
2.127.273 volgers
4 w · 

...

"Joining Gucci has been a transformative experience that pushed me beyond my comfort zone, allowing me to grow both personally and professionally. Every challenge introduced fresh perspectives and the chance to contribute to our global team dedicated to excellence."

An inspiring story is that of [Edward Yuwono](#), who began his career at Gucci Australia as a Sales Associate in 2011. Edward's dedication and determination have led him to reach new milestones, taking on the role of Senior Retail Operations Manager.

Adapting to a new country and mastering regional operations is a rich learning experience that can offer insights into different ways of working, empowering Gucci employees to seek out new opportunities, work across borders, and add innovation and creativity to our culture.

[#Guccipeople](#) [#GucciCareers](#) [#JourneyOfSuccess](#) [#Int](#)



 737

62 commentaren · 15 reposts

Appendix A – Figure 8 – Dior Post 1

Christian Dior Couture 1.674.040 volgers
2 u · 🌐

At **#Dior**, we empower our people to grow and be their best.
Meet **#NaoyaSakaguchi**, Senior Client Advisor at the Shinsaibashi Boutique of **Christian Dior Couture** in Osaka, Japan, and discover the behind-the-scenes of his **#DreamInDior** experience as he unveils the richness of his métier in retail.

When asked, 'what does **#DreamInDior** mean for you?' **#Naoya** shares: '**#DreamInDior** means that Dior becomes an integral part of our Clients' lives. The spaces we create and the services we offer are designed to inspire and enrich their experiences. To achieve this, we must consistently deliver moments of inspiration that evolve with their aspirations.'

For retail **#career** opportunities in Japan at Dior, visit https://lnkd.in/eYr2K_QH

#DiorTalents
#DreamInDior

Vertaling weergeven



👍❤️🌟 281

8 commentaren · 3 reposts

Appendix B – Declaration Page: Use of Generative AI Tools in Course Assignments

Declaration Page: Use of Generative AI Tools in Course Assignments

Student Information

Name: Dewi Kamphuis

Student ID: 697121

Course Name: Master Thesis Project CM5050

Instructor Name: Prof. Dr. M. (Martine) van Selm

Assignment Title: Master Thesis

Date: 25 June 2025

Declaration:

Acknowledgment of Generative AI Tools

I acknowledge that I am aware of the existence and functionality of generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools, which are capable of producing content such as text, images, and other creative works autonomously.

GenAI use would include, but not limited to:

- Generated content (e.g., ChatGPT, Quillbot)
- Writing improvements, including grammar and spelling corrections (e.g., Grammarly)
- Language translation (e.g., DeepL)
- Research task assistance (e.g., finding survey scales, qualitative coding, debugging code)
- Using GenAI as a search engine tool to find academic articles or books (e.g.,

I declare that I have used generative AI tools, specifically DeepL, and Scholar, ChatGPT in the process of creating parts or components of my course assignment. The purpose of using these tools was to aid in generating content or assisting with specific aspects of the assignment.

I declare that I have NOT used any generative AI tools and that the assignment concerned is my original work.

Signature:

Date of Signature: 25 June 2025



Extent of AI Usage

I confirm that while I utilized generative AI tools to aid in content creation, the majority of the intellectual effort, creative input, and decision-making involved in completing the assignment were undertaken by me. I have enclosed the prompts/logging of the GenAI tool use in an appendix.

Ethical and Academic Integrity

I understand the ethical implications and academic integrity concerns related to the use of AI tools in coursework. I assure that the AI-generated content was used responsibly, and any

content derived from these tools has been appropriately cited and attributed according to the guidelines provided by the instructor and the course. I have taken necessary steps to distinguish between my original work and the AI-generated contributions. Any direct quotations, paraphrased content, or other forms of AI-generated material have been properly referenced in accordance with academic conventions.

By signing this declaration, I affirm that this declaration is accurate and truthful. I take full responsibility for the integrity of my assignment and am prepared to discuss and explain the role of generative AI tools in my creative process if required by the instructor or the Examination Board. I further affirm that I have used generative AI tools in accordance with ethical standards and academic integrity expectations.

Signature:



Date of Signature: 25 June 2025

Kun je academische artikelen vinden over het gebruik van humor op social media?

Gesprek gevoerd met sider.ai ▾

Ik heb academische artikelen gevonden over het **gebruik van humor op sociale media**, met focus op onderwerpen als marketing, webcare, influencercommunicatie en zelfs taalpromotie. De meeste studies tonen aan dat humor op social media een krachtige tool is voor betrokkenheid, merkherkenning, en interactie – maar dat het ook risico's met zich meebrengt wanneer het verkeerd wordt toegepast.

Hieronder een overzicht van de **meest relevante Nederlandstalige studies**, inclusief directe links naar de artikelen:

Topartikelen over Humor op Sociale Media

1. **Davis, J. L., Love, T. P., & Killen, G. (2018)**
Seriously funny: The political work of humor on social media.
Gepubliceerd in *New Media & Society*. Toont hoe humor wordt ingezet als politiek instrument online.
[Lees hier](#)
2. **Yu, Y., Huang, L., Qing, P., & Chen, T. (2022)**
How humor reduces the impact of negative feedback on social media.
In *Journal of Interactive Marketing*. Humor blijkt een buffer tegen negatieve publiciteit.
[Lees hier \(PDF\)](#)
3. **Alkaraki, S. M. S., Alias, N. B., & Maros, M. (2024)**
Exploring the impact of social media humor related to the COVID-19 pandemic.
In *Cogent Arts & Humanities*. Systematisch overzicht van humor tijdens pandemie.
[Lees hier \(PDF\)](#)
4. **Briguglio, M., Bonnici, T., & Spiteri, G. W. (2023)**
Humor helps: An experimental analysis of pro-environmental social media communication.
Gepubliceerd in *Sustainability (MDPI)*. Humor verhoogt engagement met milieuboodschappen.
[Lees hier](#)
5. **Gal, N. (2019)**
Ironic humor on social media as participatory boundary work.
In *New Media & Society*. Bestudeert ironie als manier om sociale groepen te markeren.
[Lees artikel \(PDF\)](#)
6. **Yeo, S. K., Cacciatore, M. A., & Su, L. Y. F. (2021)**
Following science on social media: The effects of humor and source likability.
In *Public Understanding of Science*. Humor verhoogt wetenschappelijk vertrouwen.
[Lees hier](#)
7. **Elayan, S., Sykora, M., & Jackson, T. W. (2022)**
'Are you having a laugh?': detecting humorous expressions on social media.
In *International Journal of Information Technology and Management*. Gaat over humorherkenning door AI.
[Lees hier \(PDF\)](#)
8. **Holton, A. E., & Lewis, S. C. (2011)**
Journalists, social media, and the use of humor on Twitter.
In *Electronic Journal of Communication*. Onderzoekt hoe journalisten humor inzetten op Twitter.
[Lees hier \(PDF\)](#)

Kun je literatuur vinden over Generation theory in the workplace?
Het moeten academische artikelen zijn van een goede journal

Gesprek gevoerd met sider.ai ▾

Hier is een overzicht van recente academische literatuur over *Generation Theory in the workplace*. De studies focussen op hoe generatietheorieën van invloed zijn op werkplekgedrag, leiderschap, motivatie, communicatie, en werkprestaties. Generatie Z, Millennials en Babyboomers worden vaak vergeleken in termen van werkwaarden, leiderschapsverwachtingen en hun aanpassing aan hybride of digitale werkmodellen. Diverse theorieën zoals *Social Exchange Theory*, *Self-Determination Theory* en *Role Theory* worden toegepast om intergenerationele dynamiek te analyseren.

Relevante Artikelen:

- 1. Apolonio, R. A., & Jubac Jr, A. C. (2025)**
One Size Does Not Fit All: Exploring Leadership Inclinations in a Multigenerational Workforce
→ Bespreekt hoe verschillende generaties unieke leiderschapsvoorkeuren hebben.
[Volledige tekst \(PDF\)](#)
- 2. Neves, H. de Castro (2025)**
The Anxious Generation Theory and Generation Z Behaviour in the Workplace: A Correlation Analysis
→ Onderzoekt hoe generatie Z zich anders gedraagt op de werkvloer vanuit een "anxious generation" perspectief.
[Lees het artikel \(PDF\)](#)
- 3. Korkis, L., & Storms, A. (2025)**
Bridging Generations: Fostering Motivation and Engagement Through the Development of a Nursing Professional Practice Model
→ Integreert generatietheorie in de zorg om motivatie en betrokkenheid te verbeteren.
[Link naar ScienceDirect](#)
- 4. Nugraha, F., et al. (2025)**
Perception of Generation Z towards Leadership in the Workplace
→ Past *Self-Determination Theory* toe om leiderschapsverwachtingen van Gen Z te analyseren.
[PDF beschikbaar](#)



Kun je een artikel vinden over dat employer branding zich in deze tijd niet meer zo focust op het aantrekken van oudere mensen

Fout bij gesprek met connector

Fout bij gesprek met connector

Gesprek gevoerd met sider.ai ▾

Op basis van de beschikbare webbronnen en recent maatschappelijk debat blijkt dat employer branding in de jaren 2020 minder gericht lijkt te zijn op het aantrekken van oudere werknemers. Hoewel er geen specifiek academisch artikel beschikbaar is vanwege een tijdelijk probleem met de wetenschappelijke zoektools, geven onderstaande bronnen inzicht in het maatschappelijke sentiment en bedrijfsstrategieën:

1. Acemoglu, D., Mühlbach, N. S., & Scott, A. J. (2022).

The Rise of Age-Friendly Jobs

Onderzoekt hoe beroepen in de VS in de periode 1990-2020 "leeftijdsvriendelijker" zijn geworden en hoe dit invloed heeft gehad op de inzet van oudere werknemers. Ondanks deze positieve trend hebben jongere en hoger opgeleide werknemers er meer van geprofiteerd dan oudere, lager opgeleide mannen.

[Lees het artikel](#)

2. Baltes, S., Park, G., & Serebrenik, A. (2020).

Is 40 the New 60? How Popular Media Portrays the Employability of Older Software Developers

Analyse van media en fora die leeftijdsdiscriminatie in de IT-sector bespreken. Employer branding in tech blijkt zelden gericht op oudere werknemers, ondanks hun ervaring.

[Bekijk het artikel](#)

3. Woodworth, G., & Kadane, J. (2010).

Age- and Time-Varying Proportional Hazards Models for Employment Discrimination

Statistisch model voor leeftijdsdiscriminatie bij ontslagen – waardevol voor juridische contexten maar ook voor het begrijpen van structurele achterstelling van ouderen.

[Lees het artikel](#)

Kun je theorieën artikelen vinden over arbeidscommunicatie en employer branding?

Gesprek gevoerd met sider.ai ▾

Hier zijn enkele academische artikelen over arbeidscommunicatie en employer branding, inclusief theoretische benaderingen:

1. **Lundkvist, H. (2017).** *A Proposal for Sustainable Employer Brand: From Market and Product Theory to Sustainable Development Theories.*
 - Dit artikel onderzoekt hoe marketing en communicatietheorieën bijdragen aan een duurzame employer branding-strategie.
 - [Lees het artikel](#)
2. **Ćorić, D. S., & Špoljarić, A. (2021).** *The Origins of Internal Communication and Employer Branding in Marketing Theories.*
 - Dit artikel verkent employer branding en interne communicatie vanuit marketingperspectieven.
 - [Lees het artikel](#)
3. **Kolesnicov, I. (2018).** *Winning the War for Talent: A Study on Employer Branding from a Corporate Communication Perspective.*
 - Onderzoekt employer branding vanuit het perspectief van corporate communicatie en hoe organisaties toptalent aantrekken.
 - [Lees het artikel](#)
4. **Lindholm, L. (2018).** *The Use of Corporate Social Responsibility in Employer Branding.*
 - Kijkt naar de relatie tussen maatschappelijk verantwoord ondernemen (MVO) en employer branding.
 - [Lees het artikel](#)
5. **Itam, U., Misra, S., & Anjum, H. (2020).** *HRD Indicators and Branding Practices: A Viewpoint on the Employer Brand Building Process.*
 - Onderzoekt hoe HR en brandingtheorieën bijdragen aan een succesvol employer branding-proces.
 - [Lees het artikel](#)

6. **Tkalac Verčič, A., Verčič, D., & Špoljarić, A. (2022).** *Internal Communication and Employer Brands.*
 - Dit boek bespreekt de relatie tussen interne communicatie en employer branding en hoe communicatiekanalen bijdragen aan het versterken van de werkgeversreputatie.
 - [Lees het boek](#)
7. **Backhaus, K., & Tikoo, S. (2004).** *Conceptualizing and Researching Employer Branding.*
 - Een invloedrijk artikel dat employer branding theoretisch kadert binnen marketing en HRM.
 - [Lees het artikel](#)
8. **Carlini, J., Grace, D., & France, C. (2019).** *The Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Employer Brand Process: Integrative Review and Comprehensive Model.*
 - Een overzicht van hoe CSR wordt geïntegreerd in employer branding en organisatie-imago.
 - [Lees het artikel](#)
9. **Lievens, F., & Slaughter, J. E. (2016).** *Employer Image and Employer Branding: What We Know and What We Need to Know.*
 - Behandelt de stand van zaken in employer branding-onderzoek en toekomstige richtingen.
 - [Lees het artikel](#)
10. **Maurya, K. K., & Agarwal, M. (2018).** *Organisational Talent Management and Perceived Employer Branding.*
 - Onderzoekt de relatie tussen talentmanagement en employer branding en hoe organisaties deze concepten gebruiken om medewerkers te behouden.
 - [Lees het artikel](#)

En passen deze bronnen ook bij deze onderzoeksvraag? Hoe representeren werkgevers oudere en jongere werknemers in employer branding-campagnes op sociale media? En zou je dan willen uitlichten welke bronnen bij beide passen en welke alleen bij de ene of de andere passen?

De onderzoeksvraag "Hoe representeren werkgevers oudere en jongere werknemers in employer branding-campagnes op sociale media?" heeft een duidelijke focus op sociale media als medium en demografische representatie. Ik heb de eerder genoemde bronnen beoordeeld om te zien welke relevant zijn voor beide onderzoeksvragen en welke exclusief geschikt zijn voor een van de twee. Hier is de analyse:

1. **Your Future Employer: Employer Branding, Reputation, and Social Media**
 - Hanu, C., Amegbe, H., & Mensah, P. (2021). *African Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies*.
 - *Relevantie*: Bekijkt hoe social media wordt ingezet om employer branding te versterken, met aandacht voor diverse demografische doelgroepen.
 - **Toepassing**: Gericht op de rol van sociale media in brandingcampagnes.
 - [Link](#)
2. **(Non-) Stereotypical Representations of Older People in Social Media**
 - Xu, W. (2022). *Ageing & Society*.
 - *Relevantie*: Onderzoekt hoe oudere werknemers worden gerepresenteerd in sociale mediacampagnes, met implicaties voor inclusieve branding.
 - **Toepassing**: Focus op ouderen, relevant voor demografische representatie.
 - [Link](#)
3. **Innovation in Talent Management Practices: Employer Branding for Generation Z**
 - Pandita, D. (2022). *International Journal of Innovation Science*.
 - *Relevantie*: Presenteert brandingstrategieën gericht op jongere generaties, met aandacht voor sociale media. 
4. **Employer Branding and Recruitment: Social Media Field Experiments**
 - Keppeler, F., & Papenfuß, U. (2021). *Public Administration Review*.
 - *Relevantie*: Test hoe verschillende demografische groepen worden aangesproken via sociale media.
 - **Toepassing**: Gericht op jongere en oudere doelgroepen.
 - [Link](#)
5. **Consumers' Persuasion Knowledge of Algorithms in Social Media Advertising**
 - Voorveld, H.A.M., & Meppelink, C.S. (2023). *International Journal of Advertising*.
 - *Relevantie*: Onderzoekt hoe sociale media-algoritmen werknemerspercepties kunnen beïnvloeden.
 - **Toepassing**: Gericht op sociale media en percepties.
 - [Link](#)