

Professional success on display: LinkedIn discourses, emotional capitalism, and digital communities in Türkiye

Profesyonel başarı vitrini: Türkiye’de LinkedIn söylemleri, duygusal kapitalizm ve dijital topluluklar

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Abstract

In the digitalizing corporate world, professional identity is increasingly reconstructed through representations crafted on platforms such as LinkedIn. Building on Eva Illouz’s notion of “emotional capitalism”, this study examines how LinkedIn’s structural logic pushes users into ongoing performative display and the search for community approval. Because the platform’s algorithm foregrounds similar occupational groups, professional emotions are turned into social capital, creating a lasting tension between the user’s actual emotional life and the curated digital self. Using MAXQda-assisted qualitative content analysis, the study examines 100 LinkedIn posts from 20 high-engagement Turkish professional accounts (five per participant), focusing on success presentations, congratulatory rituals, and crisis discourses. Three research questions guide the analysis: (RQ1) are structural problems reframed as systemic critique or as tests of individual “resilience”?; (RQ2) how does the platform’s interaction loop transform emotional expressions into market-compatible “communication units”?; (RQ3) how do romantic discourses such as “chivalrous leadership” mask organizational failures and impose ideal-character pressure? The study aims to expose the emotional fatigue produced by constant visibility and to inform a more reflective ground for professional communication.

Keywords: Emotional capitalism, LinkedIn, discourse analysis, professional identity, engagement.

Öz

Dijitalleşen kurumsal dünyada profesyonel kimlik, LinkedIn gibi platformlarda kurgulanan temsiller üzerinden yeniden inşa edilmektedir. Bu çalışma, Eva Illouz’un ‘duygusal kapitalizm’ kavramından yola çıkarak, LinkedIn’in yapısal mantığının kullanıcıları nasıl sürekli performatif sergilemeye ve topluluk onayı arayışına yönelttiğini incelemektedir. Platformun benzer meslek gruplarını ön plana çıkaran algoritmik yapısı, profesyonel duyguları sosyal sermayeye dönüştürmekte; bu durum, bireyin gerçek duygu dünyası ile ekrana yansıyan kurgulanmış dijital kimliği arasında kalıcı bir gerginlik yaratmaktadır. MAXQda nitel analiz yazılımı kullanılarak Türkiye’de yüksek etkileşime sahip 20 LinkedIn profilinden seçilen 100 gönderi (katılımcı başına beş) nitel içerik analizine tabi tutulmuş; başarı sunumları, tebrik ritüelleri ve kriz söylemleri incelenmiştir. Çalışma üç araştırma sorusu etrafında şekillenmektedir: (AS1) yapısal sorunlar sistemik bir eleştiri olarak mı yoksa bireyin ‘dayanıklılık’ sınavı olarak mı yeniden çerçevelenmektedir?; (AS2) platformun etkileşim döngüsü duygusal ifadeleri pazarla uyumlu ‘iletişim birimlerine’ nasıl dönüştürmektedir?; (AS3) ‘şövalye ruhlu liderlik’ gibi romantik söylemler kurumsal aksaklıkları nasıl örtmekte ve ideal karakter basıncını nasıl yaratmaktadır? Çalışma, sürekli görünür olma zorunluluğunun ürettiği duygusal yorgunluğu deşifre ederek profesyonel iletişim için daha düşünsel bir zemin oluşturmaya katkı sunmayı amaçlamaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Duygusal kapitalizm, LinkedIn, söylem analizi, profesyonel kimlik, etkileşim.

Citation:

Armutlu, İ. İ. (2026). Professional success on display: LinkedIn discourses, emotional capitalism, and digital communities in Türkiye. *OPUS- Journal of Society Research*, 23, e1934794. <https://doi.org/10.26466/opusjsr.1934794>

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Review Note:

Evaluated by Double-Blind Peer Review

Ethics Reporting:

To report potential ethical concerns, contact: editorialoffice@opusjournal.net

Similarity screening was conducted via intihal.net.



Introduction

In the digitalizing world of work, individuals construct and perform their professional identities not only in workplace settings but also through digital platforms such as LinkedIn. Following Goffman's (Goffman, 1959) dramaturgical framework, users are seen to develop performance-oriented strategies to present themselves in a favorable light on these platforms; several recent studies converge on the observation that LinkedIn's design continuously directs individuals toward practices of self-representation and impression management (Erden, 2025). This display environment becomes particularly meaningful when assessed through Eva Illouz's (Illouz, 2007) emotional capitalism framework: Emotional expressions are transformed into market-compatible communication units; concepts such as success, resilience, and leadership are reproduced within algorithmic approval loops. Research conducted in the Turkish context confirms this pattern (Gürbüzdal, 2022).

Gürbüzdal (2022) examined the discourses of LinkedIn users in Turkey through qualitative content analysis and found that white-collar professionals develop strategies to symbolically deny conditions of precariousness while rendering their professional positions visible. Moreover, when structural problems such as job loss and economic instability are reflected on the platform, it becomes clear that these problems are reframed not as objects of critique but as tests of the individual's resilience. This reframing is an extension of the mechanism of individual responsabilization, rendering structural problems invisible and holding the individual responsible for adapting to the system (Bryant & Aggleton, 2025). Bora et al. (2011), in their study on white-collar unemployment in Turkey, documented the anxiety and future uncertainty that processes of precarization and flexibilization create for professionals, thereby revealing the societal foundation of this reframing. All of these dynamics suggest that social media platforms are not neutral broadcasting spaces but rather function as ideological apparatuses (Althusser, 1971). Heroic leadership narratives further

reinforce this structure; such romantic discourses simplify complex organizational realities while rendering institutional failures invisible, thereby creating ideal character pressure on individuals (Gjerald et al., 2025).

This study critically analyzes professional success discourses on LinkedIn within the context of emotional capitalism and digital communities, opening a discussion of the emotional fatigue generated by the platform. In constructing themselves as "entrepreneurial subjects", users turn their efforts to consolidate professional authority into a strategic performance arena that overlaps with Bourdieu's concept of social capital (Erden, 2025).

Literature Review

Emotional Labor and Its Management: Arlie Hochschild's Contributions

The concept of emotional labor, introduced by Arlie Hochschild in *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling* (1983), refers to the management of emotions in line with occupational requirements, expressed through regulated facial expressions and body language (Humphrey, 2021; Steinberg & Figart, 1999). Hochschild identifies two fundamental dimensions of this process: surface acting, in which workers suppress genuine emotions and display those deemed appropriate; and deep acting, through which individuals genuinely attempt to alter their emotional states, often regarded as more effective for authentic service delivery (Pawłowska, 2020; Wharton, 1993). Emotional labor thus plays a significant role in shaping both employee and customer experience, and is particularly critical in professions that require high levels of human interaction (Öngöre, 2020).

Hochschild's framework illuminates both the psychological effects of emotional labor and its social-economic dimensions, with subsequent studies linking emotional labor to burnout and workplace stress (Farah, 2023; Grandey & Melloy, 2017) and to organisational culture (Fulmer & Barry, 2009). Although developed for face-to-face service work, Hochschild's framework extends to

LinkedIn, where surface and deep acting become audience-managed displays of professional feeling for an algorithmically quantified audience.

The Commodification of Human Emotions

The structured emotional performance demanded by LinkedIn concretely demonstrates how human emotions become a commodity in digital professional networks. Emotional labor here encompasses not only the interpersonal energy expended in face-to-face communication but also self-presentation practices mediated by algorithms and displayed across long time spans. Users are incentivized to package emotions, optimism, gratitude, resilience, and professionalism into repeatable, consumable units circulated as digital artifacts (Erdirençelebi et al., 2022). Emotions thereby become evaluation criteria equivalent to technical skills or work experience; engagement metrics such as likes, comments, and shares function as implicit indicators of this evaluation. The platform's algorithmic architecture steers users toward deep emotional compliance: individuals reshape their genuine emotional states to align with expectations regarding professional roles, mirroring a pattern long observed in workplace emotional labor, where deep acting has been shown to intensify burnout (Li et al., 2024). In collectivist cultures, where open dissent is already suppressed by social norms, this adjustment is even more pronounced — “authentic” self-expression on LinkedIn becomes far less individual than it appears, as cultural expectations and corporate etiquette rules shape shared content substantially. This continuous emotional adjustment exacts a serious psychological cost and paves the way for professional burnout (Doğan & Turgay, 2024).

When difficult life experiences are repeatedly framed through narratives of personal success and visible joy, even adversity is converted into scripted accounts of growth rather than honest acknowledgment of systemic tension. This process operates within a broader neoliberal rationality in which individuals govern themselves according to market-aligned ideals; LinkedIn converts these

ideals into platform imperatives: constant visibility, regular engagement with others' successes, and disciplined presentation of one's own milestones. Emotion thus ceases to be transient and becomes a continuous production cycle, feeding models in which behavioral data — including emotional cues — are harvested for predictive analytics. “Toxic positivity” here refers to the social pressure to maintain a positive emotional stance regardless of circumstances, suppressing the legitimate expression of distress (Lau & Saili, 2024). Narratives of toxic positivity intensify this compression: by transforming economic crises or organizational failures into individualized stories of perseverance (Lau & Saili, 2024), structural sources of distress become invisible within collective discourse. Market-aligned optimism does not merely mask inequalities; it also erodes solidarity among professionals who might otherwise resist harmful practices. Commodification therefore operates on multiple layers: user emotions are packaged for algorithmic circulation; collective critique is fragmented into personalized narratives; platform engagement converts visible emotions into monetizable data streams. Although users technically choose what to post, their choices are underpinned by incentive matrices engineered around the attention economy (Erdirençelebi et al., 2022) — so thoroughly that disengagement may be perceived as negligence. Commodification thus operates not through overt coercion but through an engineered convergence between individual ambition and platform profitability.

Emotional Capitalism: Eva Illouz's Critique

The concept of emotional capitalism, developed through the sociological work of Eva Illouz, offers a profound perspective on the role of emotions in economic and social life. Illouz argues that emotional capitalism functions as a mechanism that shapes individuals' emotions, relationships, and social bonds, commodifying them through market dynamics: in recent years especially, emotions have become objects of consumption that hold a significant place within consumer culture (Evren,

2025). Emotional capital — theorised by Cottingham (2016) as a form of cultural capital that individuals activate and embody across distinct social fields — produces effects on both economic circumstances and social status (Brooks, 2024). The two operate at different levels: Illouz’s “emotional capitalism” is a macro-level cultural-economic regime, whereas Cottingham’s “emotional capital” is a micro-level resource individuals accumulate (Brooks, 2024; Lupinacci, 2025). Within a landscape where consumption habits intertwine deeply with emotional experiences, Illouz’s framework reveals how these dynamics are further shaped by gender, class, and cultural forces.

The Transformation of Emotional Relationships

Illouz’s work also questions how emotional relationships have been transformed in modern society. Under the influence of emotional capitalism, superficial and “cold” intimacies emerge (Esgün, 2025): individuals’ emotional expressions grow increasingly detached from reality, causing interpersonal relationships to become more superficial. This transformation inoculates individuals against their own emotional experiences, generating an inner emptiness in which intimacy is colonized by bargaining and self-interest (Illouz, 2007). In parallel, digital platforms increasingly commodify moods and vibes, extending emotional capitalism into a new stage of programmed sociality focused on the platformisation of the merely felt (Lupinacci, 2025). Illouz further shows that women in particular bear a disproportionate emotional workload, with profound effects on their psychological well-being.

Erving Goffman and the Digital Self

Erving Goffman’s concept of dramaturgical self-presentation posits that in social interaction, individuals manage their impressions by adopting roles that align with perceived audience expectations and by selectively revealing and concealing particular aspects of their identities (Tran & Diep,

2025). In digital environments, identity is constructed as a performative act shaped through continuous negotiation between personal goals and the constraints of technological systems and social norms (Tripathi, 2024; Goffman, 1959). Digital spaces facilitate liberating and creative identity work (Jenkins, 2008), yet pressure to conform to socially accepted ideals generates anxiety about maintaining the “authentic” self (Turkle, 2011), and impression management negotiated against platform algorithms leads to curated and at times commodified identities (Marwick, 2013).

Table 1. Tripathi (2024) — Key Themes and Findings in Digital Identity Construction

Theme	Key Findings	Theoretical Sources
Fluid and Performative Self	Identity is multiple, context-dependent, and constructed for social interaction and platform dynamics.	Goffman (1959), Turkle (2011), Marwick (2013)
Virtual Communities and Collective Identity	Digital groups foster belonging, shared meaning, and collective identity production that transcend physical boundaries.	Wellman et al. (2003), Papacharissi (2010)
Authenticity vs. Performance Tension	Users balance creative freedom of expression with the pressures of impression management and identity commodification.	Jenkins (2008), Turkle (2011)
Surveillance and Power	Platforms regulate identity through algorithms, data commodification, and normative enforcement mechanisms.	Fuchs (2017), Zuboff (2019)
Intersectionality and Diversity	Identity practices vary by social markers; marginalized groups face distinctive opportunities and challenges.	Boyd (2014)

Source: Tripathi, R. N. (2024). *The Social Construction of Identity in the Digital Age*, *IJSSR*, 1(4), p. 75. Table content adapted and translated in line with the research framework.

For this study, two dimensions are most consequential: the “authenticity vs. performance” tension underwrites the reading of LinkedIn posts as staged emotional displays, while “surveillance and power” anchors the analysis of algorithmically reinforced normativity. Secondary citations within the cells are reproduced as cited by Tripathi (2024).

The pursuit of likes, followers, and engagement metrics further commodifies identity. The front-stage/back-stage metaphor captures how users navigate between crafted public personas and private expressions; LinkedIn in particular operates as a professional stage where profiles function as

CV-like documents and branding tools (Chiang & Suen, 2015, p. 2)

Weisi and Hajizadeh (2025) and Chiang and Suen (2015) show that this stage operates within a highly calculated script: users manage not only their own presentation but also the expectations of their audience (Chiang & Suen, 2015; Weisi & Hajizadeh, 2025) Yet Altenburger et al. (2017) revealed that this performance is not equally accessible to all: female users produce significantly less content in free-text fields compared to male users, meaning they step onto the stage more cautiously (Altenburger et al., 2017). Leo et al. (2024) reports a further notable finding: stage performance transforms not only the audience but also the performer; the profile development process concretely increases the individual's self-efficacy and self-esteem. For Goffman, the stage was a metaphor; LinkedIn has converted this metaphor into a structure with real consequences (Leo et al., 2024).

Methodology

This study was designed using a qualitative research approach and examined the posts of professional users active on the LinkedIn platform in Turkey through qualitative content analysis informed by a critical discourse-analytic perspective; content analysis identifies recurrent expressions and frequencies across the corpus, while the discourse-analytic lens interprets how those patterns construct power and normativity. Frequency counts are reported as descriptive indicators, not inferential statistics. The aim of the research is to reveal how emotional expressions are transformed within the platform's logic and through which discursive strategy's professional identity presentation is constructed.

The analytical material of the study was compiled from popular LinkedIn accounts in Turkey with high interaction rates and large follower bases. The 20 participant profiles identified through purposive sampling were selected not only on the basis of high visibility but also according to the diversity of posts containing success narratives, crisis discourses, and congratulatory rituals. Inclusion

criteria were: ~50,000+ followers on Turkish LinkedIn or comparable recognition (e.g., LinkedIn Top Voice, CHRO100); consistent posting in the prior twelve months on professional/leadership topics; and sectoral diversity. Five posts per participant were retained as the most recent items matching one of three categories (success, crisis, congratulatory), aligning with comparable Turkish LinkedIn studies (Erden, 2025; Gürbüzdal, 2022). A total of 100 posts — five from each participant — were designated as units of analysis. All participant information was anonymized from the outset of the research process.

To enhance methodological transparency, the anonymized profile of all participants is presented below.

Table 2. Anonymized Profile of Participants (n=20)

Code	Domain / Sector	Follower Tier	Profile Type
K1	Technology & Sustainability / Leadership	150K-200K	LinkedIn Top Voice
K2	Psychology / Personal Development	150K-200K	Clinical psychologist, author, speaker
K3	Leadership / Corporate Training	100K-150K	Management consultant, academy founder
K4	Leadership / Change Management	75K-100K	Leadership and transformation consultant
K5	Entrepreneurship / Leadership	High engagement	Entrepreneurship-focused content creator
K6	Leadership / Digital Transformation	50K-75K	Executive mentor
K7	Technology / AI / Entrepreneurship	50K-75K	Tech entrepreneur
K8	E-Commerce / Retail Strategy	High engagement	Senior corporate executive
K9	Career / LinkedIn Strategy	High eng. (Top 6 in field)	Career consultant, LinkedIn strategist
K10	Career / HR Coaching	High engagement	Career consultant
K11-K13	HR / Leadership / Consulting	High eng. (CHRO100-recognized)	Independent HR/management consultant
K14	Entrepreneurship / E-Commerce	25K-50K	Entrepreneur, e-commerce specialist
K15	HR / Talent Management	High engagement	HR / career content creator
K16	HR / Leadership / Consulting	High eng. (CHRO100-recognized)	Consultant, author
K17	Corporate Leadership / Entrepreneurship	Very high	Holding board chairperson
K18	Technology / Corporate Leadership	High corporate engagement	Country general manager
K19	Finance / Entrepreneurship	High	Holding board chairperson
K20	Technology / Defense / Entrepreneurship	Very high	Corporate board chairperson

The analysis is guided by three research questions, derived inductively from recurrent discursive patterns in the data rather than imposed deductively from theory:

RQ1: How are structural problems such as job loss or economic instability reframed on the platform — as objects of systemic critique or as tests of the individual's "resilience"?

RQ2: In what ways does the platform's continuous interaction loop — congratulatory messages, likes, and appreciation metrics — transform emotional expressions into market-compatible "communication units"?

RQ3: How do romantic discourses, such as "chivalrous leadership", affect the visibility of organizational failures and shape the pressure to conform to an ideal character model?

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using content analysis, which enables systematically examined data to be gathered under meaningful categories and interpreted (Creswell & Poth, 2018). All posts and texts were transcribed and prepared for analysis. The process was carried out in four main stages:

1. Coding Process: The texts were examined line by line; meaningful expressions were identified and coded in line with the research objectives. At this stage, recurring discourses, emphases, and notable psychological expressions were given particular attention. Concepts such as “constant development pressure”, “state of alertness”, “burnout”, and “authenticity crisis” were directly converted into codes. All codes were inductively generated by the author within MAXQDA; every code reported is unique to this study.

with both data content and relevant literature informing theme formation.

4. Review and Reliability: The coding and theme-formation processes were reviewed for semantic coherence; codes were reorganized and sub-themes revised where necessary.

Findings

The findings are organized under the four themes derived from coding. Themes map onto the RQs: RQ1 → “Success Discourse and Ideological Reframing”; RQ2 → “Emotional Capitalism and the Interaction Economy” with “Construction of Professional Identity”, where the algorithm is examined through its discursive traces in posts (direct algorithm analysis requires platform-level data); RQ3 → the same with “Psychological Effects”. Frequencies are descriptive; codes (e.g., K2-P1) refer to Table 2.

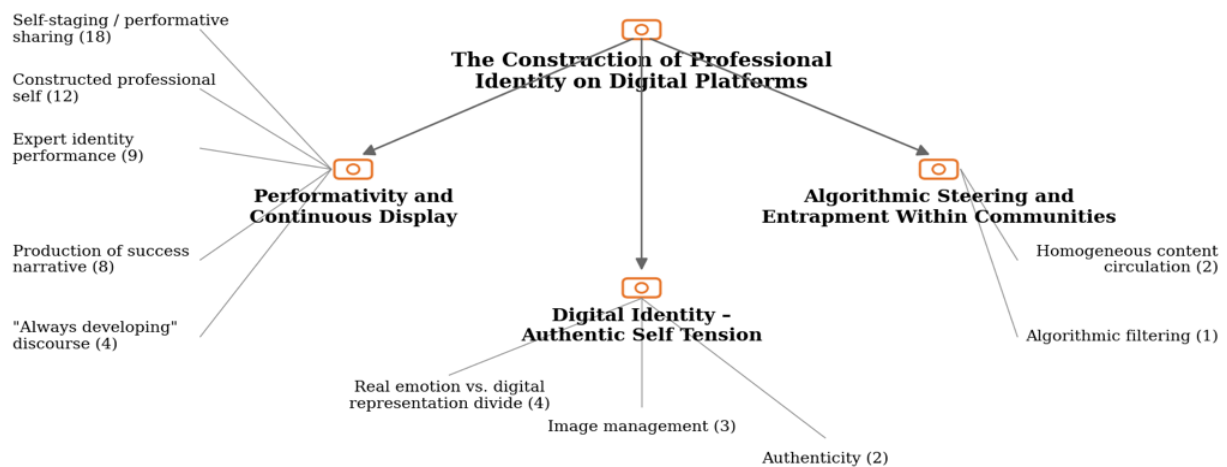


Figure 1. Sub-themes, codes, and frequencies related to the theme of The Construction of Professional Identity on Digital Platforms

2. Grouping Codes and Forming Sub-themes: Codes with similar meanings were grouped, and three core sub-themes emerged: “Constant Interaction Pressure”, “Emotional Exhaustion”, and “Unhealthy Professional Norms”.
3. Identifying Themes: Sub-themes were consolidated under higher-level themes,

The Construction of Professional Identity On Digital Platforms

The sub-themes, codes, and frequencies related to the theme of “The Construction of Professional Identity on Digital Platforms” are presented in Figure 1. This theme demonstrates how professional identity is performatively produced and circulated on LinkedIn. The findings clearly reveal that the platform operates not merely as a career space but as a continuous “front stage” (Goffman).

Performativity and Continuous Display

The analysis reveals that professional identity is largely constructed through performative practices. The “expert identity performance” code (f=9) shows that users attempt to produce epistemic authority by positioning themselves around particular concepts. For instance, one participant produces content around the question “How do you become a thought leader on LinkedIn?” and positions themselves as a guide in this field (K9-P3). Such content demonstrates that claims to expertise are not merely about knowledge transfer, but also function as a visibility strategy.

In parallel, the “always developing” discourse (f=4) shows that professional identity is presented not as a stable characteristic but as a project requiring continuous optimization. “✓Leadership ✓Communication ✓Self-Confidence ✓ Psychological Resilience...” (K7-P3), listing-style practices such as these imply that development has become a normative imperative.

The codes “constructed professional self” (f=12) and “self-staging / performative sharing” (f=18) are the domains where this performative structure is most densely visible. Participants present narratives of success, leadership, and vision within specific rhetorical molds. For example: “We will continue to strive... to live in a better country” (K3-P1); “A clear vision, a clear mission... sustainable success is no coincidence” (K7-P1). These statements show that individual experiences are being reshaped into the collectively recognized format of an “ideal professional narrative”.

“Production of success narrative” (f=8) is the output of this process. Participants construct success not only as an outcome but as a narrativized process: “A career... is the personal brand you build, the impact you create...” (K9-P5); “The fact that I was selected as “Turkey’s Most Competent CHRO”...” (K13-P11). These narratives package success into an individual story form and thus convert it into social capital.

Algorithmic Steering and Entrapment Within Communities

The codes “homogeneous content circulation” (f=2) and “algorithmic filtering” (f=1) show that content production is shaped not only by individual preferences but also by the platform’s visibility mechanisms. For example: “If everyone does their job well... Not at all” (K3-P5); “Steve Jobs / Elon Musk / Warren Buffett?” (K6-P5). Such content reproduces familiar discussion formats that carry high engagement potential. Content diversity thus diminishes, and specific discursive patterns are put into circulation within the platform.

In this sense, the “digital communities” in the title are algorithmically curated discursive enclosures rather than bounded groups. These dynamics align closely with the concept of the *echo chamber*, originally articulated by Sunstein (2001) and later extended through Pariser’s (2011) theorization of the *filter bubble*. The platform’s prioritisation of similar occupational groups combined with engagement-optimised templates produces closed discursive loops where leadership tropes, success archetypes, and motivational appeals circulate, and deviation risks reduced visibility.

Digital Identity – Authentic Self Tension

This sub-theme clearly reveals the digital counterpart of Goffman’s front-stage/back-stage distinction. The “image management” (f=3) code shows that users strategically construct their content. For example: “A spelling mistake gives me the feeling of organic vegetables” (K8-P1). This statement implies that even naturalness is strategically produced. When the “authenticity” (f=2) and “real emotion vs. digital representation divide” (f=4) codes are considered together, it becomes evident that even “sincerity” itself has turned into a performative category on the platform. “Naturalness and sincerity are more valuable today than ever before” (K8-P1); “When I do the job, I want... I feel successful” (K12-P6). These excerpts show that individuals stage the narrative of the “authentic self”,

yet do so through a controlled and curated representation.

The findings obtained under this theme show that professional identity on LinkedIn is not a fixed characteristic but a performative structure that is continuously reproduced. High-frequency codes (in particular “self-staging” $f=18$ and “constructed self” $f=12$) reveal that the platform encourages users to produce continuous visibility. The fact that even the discourse of authenticity ($f=2$) and the emphasis on reality ($f=4$) become part of this performance suggests that the tension between digital identity and authentic self is a structural feature. This indicates that professional identity is not merely represented but is continuously reconstructed in line with algorithmic and social expectations.

Emotional Capitalism and The Interaction Economy

The sub-themes, codes, and frequencies related to the theme of “Emotional Capitalism and the Interaction Economy” are presented in Figure 2.

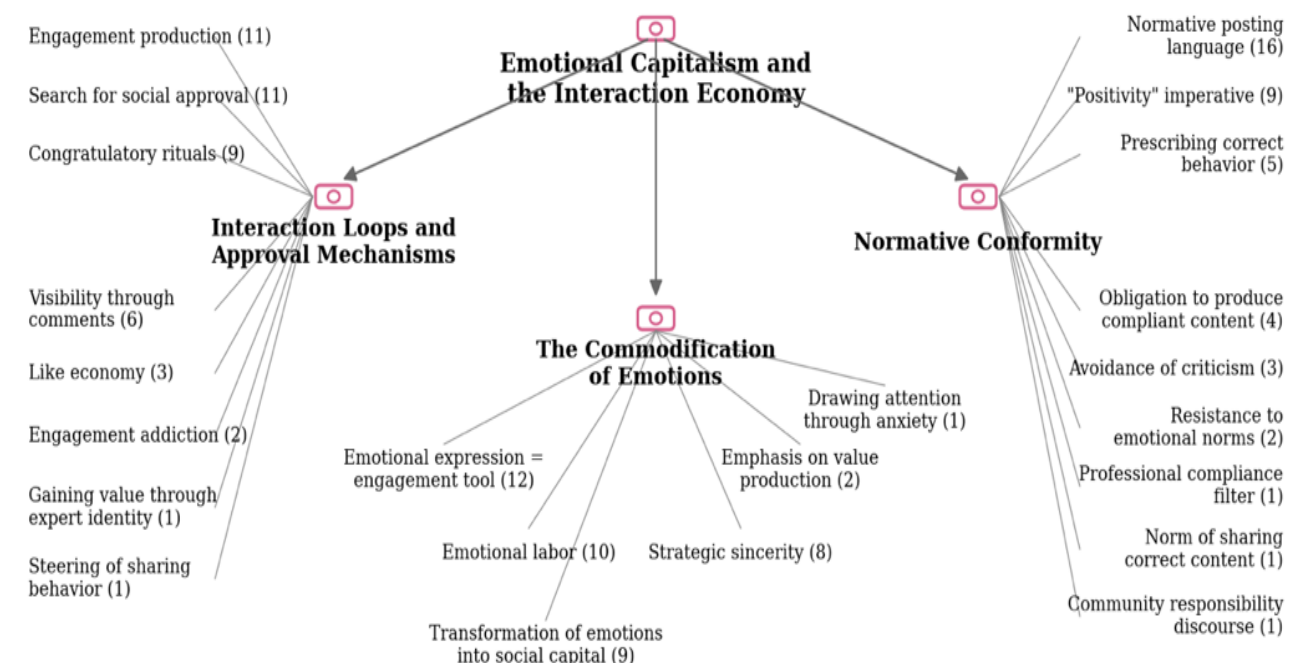


Figure 2. Sub-themes, codes, and frequencies related to the theme of Emotional Capitalism and the Interaction Economy

The Commodification of Emotions

“Emphasis on value production” ($f=2$) shows that emotions are reframed through a search for meaning: “Our goal in relationships should not be ‘what can I get from this person’, but ‘what can I add to them’” (K10-P3) — a framework in which “value creation” becomes inseparable from professional identity. “Drawing attention through anxiety” ($f=1$) ties emotions to the attention economy: “The world is a wolf’s table” (K2-P4). “Emotional labor” ($f=10$) emerges as one of the theme’s strongest dimensions: participants openly express the need to manage specific emotions (“Although I am a psychologist, I too sometimes fall into the same mistakes...” K2-P1; “True self-confidence... simply exists” K10-P1), reflecting the internal and external regulation Hochschild described.

“Strategic sincerity” ($f=8$) reveals that the discourse of authenticity has become instrumentalized. For example: “A more livable world is not a romantic sentence” (K1-P3); “Titles are forgotten, but how you made people feel remains” (K5-P2).

Such statements show that sincerity has been turned into a value-production strategy. The “emotional expression = engagement tool” ($f=12$) code

demonstrates that emotions are directly used to produce visibility: “Naturalness, sincerity... more valuable than ever” (K8-P1); “A single “you did a good job” sentence... leaves a mark” (K6-P4).

risk in moments of crisis?” (K7-P2); “Like this post... write “CV” in the comments” (K15-P1).

Such invitations show that engagement is con-

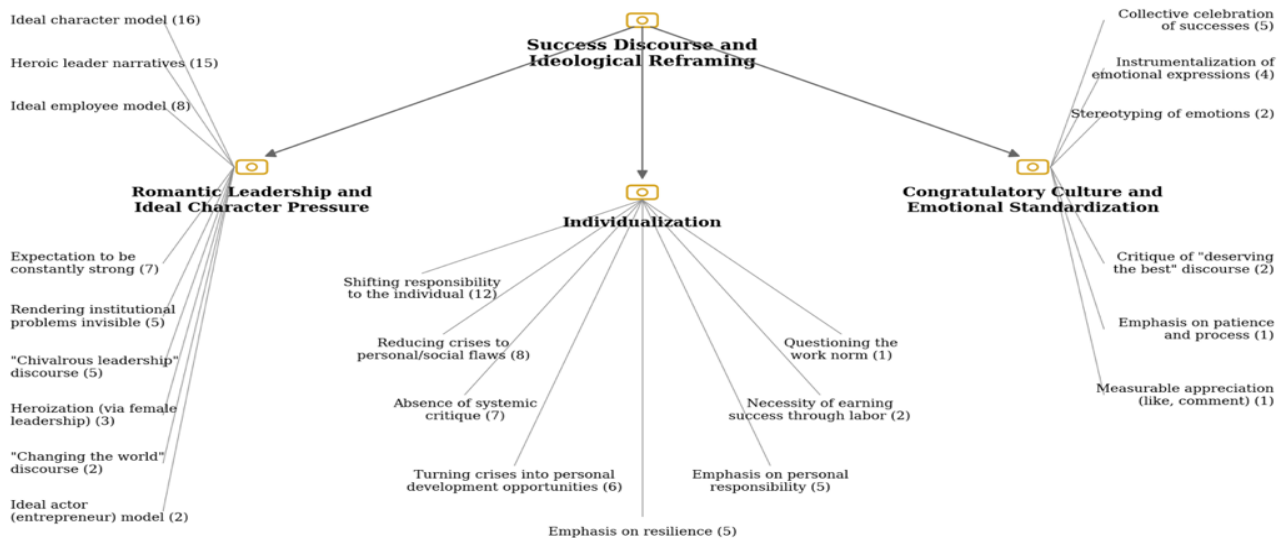


Figure 3. Sub-themes, codes, and frequencies related to the theme of Success Discourse and Ideological Reframing

In this context, emotions are not merely expressed; they are also transformed into measurable units of engagement. Finally, “transformation of emotions into social capital” (f=9) constitutes the core finding of this theme. “Sometimes success is merely about being seen” (K6-P4). This statement clearly reveals the direct link established between visibility and value.

Interaction Loops and Approval Mechanisms

This sub-theme shows how the platform’s interaction architecture shapes emotional expression. “Engagement production” (f=11) and “search for social approval” (f=11) are among the highest-frequency codes. For example: “Being appreciated makes a person grow” (K6-P4); “I am happy to be part of this journey” (K4-P2). These statements indicate that approval functions as a determining factor in both motivation and content production.

“Visibility through comments” (f=6) and “like economy” (f=3) reveal the technical dimension of interaction: “In your opinion, what is the greatest

sciously triggered. “Congratulatory rituals” (f=9), in turn, make visible the platform’s collective emotional practices: “Happy birthday, my friend” (K3-P2); “My sincere thanks to all of you” (K18-P3). These rituals show that emotions have turned into standardized and recurring communicative forms.

Normative Conformity

This sub-theme reveals that the platform determines not only what is said but also how it should be said. “Normative posting language” (f=16) is among the highest-frequency codes. “You will stand by your values...” (K4-P1); “Vindictiveness... a sign of lack of self-confidence” (K8-P3). This language encourages users to conform to particular moral and professional frames. “Positivity imperative” (f=9) marks the boundaries of the platform’s emotional tone: “There’s still hope!... But not everything is negative” (K11-P1). By contrast, “resistance to emotional norms” (f=2) occupies a more limited space: “Toxic positivity... just hug them” (K2-P2). This indicates that critical emotional expressions remain relatively marginal. The codes “prescribing correct behavior” (f=5) and “obligation to produce compliant content” (f=4) reveal the platform’s pedagogical tone: “If you made a mistake, apologize...”

(K2-P3); “People don’t buy what you do, they buy why you do it” (K3-P4). These contents function not only as experience-sharing but also as norm production.

Overall, emotions on LinkedIn operate within an economic logic: the high frequencies of “emotional expression = engagement tool” (f=12), “normative language” (f=16), and “transformation of emotions into social capital” (f=9) resonate strongly with Il-louz’s emotional capitalism — emotions function not merely as felt experiences but as managed, packaged, and circulated “communication units”.

Success Discourse and Ideological Reframing

The sub-themes, codes, and frequencies related to the theme of “Success Discourse and Ideological Reframing” are presented in Figure 3.

Individualization

The findings under this sub-theme show that, in LinkedIn posts, structural and collective problems are systematically recoded within the frame of individual responsibility, attitude, and performance. In particular, the “reducing crises to personal/social flaws” (f=8) code becomes visible as disasters, economic crises, or organizational problems are attributed to individual factors such as “ignorance”, “wrong attitude”, or “negative expectation”. For example, a participant says “Whatever befell us happened due to ignorance... and the erosion of character” (K4-P5), reducing a structural catastrophe to individual/moral failings. Similarly, statements arguing that leadership language determines employee performance (“what limits performance... may be the language used by the institution”, K6-P1) shift responsibility away from structural conditions toward individual perception management.

Relatedly, the codes “emphasis on personal responsibility” (f=5) and “shifting responsibility to the individual” (f=12) reduce complex social problems to individual behaviors: “If you made a mistake, apologize...” (K2-P3) excludes the structural context, while “As a team leader... your attitude determines whether young people become heroes or

cowards” (K3-P3) clearly reflects the individualizing tendency.

The “absence of systemic critique” (f=7) code shows that even when statements such as “If roles are not properly defined... you cannot expect performance from the team” (K3-P5) point to systemic problems, participants still pull the solution down to the individual level. Finally, the codes “turning crises into personal development opportunities” (f=6) and “emphasis on resilience” (f=5) re-frame crises as sites of “learning”, exemplified by “Face the hardest truths... but do not lose faith that you will succeed in the end” (K6-P2). This sub-theme thus addresses RQ1: structural problems are systematically transformed into narratives of individual resilience.

Success Discourse and the Emphasis on Labor

This sub-theme focuses on discursive patterns regarding how success is defined and legitimated. The findings show that success is largely constructed through individual effort, patience, and continuity. In particular, the “necessity of earning success through labor” (f=2) code presents success as the outcome of long-term, invisible, and repetitive effort. The statement “Most success is built when we choose to do the same thing over and over again... while no one is watching” (K10-P4) is a typical example of this narrative. Similarly, discourses that argue for accepting low-status jobs at the outset (“In time, as you put in the effort, it happens”, K2-P5) frame success as a linear and meritocratic process.

At the same time, this sub-theme contains examples in which work is not only celebrated but also questioned. The “questioning the work norm” (f=1) code represents an alternative discourse emphasizing that life cannot be defined through productivity alone. The statement “Life is not just about working... we must also lead by example by not working” (K1-P5) offers a limited yet meaningful counter to the hegemonic narrative of success. However, the relative scarcity of such examples shows that work and individual labor retain their central position in the general discourse.

Overall, this sub-theme points to a powerful ideological framework that defines success through

individual effort and self-discipline. Within this framework, the possibility of failure is rendered invisible, and structural inequalities are pushed to the background.

Success ≠ Work: Alternative Life Discourses

This sub-theme reveals a more limited but important counter-narrative developing against the dominant discourse of success and productivity. In particular, the “questioning the work norm” (f=1) code represents a critical position against measuring an individual’s value solely through productivity and performance. The participant’s statement “Knowing how to rest, knowing how to have fun... are these things to be underestimated?” (K1-P5) foregrounds a more holistic understanding of life against the neoliberal work ethic.

Yet this counter-discourse remains quite limited within the dataset and offers an exceptional alternative to the dominant success narrative rather than transforming it. This demonstrates that norms centered on productivity, development, and success remain hegemonic within the LinkedIn context. Accordingly, while this sub-theme renders the boundaries of the dominant discourse visible, it fails to constitute a sufficiently widespread counter-discourse capable of undermining it.

Psychological Effects and Emotional Exhaustion

The sub-themes, codes, and frequencies related to the theme of “Psychological Effects and Emotional Exhaustion” are presented in Figure 4.

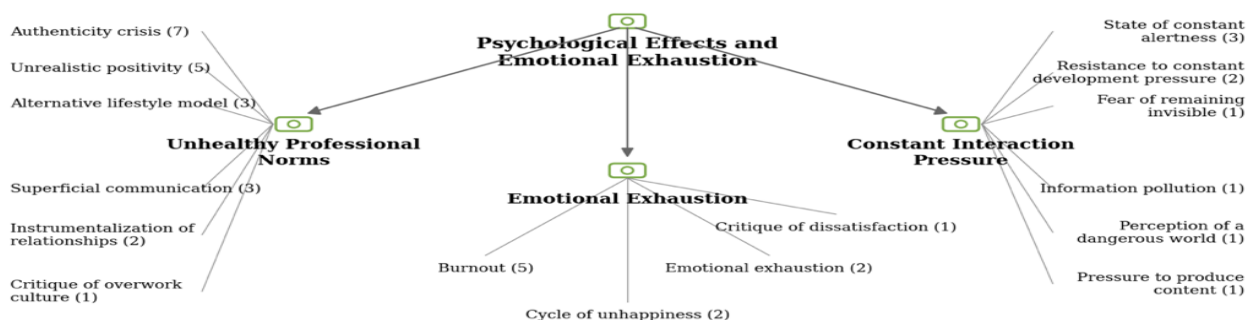


Figure 4. Sub-themes, codes, and frequencies related to the theme of Psychological Effects and Emotional Exhaustion

Constant Interaction Pressure

This sub-theme reveals the psychological pressure individuals face to remain constantly visible and competitive. The codes “state of constant alertness” (f=3) and “perception of a dangerous world” (f=1) construct the work world as a risky arena: “The world is a wolves’ table... I explain to them how they can protect themselves” (K2-P4) normalizes continuous defensive posture.

The “fear of remaining invisible” (f=1) code becomes pronounced in future-oriented narratives: “Will you be on the side that grows stronger, or the side that silently stays out of the game?” (K9-P2). The codes “pressure to produce content” (f=1) and “resistance to constant development pressure” (f=2) reveal a limited counter-discourse — “Just because it’s a new year, I don’t have to set lots of new goals for myself” (K10-P5) — but the general picture shows individuals under constant performance, development, and visibility pressure. The “information pollution” (f=1) code adds cognitive burden to this performative pressure: “The spread of false and misleading information... shows itself more powerfully during times of crisis” (K1-P4).

Emotional Exhaustion

This sub-theme focuses on the experiences of emotional exhaustion and dissatisfaction produced in individuals by constant performance and interaction pressure.

The findings are particularly marked by the high frequency of the code's "burnout" (f=5) and "emotional exhaustion" (f=2). The statement "Life is not just about working... knowing how to rest... are these things to be underestimated?" (K1-P5) develops a clear awareness of the fatigue produced by intense work culture. Similarly, discourses developed against the imperative of constant goal-setting and development ("Just because it's a new year... I don't have to set goals", K10-P5) can be read as a reflection of burnout.

On the other hand, the codes "cycle of unhappiness" (f=2) and "critique of dissatisfaction" (f=1) show that individuals experience a chronic state of dissatisfaction under the pressure of constantly aiming for something better. The statement "When you expect the best, it doesn't turn out to be the best... one becomes trapped in a cycle of unhappiness" (K2-P5) clearly reveals this situation. This discourse makes visible the psychological cost produced by the narrative of success, rendering it visible. Notably, statements intersecting with romantic leadership discourses ("those who fight to the last drop of their blood", K11-P4) also appear under the burnout code, demonstrating that the ideal of constant struggle exerts a wearing pressure on individuals. Overall, this sub-theme reveals that a powerful experience of emotional fatigue and exhaustion lies behind the performative success discourse on LinkedIn.

Unhealthy Professional Norms

This sub-theme makes visible the problematic structures generated by the forms of professional relationships and norms reproduced on the platform. The findings are particularly marked by the "authenticity crisis" (f=7) code having the highest frequency. This suggests that professional relationships often acquire a superficial, strategic, and performative character. The statement "If someone constantly reminds you of their achievements... they are probably afraid of being inadequate" (K10-P1) exposes the fragility behind the ostensible performance of self-confidence and success.

Similarly, the codes "unrealistic positivity" (f=5) and "superficial communication" (f=3) show that communication on the platform is often standardized, lacking emotional depth, and grounded in normative positivity. The statement "Toxic positivity... just hug them and sincerely ask how they are" (K2-P2) articulates this critique directly. Moreover, the "instrumentalization of relationships" (f=2) code reveals that professional relationships are shaped on the basis of competition and self-interest. The statement "Darkening a friend in order to polish oneself" (K8-P5) is a clear example of this instrumentalization.

This sub-theme also includes the codes "alternative lifestyle model" (f=3) and "critique of overwork culture" (f=1), representing the limited domains of resistance developed against dominant professional norms. Statements such as "Perhaps I should open up some space to be bored?" (K17-P1) emphasize a need for pause and reflection against the norm of constant productivity and busyness. However, these counter-discourses remain marginal within the overall picture; the platform's dominant norms are shown to be grounded in superficiality, strategic emotionality, and the continuous production of performance.

Conclusion and Discussion

This study analyzed professional discourses produced on the LinkedIn platform in Turkey through the frameworks of emotional capitalism, emotional labor, and digital self-presentation, addressing the three guiding research questions. The findings offer rich empirical insights into each question.

Turning to RQ1, the analysis shows that participants' posts consistently turn structural problems into stories of individual resilience. This pattern aligns with Hochschild's emotional labor and Gürbüzdal's (2022) symbolic denial of precarization, and extends Bryant and Aggleton's (2025) account of individualisation mechanisms; the white-collar anxiety documented by Bora et al. (2011) reads as a historical antecedent of these dynamics.

For RQ2, the platform's interaction mechanisms transform emotions into measurable communication units, illustrating Illouz's emotional capitalism. The dominance of normative posting language and strategic sincerity standardises emotional expression and bears strong affinity with Zuboff's (2019) surveillance capitalism framework.

For RQ3, romantic discourses such as "chivalrous leadership" obscure organisational failures and impose pressure toward an ideal character model, with concrete psychological costs visible in the authenticity-crisis, unrealistic-positivity, and burnout codes. Read through Goffman's metaphor of backstage leakage, even "sharing vulnerability" becomes a strategic front-stage performance, and the discourse of authenticity paradoxically becomes the most sophisticated form of impression management. The dual function of romantic leadership discourse — simultaneously masking organisational failures and feeding individual burnout — is the most visible manifestation of the platform's ideological dimension.

Theoretically, this study demonstrates how Hochschild's emotional labor and Illouz's emotional capitalism articulate and mutually reinforce each other in the digital professional context, while Goffman's complementary dramaturgical framework reveals the concrete ways these dynamics materialize on LinkedIn. Hochschild explains how emotional regulation is performed for an audience, Illouz why it is structurally rewarded, and Goffman supplies the language of staging; the three are complementary but mutually constraining. Counter-patterns — the "questioning the work norm", "alternative lifestyle model", and "resistance to development pressure" codes — mark the limits rather than the absence of dissent, connecting to the emotional-fatigue debate. The study contributes (1) empirically, a context-specific account of emotional capitalism in Turkish LinkedIn discourse; (2) theoretically, a layered scaffold combining Illouz, Hochschild, and Goffman; and (3) methodologically, the pairing of content-analytic coding with critical discourse-analytic interpretation.

The study has certain limitations: the sample's focus on high-interaction profiles means the findings may not represent passive or low-visibility users, and the cross-sectional design cannot track discursive transformation over time. Future research could longitudinally examine the effects of algorithmic updates, comparatively study Turkey alongside other contexts, and investigate premium versus free-account differences as a test of whether emotional capitalism intensifies across paid visibility tiers. AI-assisted content production warrants dedicated empirical study and is flagged here as a future agenda rather than a finding of this analysis.

Declarations

Funding: The author received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflicts of interest related to this study.

Ethical Approval: This study is of a nature that does not require ethics committee approval, and the data used were obtained through a review of the literature and other published sources. It is hereby declared that scientific and ethical principles were observed throughout the preparation of this study and that all works utilized have been indicated in the references.

AI Disclosure: *No artificial intelligence (AI)-based tools or applications were used in the preparation of this study. The entire content of the study was produced by the author(s) in accordance with scientific research methods and academic ethical principles.*

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