THOUGHT LEADERSHIP IN HYDROPOWER & DAMS: A CASE STUDY

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1. INTRODUCTION

The presented paper is aimed to the analysis of a case study in the hydroelectric sector, evaluating the achievement of “Thought Leadership”.

2. WHAT IS “THOUGHT LEADERSHIP”?

To fully understand the topic at hand, it is essential to explore the origins and academic definition of Thought Leadership. The term is believed to have been coined in marketing about thirty years ago (Young, 2013). Over time, it has become widely used in the business world, often sounding like corporate jargon; however, its primary intent is to serve a greater purpose. Thought Leadership fosters trust and authority among industry players (Taylor, 2016).

Young (2013) described Thought Leadership as a business tool with distinct characteristics, designed to create ideas that help businesses succeed. He emphasized that it aims to generate innovative ideas to provide both direct and indirect business advantages. In his book *Thought Leadership: Prompting Businesses to Think and Learn* (2013), Laurie Young compiled definitions from experts across various industries, including:

- “A novel point of view that brings a new perspective and can change someone’s views on an issue” – Katy Hartley, Director, Centre for Health and Well-Being, Phillips.

- “Ideas that educate clients and prospects about important business issues and help them solve those issues, without selling” – The ITSMA.

- “The action of introducing and promoting convention-breaking ideas that cause people to rethink marketplace or societal issues” – Van Halderen & Kettler-Paddock (2011).

- “The process of formulating big ideas and insightful viewpoints on the issues buyers face, capturing those ideas in multiple content vehicles, and sharing them with prospects and customers to enlighten them, engage them in dialogue, and position your company as a trusted resource” – Forrester Research (2011).

Other definitions include:

- M. Brenner (2015), who defined Thought Leadership as part of content marketing aimed at addressing the deepest questions of a targeted audience, or marketing through content on specialized topics to answer pressing audience concerns.

- Tim Prizeman, in a guest blog, explained Thought Leadership as an activity that positions a person or business as a leading expert in a particular area.

- Brosseau & Kawasaki (2013) defined it as the ability to inspire others to new ideas and transform industries and society. Brosseau & Guy (2013) further noted that Thought Leaders create platforms with guidelines or best practices to shape success, rather than simply urging a new way of thinking.

- Van Halderen et al. (2013), citing Crainer & Dearlove (2013), defined Thought Leadership as a strategy that positions a brand as intellectually superior to its competitors, while Celli & Miller (2015) referred to it as intellectual engagement.

- Heuvel & Badings viewed it as the successful promotion of an organization's unique insights, leading to important customer engagement, while Andrea Learned (2016) argued that it helps build public trust.

Van Halderen et al. (2013) summarized Thought Leadership as the process of promoting thought-provoking viewpoints that provide new insights and solutions, ultimately changing the way customers think about key issues. From these definitions, it is clear that intellect, innovation, trust, and influence are essential elements of Thought Leadership.

Therefore, Thought Leadership can be personally defined as the introduction and promotion of influential, novel ideas that are recognized, implemented, and trusted by industry players and society to address pressing concerns (Van Halderen, 2013), without the intention of direct marketing (ITSMA, 2015). It establishes the company or individual as a trusted reference (Ernst, Cooperstein & Dernoga, 2011). Alternatively, it can be seen as an approach that helps companies or individuals distinguish themselves in their field by creating insightful content that influences decisions and impacts the industry (Brenner, 2015), without aiming to sell (ITSMA, 2015).

It is important to note that Thought Leadership involves breaking away from conventional societal practices in a positive way, aiming to solve societal issues and improve industry practices without directly marketing the individual or company. While the various definitions provide an understanding of Thought Leadership, they do not delve into its specific features. The next section will address these aspects to further clarify the term.

3. CHARACTERISTICS OF THOUGHT LEADERSHIP

The previous section explored the origins and definitions of Thought Leadership from various authors. However, these definitions alone do not provide a clear understanding of its key features. In this section, we will examine the main characteristics associated with Thought Leadership to enhance the comprehension of this concept.

Firstly, Thought Leadership differs from traditional leadership in that it lacks a hierarchical structure, where no one manages anyone else. Instead, it revolves around the introduction of new ideas (McCrimmon, 2005) to address industrial or societal challenges, without relying on instinctive influence over people. Anyone within an organization or industry, whether in a managerial or non-managerial role, can be a Thought Leader, provided they possess the necessary intellect and expertise. For instance, McCrimmon (2005) pointed out that when Christian Barnard demonstrated the viability of heart transplant surgery, many doctors adopted the procedure based on the evidence he presented, not because of his personal influence.

Secondly, Thought Leadership is distinct from traditional marketing and sales. Rather than selling to prospects, it focuses on building a following for a novel idea in order to establish trust and influence (Brosseau & Kawasaki, 2013). It's also important to note that Thought Leadership is not the same as content marketing.

Additionally, it is crucial to recognize that the term *Thought Leadership* does not imply that a company is generating large profits. Instead, it serves as a catalyst for new thinking that benefits stakeholders, contributes to long-term gains, and has the potential to transform the world (Van Halderen et al., 2013).

Finally, Thought Leadership is not the same as innovation (McCrimmon, 2005). There is a significant difference between the two concepts (Van Halderen & Kettler-Paddock, 2011). As Van Halderen & Kettler-Paddock (2011) explained, innovation involves turning a new idea into a product or service with the intent to sell it to customers. In contrast, Thought Leadership connects a vision to a societal issue, becoming a market influence and the owner of a novel point of view. Similarly, Van Halderen et al. (2013) emphasized that innovation can involve adding value to an existing product (e.g., a new flavor of toothpaste), which does not require a novel point of view beyond the product or service itself. Thought Leadership, on the other hand, involves creating a new concept within a particular area of expertise that goes beyond just the product or service. Moreover, Van Halderen et al. (2013) noted that innovative products alone are no longer sufficient, as customers increasingly seek new insights that address ongoing societal challenges, such as those related to the economy, society, and the environment. Thought Leadership, therefore, involves sharing a company's novel perspectives with stakeholders and industry players to shift customer thinking and build trust, unlike innovation, which companies typically keep to themselves to maintain a business advantage and would not share with competitors.

4. THOUGHT LEADERSHIP IN HYDROPOWER & DAMS, THE CASE STUDY OF A LINKEDIN USER: ALESSANDRO CALVI

To establish Thought Leadership on LinkedIn, a quantitative approach was implemented, focusing on two primary performance indicators: the total annual impressions of published posts and the top percentage of the Social Selling Index (SSI). This strategy aimed to evaluate and enhance visibility, engagement, and influence across two key dimensions: the hydropower production sector and the individual's own professional network. By monitoring the total impressions of posts over the course of the year, the strategy sought to maximize exposure and generate high levels of interaction with content related to hydropower industry topics. Additionally, attention was given to the Social Selling Index, which reflects an individual's ability to leverage their network, build relationships, and establish credibility. Being ranked in the top percentage of SSI, both within the hydropower industry and across the individual's broader LinkedIn network, provided a clear benchmark for success, emphasizing the individual's prominence and authority in the field. By combining these two quantitative metrics, the approach aimed not only to measure success but also to continuously optimize content and strategies to solidify the individual's role as a trusted thought leader, fostering professional growth and industry recognition.

The numerical references related to Thought Leadership, both in terms of total annual post impressions and the Top% of Social Selling Index (SSI), are displayed in Table 1 and Table 2. These tables provide clear benchmarks for understanding the levels of success achieved on LinkedIn. Table 1 outlines the progression of success based on the number of impressions a user's posts receive annually, from minimal reach to elite visibility. Table 2 focuses on the Social Selling Index, indicating how individuals can rank within the top percentage based on their engagement, network activity, and content influence. Together, these tables offer a comprehensive view of how both visibility and social selling activity contribute to establishing and measuring Thought Leadership on LinkedIn.

The growth period towards achieving significant Thought Leadership values began in September 2023 until December 2024. The key results of this period are presented in Figure 1 and subsequent Figures, which highlight the progress made in terms of post impressions and Social Selling Index performance, both within the hydropower sector and across the individual's network. These metrics provide a clear view of the journey towards establishing a strong and influential presence on LinkedIn.

Annual Impressions	Success Level	Description
100	**Very Low Success**	Minimal visibility with little to no engagement. Hardly any content reach.
1,000	**Low Success**	Very limited reach. Content is reaching only a small audience with low interaction.
10,000	**Moderate Success**	Some visibility, but still limited engagement. Growing, but not widely known.
50,000	**Good Success**	Solid reach and engagement. Content resonates with a larger audience.
100,000	**High Success**	Strong presence with frequent engagement. Content reaching a broad network.
200,000	**Very High Success**	Significant influence with consistent high engagement.
350,000	**Outstanding Success**	Well-established presence with a broad and engaged audience.
500,000	**Top-tier Success**	Major influence with top-level visibility and high engagement.
1,000,000	**Elite Success**	Very high visibility and reach, major influence in your field or industry.
1,000,000+	**Industry Leader**	Exceptional success, with thought leadership and maximum audience engagement.

Top% of SSI	Success Level	Description
Top 90%	Low Success	Below average SSI performance. Limited visibility and engagement within the industry.
Top 80%	Moderate Success	Moderate engagement and visibility. Still growing within the sector with some recognition.
Top 70%	Good Success	Solid engagement and network growth. Beginning to establish a visible presence in the hydroelectric sector.
Top 60%	Above Average Success	Increasing visibility. The user is becoming more recognized within the industry, with a growing influence.
Top 50%	Decent Success	Strong presence in the sector. Good engagement with peers and stakeholders in the hydroelectric field.
Top 40%	Strong Success	Well-established network and visibility. The user is regularly engaged in sector-specific conversations.
Top 30%	High Success	Excellent influence and visibility in the hydroelectric sector, with substantial engagement and interactions.
Top 20%	Very High Success	High-level visibility and significant recognition. Frequently engaging with key players in the industry.
Top 10%	Outstanding Success	Exceptional influence. Strong industry recognition and regular thought leadership presence.
Top 5%	Elite Success	Highly influential in the hydroelectric sector, with top-tier engagement and a prominent voice in industry discussions.
Top 2%	Industry Leader	Top-tier status, with major influence and authority in the hydroelectric sector. A recognized thought leader.
Top 1%	Global Authority	The highest level of success. Exceptional visibility, thought leadership, and authority in the global hydroelectric industry.

Table 1 and Table 2: LinkedIn Thought Leadership Benchmarks

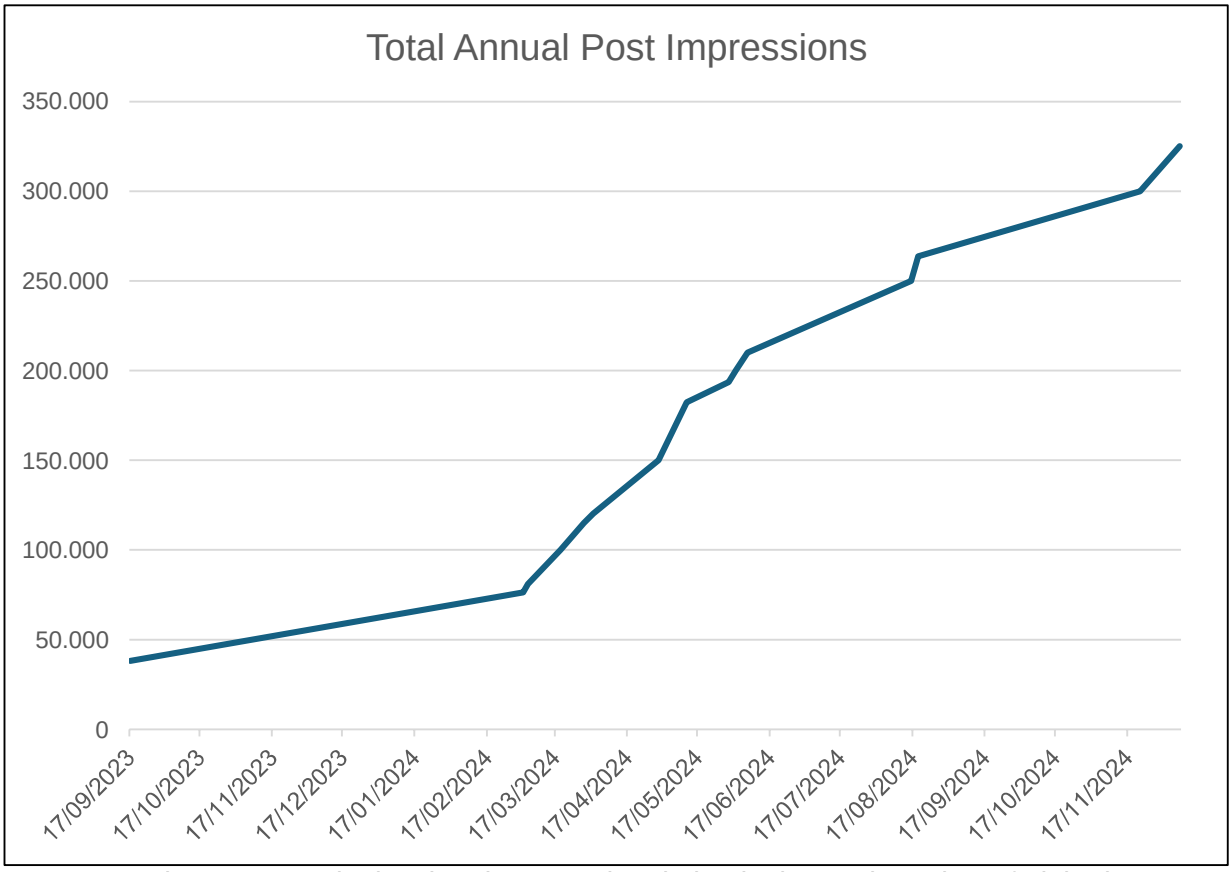

Figure 1: Graph showing the annual variation in the total number of LinkedIn post impressions, highlighting the growth in visibility over the selected period

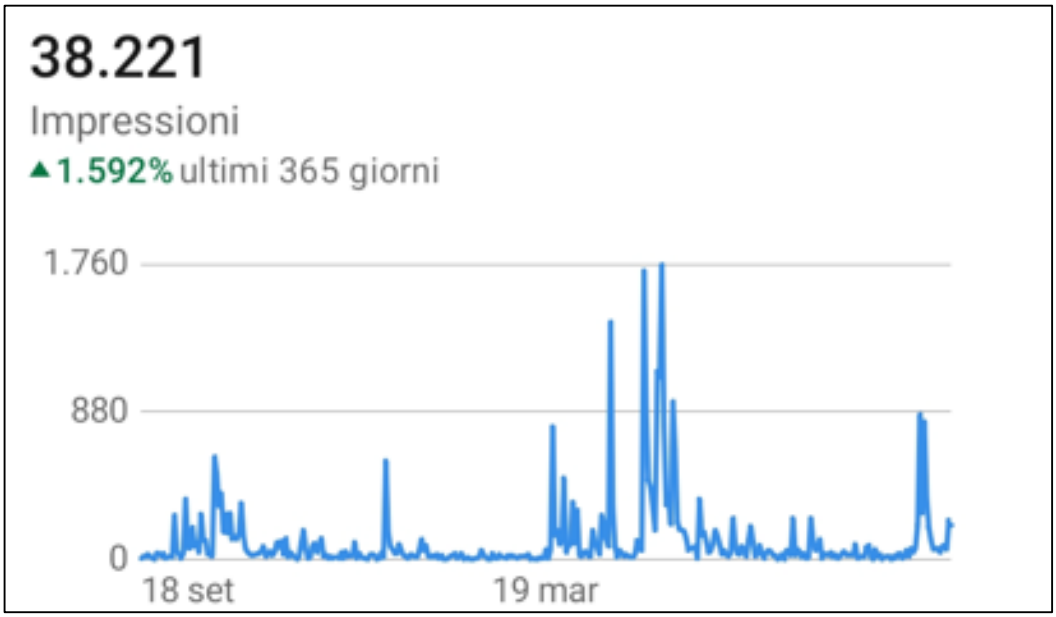

Figure 2: The graph illustrates the trend in total annual LinkedIn post impressions, initial monitoring date (17/09/2023)

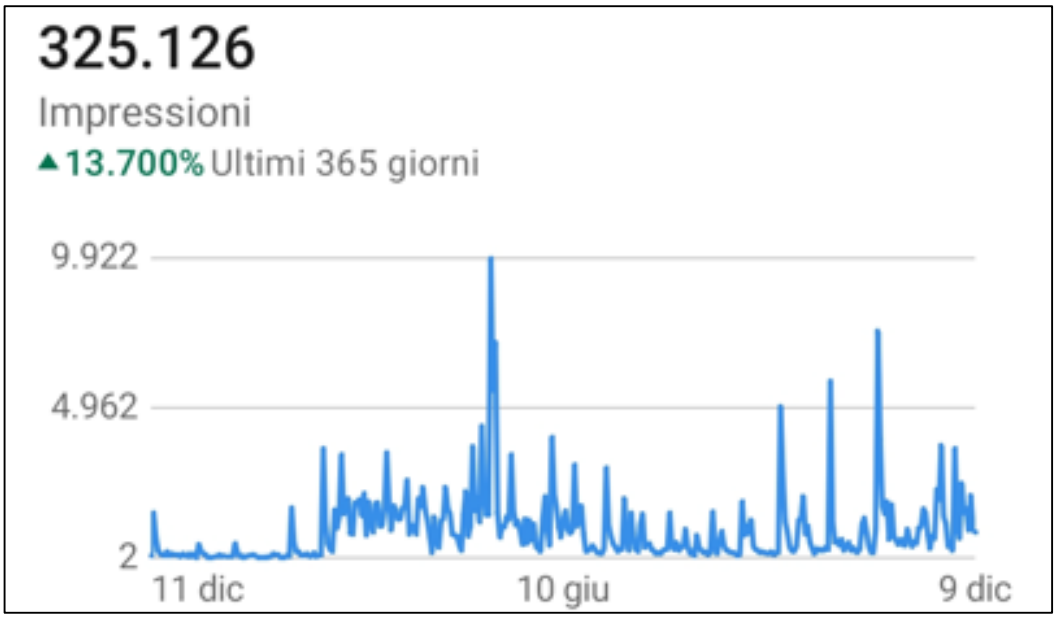

Figure 3: The graph illustrates the trend in total annual LinkedIn post impressions, end monitoring date (09/12/2024)

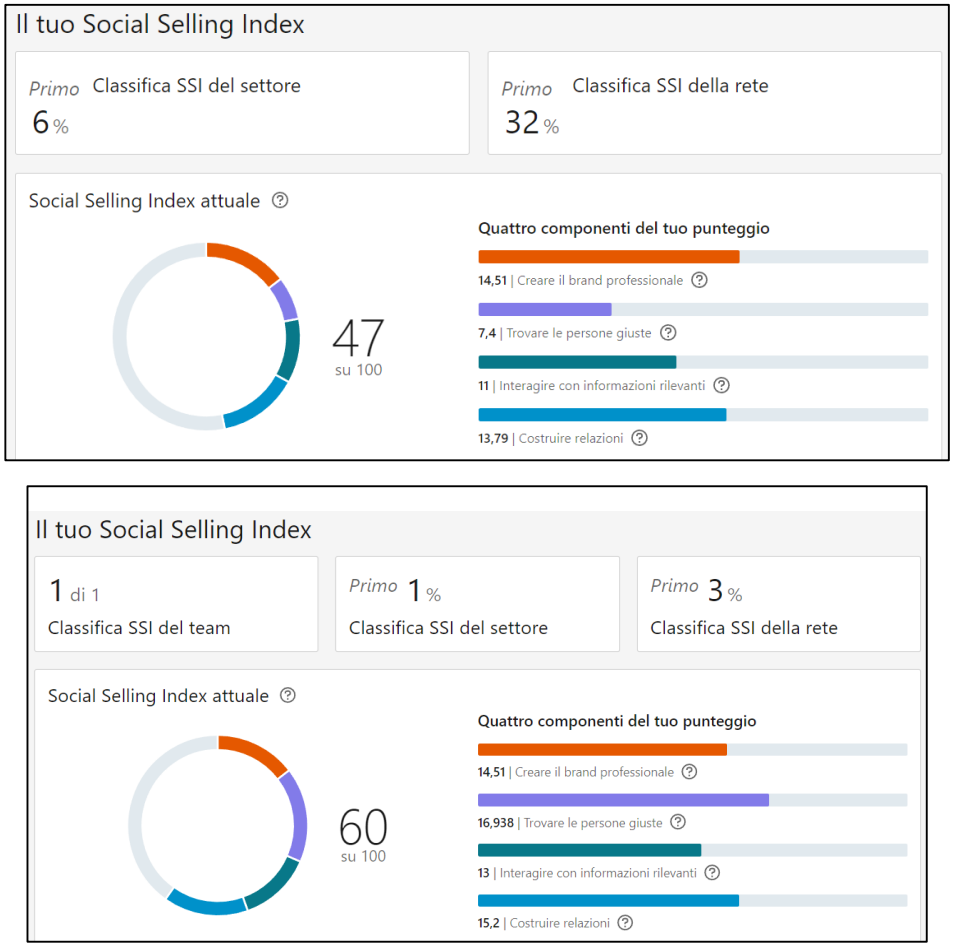

Figure 4, 5 : Top % Social Selling Index, Hydropower sector and Network (15/03/2024, 14/05/2024)

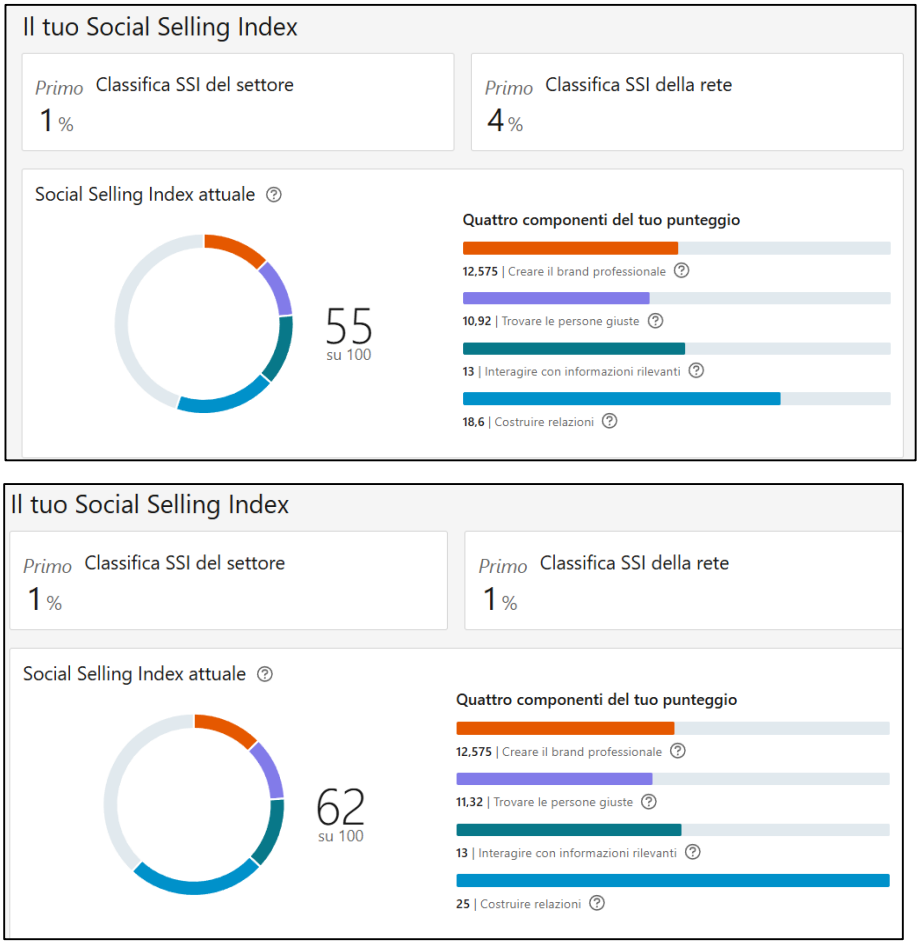

Figure 6, 7 : Top % Social Selling Index, Hydropower sector and Network (22/11/2024, 11/12/2024)

5. THOUGHT LEADERSHIP ON LINKEDIN, WHICH REFERENCE TO USE?

The relevance of Thought Leadership on LinkedIn is more accurately measured through the Social Selling Index (SSI) rather than the total annual post impressions, especially when it comes to establishing oneself as a leader in a specific sector. While post impressions provide insight into visibility and engagement, they do not fully capture the depth of influence and credibility within a particular industry. The SSI, on the other hand, reflects an individual's ability to build and nurture relationships, establish trust, and demonstrate expertise within a professional network, all of which are crucial for thought leadership. In the context of the hydropower sector, for example, the SSI measures how effectively a professional engages with industry-specific content, interacts with relevant stakeholders, and positions themselves as a trusted authority. This makes SSI a more targeted and reliable indicator of Thought Leadership, as it demonstrates not just visibility, but meaningful, industry-focused connections and influence.

6. KEY LINKEDIN POSTS HIGHLIGHTING THOUGHT LEADERSHIP IN THE HYDROPOWER AND DAM INDUSTRY OF THE PRESENT CASE STUDY

The topics discussed on LinkedIn in relation to this case study have covered a variety of aspects within the hydropower and dam industry. The main themes include showcasing hydroelectric plants and dams worldwide through images and descriptive content, highlighting the engineering behind dams and hydro turbines, as well as focusing on project management and related aspects in the hydropower field. These discussions aimed to provide a comprehensive view of the industry, combining technical expertise with practical insights into the challenges and innovations shaping the sector.

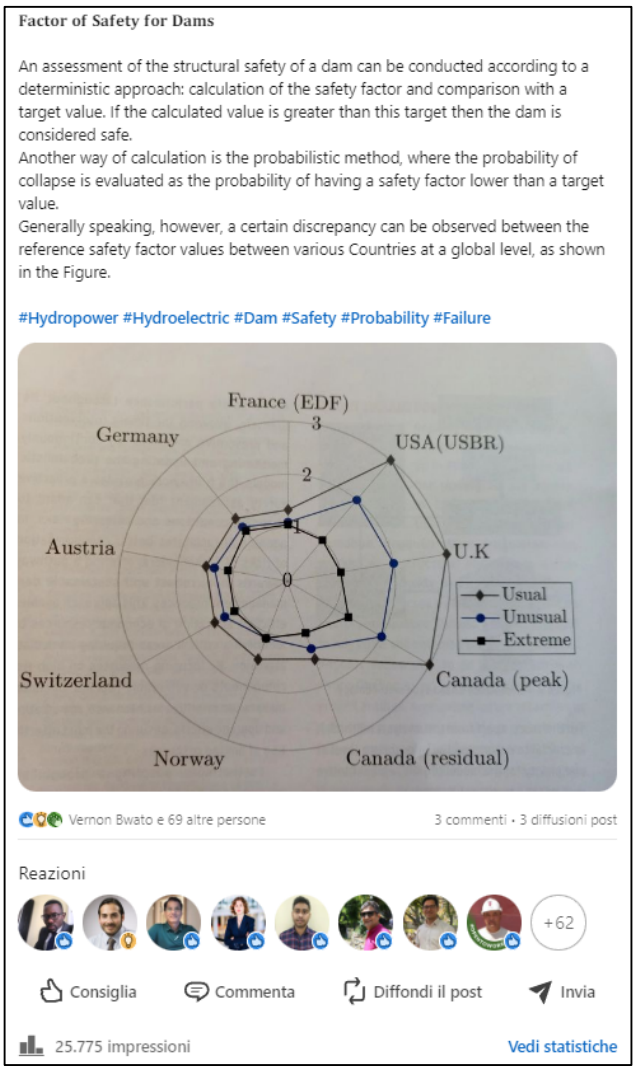

Figure 8: LinkedIn post with over 25,000 impressions, discussing the Safety Factor adopted by leading countries worldwide in dam engineering and hydropower projects.

This section highlights several key posts that have garnered the most media attention. Among them, the post with the highest engagement, exceeding 25,000 impressions, focused on the Safety Factor adopted by leading countries worldwide. This post sparked significant interest and discussion within the hydropower industry. As shown in Figure 8, it resonated strongly with the audience, reflecting the importance of safety standards in dam engineering and contributing to the overall discourse on best practices in the sector.

Figure 9: LinkedIn post featuring an ancient article about a hydropower plant in Italy, highlighting early engineering techniques and the historical context of hydropower development in Europe

Figure 9 further elaborates (with reference to a specific hydropower plant in Italy) on the topic of dam engineering and hydropower construction, particularly in the context of early 20th-century projects in Europe. During this era, large-scale hydropower constructions employed pioneering techniques, especially in the initial scouting phase for evaluating water resources. These methods were groundbreaking, as they involved various

disciplines working together through each stage of the project. At the time, the lack of modern computational tools meant that engineers had to rely heavily on their observational skills and technical expertise to assess and solve problems before formalizing designs and calculations. The construction phase itself was also highly critical and unique, as many of these monumental projects were built with local labor, often working with unfamiliar challenges for the first time. The combination of pioneering engineering, practical problem-solving, and local craftsmanship laid the foundation for the impressive hydropower infrastructure we see today, despite the absence of the advanced technologies available now.

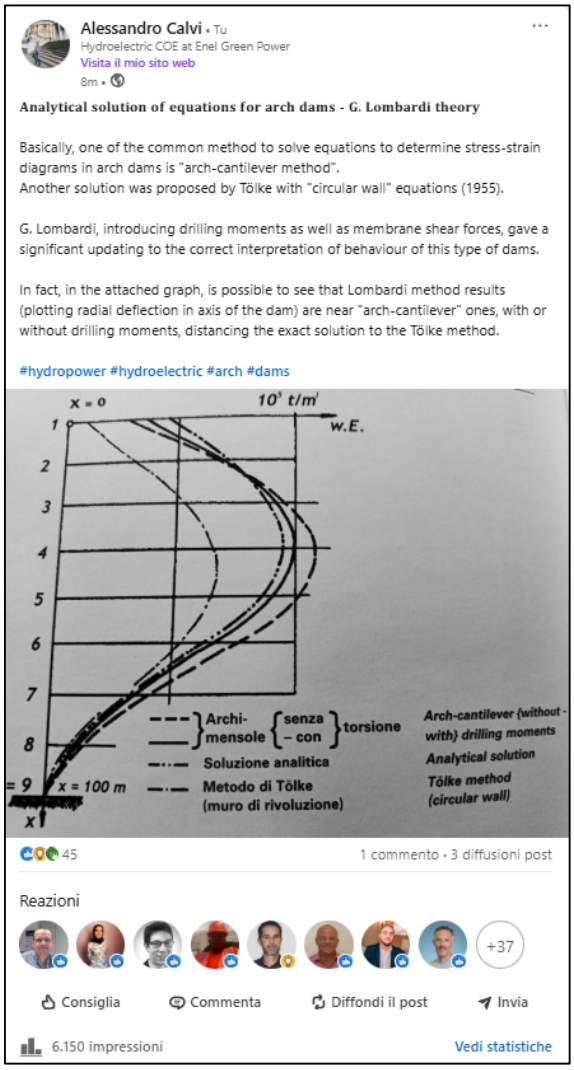

Figure 10: LinkedIn post discussing analytical solutions for stress-strain equations in arch dams, featuring G. Lombardi's contributions to the field, including the introduction of drilling moments and membrane shear forces, and comparing the results with the "arch-cantilever" and Tölke methods.

Figure 10 presents a post discussing analytical solutions for solving equations related to the stress-strain behavior of arch dams, focusing on the work of G. Lombardi and his contributions to the field. One common method for determining stress-strain diagrams in arch dams is the "arch-cantilever method," which simplifies the complex forces acting on the structure into manageable calculations. However, in 1955, Tölke proposed a more refined approach using "circular wall" equations to better capture the behavior of arch dams under load. G. Lombardi, however, introduced a significant update to this analysis by incorporating drilling moments and membrane shear forces into the equation. These additions improved the understanding of the dam's behavior, particularly in terms of how forces are distributed across its structure. Lombardi's method, as shown in the attached graph, provides results that closely match the traditional "arch-cantilever" method, even when drilling moments are considered. This shows that while the Tölke method provides a more exact solution, Lombardi's approach offers a highly practical and effective alternative that aligns closely with traditional methods, while accounting for the complexities introduced by modern analytical techniques. This post emphasizes how evolving theories in dam engineering continue to shape the understanding and construction of arch dams, blending traditional methods with innovative solutions for enhanced safety and performance.

7. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the achievement of Thought Leadership in the hydropower and dam sector has been clearly demonstrated through the impressive results achieved on LinkedIn. Over the course of the campaign, a total of 300,000+ annual impressions were generated, showcasing a significant reach and engagement with the target audience. Additionally, reaching the Top 1% of the Social Selling Index further emphasizes the strong professional influence and authority established within the industry. With approximately 250 posts published, each contributing to valuable discussions, the content has successfully captured the attention of the technical community on LinkedIn, positioning the individual (Alessandro Calvi) as a leading voice in the hydropower and dam engineering fields. These milestones reflect not only visibility but also meaningful impact, solidifying the individual's reputation as a trusted expert in the sector.

8. MAIN REFERENCES

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