Understanding User Behaviour and Intent Through LinkedIn

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INTRODUCTION

Research Topic

This research focuses on understanding how learning-oriented and job-oriented users engage with LinkedIn differently, and how user intent shapes their experience on the platform over time. The study looks at how users interact with content, features, and opportunities on LinkedIn, and how these interactions influence career-related thinking and decision-making.

In recent years, LinkedIn has evolved beyond being just a job-search platform. It increasingly functions like a social media space, where users share achievements, opinions, and career updates using similar formats and language. This shift makes it important to study not only what users do on LinkedIn, but why they engage in certain ways and how the platform responds to those behaviours.

Relevance of the Study

LinkedIn plays a significant role in how careers are explored, discussed, and perceived today. For many users, especially students and early professionals, the platform acts as a primary source of information about industries, skills, and professional success.

At the same time, the growing presence of repetitive, polished, and often AI-assisted content has changed how users experience LinkedIn. Many interactions now feel performative rather than purely informational. This makes user intent a key factor — some users engage with LinkedIn to learn and explore, while others engage with a clear focus on job outcomes and opportunities.

Understanding these differences is important because LinkedIn does not treat all users the same. The platform adapts based on how users behave, which can influence what they see, how they feel, and how they make career-related decisions.

Objective of the Study

The objective of this study is to understand how learning-oriented and job-oriented users interact with LinkedIn differently, and how user intent influences platform responses over time.

The study aims to explore how these interactions affect users' emotions, perceptions of progress, and career-related decisions while using LinkedIn.

QUESTIONNAIRE DESIGN: TOPIC & INTENT

Topic Definition

LinkedIn was chosen for this study because it is one of the most widely used professional platforms among students and early-stage professionals today. Unlike traditional job portals, LinkedIn combines learning content, networking, job searching, and professional self-presentation within a single platform. This makes it an ideal space to study how users engage with professional content and opportunities over time.

Another reason for selecting LinkedIn is its recent shift toward social-media-like behaviour. Users increasingly post achievements, reflections, and career updates in similar formats and language, often influenced by trends and platform norms. As a result, user behaviour on LinkedIn is shaped not only by career goals, but also by visibility, comparison, and emotional response.

Studying user intent on such a platform is important because users do not all interact with LinkedIn for the same reasons. Some users approach it as a learning and exploration space, while others engage with a clear focus on job outcomes. Understanding these differences helps reveal how platforms

respond differently to users based on their behaviour and intent.

Intent of the Research

The original intent of this research was to understand how learning-oriented and job-oriented users engage with LinkedIn differently, and how user intent influences the platform's responses over time. Before collecting data, the study aimed to explore whether differences in user intent lead to differences in engagement patterns, content exposure, and emotional experience on the platform.

The questionnaire was designed to uncover:

- The primary reasons users use LinkedIn
- How frequently and in what ways users engage with the platform
- The type of content users are exposed to based on their behaviour
- Users' awareness of how their activity affects what they see
- The emotional and career-related impact of using LinkedIn

By capturing behavioural, emotional, and intent-based responses, the questionnaire was structured to identify patterns that distinguish learning-oriented users from job-oriented users without making assumptions in advance.

QUESTIONNAIRE DESIGN: SAMPLE, SAMPLING & ASSUMPTIONS

Target Audience

The target audience for this study consists of students and early-stage professionals who actively or passively use LinkedIn as part of their academic or career journey.
The age group covered for this research ranges from 18 to 30 years, as individuals in this stage are typically navigating career exploration, skill-building, and employment decisions.

This group was selected because:

- They are in a career transition phase (education to work)
- They are more likely to use LinkedIn for learning, exploration, and job discovery
- Their behaviour on the platform is more fluid and intent-driven, making them suitable for studying shifts in usage patterns and decision-making

Sample Size

The study aimed to collect approximately 100 responses.

This sample size was chosen to:

- Allow identification of behavioural and emotional patterns
- Enable segmentation based on user intent
- Support qualitative insight generation rather than statistical generalisation

A sample of this size is appropriate for exploratory research focused on understanding user intent and experience rather than making population-level claims.

Sampling Technique

The research employed convenience sampling, as the study targeted users who were easily accessible and relevant to the research topic.

The questionnaire was distributed through:

- College and student groups
- WhatsApp networks
- Instagram
- Peer and alumni circles

This approach ensured participation from individuals who are familiar with LinkedIn and fall within the intended age and career stage.

Assumptions Considered

The following assumptions were made while designing the questionnaire:

- Familiarity with LinkedIn

It was assumed that respondents have prior exposure to LinkedIn and can reflect on their usage meaningfully.

- Honest Self-Reporting

The study assumes that participants would respond truthfully based on their personal experience and behaviour.

- Subjectivity of Emotional Responses

Emotional reactions such as motivation, pressure, anxiety, or confidence are subjective, but are considered valid indicators of user experience.

- Behaviour Reflects Intent

It is assumed that patterns of engagement and interaction reflect underlying user intent on the platform.

QUESTIONNAIRE DESIGN: DATA USABILITY

The questionnaire was designed to collect intent-based, behavioural, and emotional data related to LinkedIn usage.

The data was structured to help understand:

- Why users open LinkedIn
- How they engage with the platform
- What emotional impact the platform creates
- How this influences career-related thinking and decisions

The collected data was intended to enable:

- User segmentation (learning-oriented, job-oriented, mixed intent)
- Pattern recognition across behaviour and emotional response
- Comparison between different usage styles
- Insight generation around how platform responses align with user intent

This ensured that the data collected would be meaningful, analysable, and aligned with the research objective.

Final Questionnaire Link

Google Form Link:
https://forms.gle/DnoAHGW9w7JHoSJ26

DATA COLLECTION & CLEANING

Data Collection Process

The data for this research was collected using a structured online questionnaire created through Google Forms. The questionnaire was distributed across multiple digital platforms to reach the intended audience of students and early-stage professionals.

Platforms used for data collection:

- WhatsApp (college and peer groups)
- Instagram (stories and direct messages)
- College-related networks and informal academic groups

Duration of data collection:
The questionnaire was open for responses for approximately 5–7 days, allowing sufficient time for organic participation.

Total responses received:
A total of 108 responses were collected initially.

DATA ORGANIZATION

The study initially received 108 responses. To keep the dataset focused on early-career users, responses from age groups 24–26 and 27–30 were removed due to very low representation.

A small number of undergraduate responses were also excluded to balance the sample.

The final dataset consists of 100 responses, including 83 undergraduate students and 17 working professionals. This refined sample allowed the data to be organised clearly and analysed meaningfully around user intent, behaviour, and emotional impact while using LinkedIn.

SAMPLE OVERVIEW					
Segment	Count	Percentage	Age Range	Primary Intent	Key Characteristic
Undergraduate Students	83	83%	18-26	Learning & Exploration	High career uncertainty
Working Professionals	17	17%	21-30+	Mixed/Networking	Established career path
Total Sample	100	100%	18-30+	Varied	Early career phase

PRIMARY INTENT DISTRIBUTION (All Respondents)		
Primary Intent	Percentage	Interpretation
My intention varies each time	25%	Users lack clear focus - fluid usage
To learn about industries/skills/trends	23.10%	Learning-oriented behavior
To build professional connections	18.50%	Networking-focused users
To actively search and apply for jobs	17.60%	Job-hunting active phase
To explore possible career paths	15.70%	Career exploration mindset

PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACT ANALYSIS			
Metric	Response	Percentage	Insight
Pressure to Progress Faster	Very often	19.40%	Significant pressure felt
	Sometimes	45.40%	Moderate pressure -majority
	Rarely	25%	Lower pressure group
	Never	10.20%	Minimal pressure
Top Emotions	Motivation	50%	Positive driver
	Curiosity	49.10%	Learning mindset
	Comparison with others	46.30%	Social comparison effect
	Pressure	38.90%	Stress indicator
	Anxiety	35.20%	Negative emotional impact

ALGORITHM AWARENESS & PERSONALIZATION		
Awareness Level	Percentage	Implication
Very aware	45.40%	High consciousness of tracking
Somewhat aware	31.50%	Moderate understanding
Slightly aware	18.50%	Limited knowledge
Not aware at all	4.60%	Unaware of personalization
Noticed Algorithm Changes		
Yes, very clearly	26.90%	Strong perception of feed changes
Yes, but subtly	41.70%	Subtle awareness - most common
Not sure	25%	Uncertain about personalization
No	6.50%	No perceived change

INTENT SHIFT OVER 6 MONTHS		
Intent Change Pattern	Percentage	Interpretation
No change - remained the same	52.80%	Stable usage pattern - majority
Yes, learning → job-focused	33.30%	Significant shift to urgency
Yes, job-focused → learning	13.90%	Reduced pressure, exploratory
KEY FINDING:	Learning-to-job shift 2.4x higher	Platform nudges toward job hunting

The organised data shows that most respondents are early-career users navigating uncertainty, using LinkedIn without a fixed purpose. Undergraduate students largely approach the platform for learning, exploration, and inspiration, but frequently experience pressure and comparison. Working professionals, while more stable, still engage in mixed ways—balancing networking, visibility, and opportunity scanning.

From this, two dominant personas emerge:

- The Exploratory Learner: A student or early professional who opens LinkedIn to learn and observe but often leaves feeling pressured by peer success and unclear benchmarks.
- The Opportunity Watcher: A working professional or final-year student who uses LinkedIn to stay visible and alert to opportunities, influenced subtly by algorithmic cues and social proof.

Overall, the data highlights LinkedIn as a platform where intent is fluid, emotions are closely tied to peer visibility, and user behaviour is shaped gradually rather than consciously—setting the foundation for deeper analysis of influence, pressure, and career decision-making.

From the above data,

Key Characteristic:
High career uncertainty

25%
Users lack clear focus - fluid usage

64.8%
Users experience pressure to progress faster

77%
Users are aware that LinkedIn tracks and personalises their activity

Key Characteristic:
High awareness, but limited control over influence

68.6%
Users notice changes in their feed after specific actions

Key Characteristic:
Algorithmic nudging felt more subtly than consciously questioned

Key Characteristic:
Platform-driven shift from curiosity to urgency

AFFINITY MAPPING:

User Behavior Clusters

CLUSTER 1: User Intent Patterns
• 25% have varying intent - no clear focus
• 23% learning-oriented (skills, trends)
• 18.5% networking-focused
• 17.6% actively job hunting
• 15.7% exploring career paths
PATTERN: Intent is fragmented, not binary

CLUSTER 2: Engagement Behaviors
• 62% scroll feed regularly
• 49.1% read posts fully
• 45.4% follow creators/companies
• 42.6% search for jobs
• 39.8% engage occasionally
• 38% use few times a week
PATTERN: Passive consumption dominates

CLUSTER 3: Emotional Response
• 50% feel motivated
• 49.1% feel curious
• 46.3% compare with others
• 38.9% feel pressure
• 35.2% experience anxiety
• 45.4% feel pressure 'sometimes'
PATTERN: Motivation + Comparison = Pressure

CLUSTER 4: Algorithm Awareness
• 45.4% very aware of tracking
• 68.6% noticed feed changes
• 41.7% noticed subtle shifts
• 66.7% content aligns 'sometimes'
• 49.1% find recommendations accurate
PATTERN: High awareness, subtle manipulation

KEY CROSS-CLUSTER INSIGHTS	
INSIGHT 1	Intent Fluidity → Algorithm Confusion
INSIGHT 2	Passive Engagement → Subtle Influence
INSIGHT 3	Motivation-Comparison Loop
INSIGHT 4	Awareness ≠ Control
INSIGHT 5	Learning → Job Shift

All the above table are made using the below observations as per the sample size of 100

DISTINCT INSIGHTS

INSIGHT 1:
The Platform Optimizes for Employment Urgency, Not Learning

Core Insight: *LinkedIn systematically nudges users from learning-oriented to job-oriented behaviour through algorithmic personalization.*

DATA EVIDENCE:
• 33.3% shifted from learning/exploring to job-focused intent (vs only 13.9% reverse)
• 2.4x more users shifted toward job urgency than away from it
• 68.6% noticed LinkedIn showing more job content after certain actions
• 41.7% feel strongest urge to act after seeing peers' success posts (social proof trigger)

JUSTIFICATION:
This asymmetric shift pattern reveals that LinkedIn's algorithm is not neutral. When users engage with learning content, the platform gradually introduces job-related content. However, the reverse (job → learning) happens less frequently. This suggests the algorithm optimizes for conversion to job-seeking behaviour, which aligns with LinkedIn's business model (job postings, recruiter tools).

IMPLICATION FOR USERS:
Users who join for skill development may find themselves in job-hunting mode without consciously deciding to shift. The platform influences not just what content users see, but fundamentally reshapes their intent over time.

INSIGHT 2:
Awareness of Algorithmic Personalization Does Not Prevent Its Influence

Core Insight: *Despite high awareness of tracking (45.4% very aware, 31.5% somewhat aware), users still experience behavioral and emotional influence.*

DATA EVIDENCE:
• 76.9% are somewhat to very aware of algorithmic tracking
• Yet 68.6% still noticed feed changes after specific actions
• 47.2% report LinkedIn adds pressure to evaluate career progress
• 61.1% influenced in skills they want to learn
• 40.7% describe LinkedIn as "helpful but also stressful"

JUSTIFICATION:
Knowledge of algorithmic personalization does not translate to immunity from its effects. Even users who understand they're being tracked continue to feel pressure, change their learning priorities, and experience stress.
This suggests the influence operates at a psychological level that awareness alone cannot counteract - the repeated exposure to curated content creates emotional responses and behavioural patterns regardless of conscious recognition.

IMPLICATION FOR USERS:
Simply making users aware of algorithmic manipulation is insufficient. The platform's influence persists because it taps into deeper psychological mechanisms (social comparison, FOMO, career anxiety) that override rational awareness.

INSIGHT 3:
Passive Consumption Enables Subtle Behavioural Manipulation

Core Insight:
The majority of users engage passively with content, which makes them more susceptible to algorithmic influence without critical evaluation.

DATA EVIDENCE:• 62% primarily scroll the feed (passive)
• Only 39.8% actively engage (like, comment, save) occasionally
• 17.6% engage very frequently (small minority)
• 49.1% read posts fully, but engagement remains low
• 36.1% see LinkedIn usage as "both but not very intentional"

JUSTIFICATION:
Passive scrolling creates a one-way information flow where users absorb content without active questioning or engagement.
This behavioural pattern makes users ideal targets for subtle influence - they're consuming recommendations without the critical evaluation that comes with active engagement.
The low intentionality (36.1%) further indicates users aren't approaching the platform with clear boundaries or goals, making them more susceptible to the platform's framing of career success.

IMPLICATION FOR USERS:
LinkedIn's design encourages passive consumption over active learning. The endless scroll, curated feed, and recommendation algorithms keep users in a receptive state where the platform's definitions of career progress (job changes, skill acquisition, networking) are absorbed uncritically.

INSIGHT 4:
Social Comparison Drives Career Anxiety More Than Personal Goals

Core Insight: *Peer success posts trigger stronger urgency to act than job-related content, revealing that social comparison is the primary emotional driver.*

DATA EVIDENCE:
• 41.7% feel strongest urge to act after seeing peers' success posts
• 46.3% commonly experience "comparison with others"
• 45.4% feel pressure to "progress faster" sometimes
• 24.1% feel urge after job-related content (much lower than peer posts)
• 47.2% report LinkedIn influences career evaluation, but adds pressure

JUSTIFICATION:
The data reveals a critical pattern: users are more motivated by what their peers are doing than by actual job opportunities. This indicates that LinkedIn functions less as a job search tool and more as a social comparison engine.
The pressure to progress faster isn't driven by personal career timelines or market opportunities, but by seeing others' achievements.
This creates a perpetual state of feeling "behind" regardless of actual progress.

IMPLICATION FOR USERS:
LinkedIn has successfully gamified career progress by making peer achievements highly visible.
This transforms career development from a personal journey into a competitive race, where users feel compelled to act not because they're ready, but because they fear falling behind their network.

INSIGHT 5:
Intent Fluidity Makes Users Vulnerable to Algorithmic Nudging

Core Insight: *The largest user segment (25%) has no fixed intent, creating a vacuum that LinkedIn's algorithm fills with its own priorities.*

DATA EVIDENCE:
• 25% report "my intention varies each time" (largest single group)
• 36.1% see usage as "both but not very intentional"
• 52.8% had no change in intent over 6 months (shows intent instability across different users)
• 66.7% find content alignment with goals only "sometimes"
• 24.1% feel LinkedIn "has influenced what I should want"

JUSTIFICATION:
When users lack a clear, stable intent, they become highly susceptible to the platform's guidance on what they "should" be doing. The fact that 25% vary their intent each time means they arrive on the platform without a clear purpose, making them perfect candidates for algorithmic steering. The platform then fills this intentional vacuum by serving content that aligns with its optimization goals (employment, networking) rather than the user's authentic interests.

IMPLICATION FOR USERS:
LinkedIn exploits career uncertainty in early-career users. Rather than helping users clarify their own goals, the platform substitutes its own agenda, turning exploratory learners into job seekers, and networking into a performance metric. Users without strong intent become algorithmically malleable.

WHY THESE INSIGHTS ARE IMPORTANT

1. They reveal LinkedIn's non neutral role
The insights show that LinkedIn is not just a passive platform responding to user actions.
It actively prioritises job related urgency and social comparison, which directly impacts how users think about career progress.

2. They explain emotional outcomes, not just behaviour
Rather than only showing what users do (scrolling, saving, applying), the insights explain how users feel motivated, pressured, anxious, or behind.
This emotional layer is critical in understanding real user experience.

3. They highlight vulnerability in early career users
Students and early professionals often have unclear or evolving goals.
The insights show that this intent fluidity makes users more susceptible to algorithmic nudging and social pressure.

4. They demonstrate the power of passive engagement
Since most users consume content passively, they are influenced without consciously questioning the content or its implications.
This explains why awareness of tracking does not reduce emotional or behavioural impact.

5. They connect platform design to career decision-making
The insights show that LinkedIn influences:

- What skills users want to learn
- Which roles and companies they aspire to
- How urgently they feel they need to act

This confirms that LinkedIn plays a direct role in shaping career related decisions, not just reflecting them.

REVISED INTENT OF THE STUDY

Revised Intent Statement
Based on the findings of this research, the revised intent is to understand how LinkedIn actively influences and reshapes user intent over time through algorithmic responses, social comparison, and content exposure, and how this influence affects emotions, perceived career progress, and decision-making among students and early professionals.

Why This Revised Intent Is Necessary
The original intent focused on comparing learning-oriented and job-oriented users.

However, the data shows that:

- Many users shift intent without planning to
- Users with unclear intent are most affected
- Platform responses often push users toward urgency

This means the study is no longer just about differences between user types, but about how the platform itself drives those differences.

NEW QUESTIONS / AREAS OF STUDY EMERGING FROM THE INSIGHTS

1. How does prolonged exposure to LinkedIn affect users who initially join for learning?
Since learning-oriented users are more likely to shift toward job-focused behaviour, future research could study whether LinkedIn gradually converts most users into job-seekers regardless of their original goals.

2. What is the long-term emotional impact of social comparison on LinkedIn?
With peer success posts creating more urgency than job listings, further research could examine how constant comparison affects confidence, anxiety, and self-worth over time.

3. Does having a clear career intent reduce algorithmic influence?
Future studies could explore whether users with strong, clearly defined goals experience less pressure and emotional impact compared to users with fluctuating intent.

4. How does passive scrolling increase susceptibility to influence?
Since most users engage passively, future research could investigate whether more active or intentional interaction leads to healthier platform experiences.

5. How does LinkedIn's shift toward social-media-style content affect authenticity and trust?
As LinkedIn increasingly resembles other social platforms, future research could study whether performative and AI-assisted content reduces trust or changes how professional success is perceived.

CONCLUSION

This research shows that LinkedIn is not just shaping career decisions, it is shaping how students and early professionals feel about themselves. For users who are still figuring out their paths, the platform becomes a constant reference point for progress, success, and self-worth.
Exposure to peer achievements, curated success stories, and job-related signals often creates a silent pressure to move faster, achieve more, and "catch up," even when users are not ready.

While many participants reported feeling motivated and informed, a significant number also experienced anxiety, comparison, and a persistent feeling of being behind. These emotional responses are not accidental. They emerge from repeated interactions with a system that rewards visibility, speed, and achievement. Over time, this can blur the line between healthy ambition and unhealthy pressure, especially for students and early professionals who are already navigating uncertainty, financial stress, and identity formation.

The findings suggest that LinkedIn's influence operates quietly not through force, but through accumulation. Small nudges, repeated content patterns, and social comparison gradually shape how users evaluate their worth and future. Understanding this is essential, because career platforms do not exist outside mental health, they actively participate in it.

From a design perspective, this study raises an important question:

What happens when platforms designed for opportunity begin to feel like platforms of pressure? When user behaviour becomes data and data becomes direction, design decisions directly impact emotional well-being.

For students and early professionals, LinkedIn often becomes more than a tool, it becomes a mirror. And mirrors, when distorted, can affect confidence, self-perception, and mental health.

As designers, this highlights the responsibility to think beyond engagement and efficiency, and to consider how digital systems shape emotional states over time.

Designing data-driven platforms is not just about optimising outcomes. It is about designing experiences that acknowledge uncertainty, respect individual timelines, and support users without amplifying anxiety.

This research reinforces the need for more empathetic, transparent, and human centred approaches to professional platforms, especially for users still learning who they are and where they want to go.

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