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## Being unemployed in the age of social media

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# **Being Unemployed in the Age of Social Media**

## *Abstract:*

This paper reports the results of a stratified sample survey of 2,414 unemployed individuals in Germany regarding Internet usage, accompanied by a small sample of qualitative interviews and time-use diaries. The Internet serves as a structuring device for individuals during unemployment and helps such individuals maintain social contacts; it fills time with activities for the unemployed that are meaningful from a normative perspective and are perceived subjectively as a good use of time. The Internet enables degrees of interaction that would otherwise not be possible because of financial difficulties. The research suggests that expanded interaction on the Internet for the unemployed would likely be beneficial.

## *Keywords:*

Unemployment; Internet Usage; Internet Skills, Internet Motivations; User Typologies; Participation

# Being Unemployed in the Age of Social Media

## 1 Introduction

In this article we seek to explore how the Internet helps structure time, maintain contacts, and perform job-seeking tasks during periods of unemployment. In recent years, we have witnessed the media environment move toward more participatory forms of communication. These new forms of social media may have ramifications not only for how we perceive periods of unemployment but also for how the unemployed use the Internet—affecting how organizations and policymakers design new media for inclusion.

Being unemployed means more than being out of a job and suffering from a loss of immediate income. Unemployment frequently also entails a loss of social structure and societal participation. The consequences of unemployment may be detrimental to an individual's chances of future reintegration into the workforce. To find new employment, individuals must rely on their social capital and on a confident demeanor and self-presentation (Bentolila, Michelacci & Suarez, 2010; Freitag & Kirchner, 2011).

In 2012, three million people were unemployed in Germany, some long-term and some short-term. There are strong regional differences in these numbers and these differences were addressed through labor market reforms undertaken between 2003 and 2005 (Rhine & Zimmermann, 2013). Likely as a consequence of those reforms, Germany was mostly successful in keeping the unemployment rate under control through the recession compared with other European countries. However, many uncertain working conditions have begun to characterize life for the unemployed, with part-time work, fixed-term contracts, marginal employment and temporary work increasing steadily (Körner et al., 2012). Therefore, although many people are no longer statistically unemployed, they nonetheless can expect to fall back into unemployment from time to time.

Thus, new solutions must be found to overcome unemployment and to give the unemployed access to new jobs. One possible solution might be the support that unemployed people can find in the Internet. New media may enable the unemployed to remain integrated or to reintegrate into society, in addition to offering more and deeper information about the job market. At the same time, accompanying such new media is the challenge of using the time spent on the Internet with purpose, which underlines the importance of extending the previous unemployment literature with regard to the critical aspect of Internet usage.

To date, there is little research on unemployed persons and their Internet usage behavior, skill and/or literacy. To close this gap, this paper seeks *first* to investigate the social media usage of the unemployed. We use a multi-method approach that combines qualitative elements (interviews and Internet diaries) with quantitative elements (a questionnaire-based survey of 2,414 persons) to investigate how social media are used during the different phases of unemployment. *Second*, this study will investigate differences in terms of Internet access, skills and literacy. *Third*, we examine different usage types of the unemployed with the objective of gaining a better understanding of the potential and importance of social media usage during unemployment.

## 2 Literature: The Unemployment Experience and the Internet

Studies show that unemployment is associated with unhappiness, anxiety, depression, stress-related physical symptoms, lower self-esteem and a lower level of satisfaction with life (e.g., Gallie et al., 2003; McKee-Ryan et al., 2005; Wanberg, 2012); unemployment, particularly long-term unemployment, also has a negative impact on psychological and physical well-being (Paul & Moser; Wanberg, 2013). Research has shown links between unemployment and mental health problems, including depression, somatization, anxiety, and substance abuse (e.g., Johnson & Jackson, 2012; Sadeh & Karniol, 2012). Unemployment can generate high levels of familial conflict and frequently leads to the break-up of relationships (Gallie, Pau-

gam & Jacobs, 2003; Golubovic, Golubovic, Marinkovic, Milosevic & Milasinovic, 2012). In addition, the risk of social exclusion increases with the length of unemployment (Golubovic et al., 2012).

In practical terms, periods of unemployment challenge those hit by it to structure their spare time purposefully (Wanberg et al., 1997). Fryer and Payne (1984) propose that unemployment creates a psychological void that people attempt to fill by finding different outlets for self-expression and by attempting to cope in a variety of ways. If unemployed individuals keep busy, hold their routines, and have a sense of purpose, they might approximate a working situation that provides them with benefits linked to greater psychological well-being (Van Hoye & Lootens, 2013).

Today, in the age of social media, we have different tools at hand that help us spend our time. In this context, social media may prove to be a double-edged sword for the unemployed. Previous research shows both positive and negative consequences of being online. On one hand, an excessive amount of time spent online and the compulsive use of new media may result in decreased social interaction with 'real' people and increased loneliness and depression (Treuer et al., 2001; Whang et al., 2003; Yellowlees and Marks, 2007). The psychological strains of unemployment discussed above (e.g., anxiety, depression, low self-esteem) are also the most important risk factors for Internet addiction (Chou, 2001; Davis, Flett & Besser, 2002; Koronczai et al., 2013; Treuer, Fabian, & Furedi, 2001). Social activities such as messaging, social information seeking and online gaming are considered risk factors for excessive Internet use (Griffiths, Kuss, et al., 2014). All in all, excessive amounts of time spent online can significantly impair normal everyday functioning (Douglas et. al., 2008).

On the other hand, social media may be used not only for purposes of enjoyment when bored or lonely but also for self-gratification, to gain knowledge (Mafé and Blas, 2006) and to engage in organizational processes. The characteristics of online communication, such as ano-

nymity, community-based congeniality and the uncoupling of real and virtual behavioral patterns, facilitate interaction in general (Barak, 2007; Ben-Ze'ev, 2003; Davis et al., 2002; Howard, Rainie, and Jones, 2001). The (perceived) safe environment helps users build new contacts, which is of great assistance—particularly to socially inhibited people—and provides social support (Amichai-Hamburger & Furnham, 2007). The spectrum of Internet applications enhances social affiliation (Contarello & Sarrica, 2007; Wellman, 2001), which increases well-being (cf. Amichai-Hamburger, 2007; Caplan and Turner, 2007; Green-Hamann et al., 2011).

In the final analysis, the effect of social media at the individual level may come down to an individual's particular usage. Material access, digital skills, and different types of literacy are factors that influence behavior and participation inequalities (Brandtzæg et al., 2011), which leads to different types of instrumental, recreational, or ritual activities (Mafé and Blas, 2006; see also Livingstone and Helsper, 2007; van Dijk, 2006). Instrumental use involves activities related to obtaining information, goods and services (Chen et al., 2002), whereas recreational use is geared toward enjoyment and involves websites high in entertainment value and features of play (Douglas et al., 2008). Social activities, such as interacting and socializing through email or social networks, are classified as recreational use (Chen et al., 2002) or are placed in a separate category, such as social use. The attraction of those activities ranges from socializing, entertainment, information-seeking, self-status seeking (Park et al., 2009) to documenting lives, commenting, catharsis, or musing (Nardi and Schiano, 2004).

To summarize, social media usage is diverse, which is expected to be true for the unemployed as well. In this study, we are interested in how social media are used during unemployment, which motives drive such social media usage, and whether such usage determines the development of certain sets of skills; as a result, our analysis leads to different usage types.

### 3 Methodology

By combining a quantitative survey with qualitative interviews and usage diaries, we sought to cut across the qualitative-quantitative divide and gain an in-depth view of user types and usage patterns in situations of unemployment. The data for the quantitative analysis were collected from February to April 2012 by means of 2,414 telephone interviews with unemployed persons, including both Internet-users and non-users. Furthermore, two qualitative approaches were used to collect additional data: qualitative interviews with 28 unemployed individuals in four different cities in Germany provided subjective insights and rich explanations of their situations. In an additional step, we asked 11 of our unemployed informants to take part in a 14-day diary study to gather additional information about the context of their Internet usage.

Potential participants were drawn from the pool of unemployed persons registered with the German Federal Labour Market Authority by disproportional strata. The stratification used three characteristics: age (up to 25 years, 26-50 years, over 50 years), gender (male, female) and urbanity (urban areas, rural areas). Table 1 summarizes the sample characteristics. This sampling strategy enables comparisons between the categories of each characteristic. To ensure a maximum level of data security, an external CATI studio conducted the telephone interviews; data were strictly anonymized for further analysis.

TABLE 1: *Sample Profile* ABOUT HERE

The quantitative questionnaire included questions that differentiated among users and non-users and among individuals' Internet experiences. We collected eight items on the frequency of different forms of usage, as suggested by Chung (2013), and 13 Likert-scale items regarding the motivations of usage. Different levels of skills and literacy were addressed by 15 items following Correa (2010), Deursen and Van Dijk (2010), and Hargittai and Hsieh (2012). Statements were answered on a scale from 1 (completely agree) to 5 (completely disagree).

Items of usage motivation and skills were reduced to factors by applying exploratory factor analysis and a principal component analysis with Varimax rotation. Out of the sample, we explored user types by means of a hierarchical cluster analysis based on usage frequency, the applications used and experience on the Internet. We differentiated the applications used by the degree of active participation with four usage modes: the first denotes more traditionally passive Internet activities ('Information Search' and 'Transactions'); the second more traditionally active forms of Internet activities ('Messaging' and 'Gaming'); the third contains more social media-like, albeit passive, uses ('Reading Posts' and 'Consuming Multimedia'); and the fourth consists of more active forms of social media usage ('Writing Posts' and 'Sharing Content').

As a result, we identified four types of Internet users. A discriminant analysis, testing the quality of the clustering solution, confirmed the appropriateness of the selected variables, with 84.2% of the originally grouped cases correctly classified. As a last point, we compared the means of these factors among user types based on Kruskal Wallis Test statistics.

The semi-structured qualitative interviews included questions relating to general social media use, skills, access, literacy and social media use targeted specifically at job searches. The two-week paper-pencil diary covered several parts: a daily documentation of Internet usage dependent on the time of day, daily tasks with reporting, and questions about the context of usage in general. Participants were explicitly asked to use photos, sketches or pictures to explain their particular answers, feelings, ideas and comments.

Both interviews and diaries were coded based on the constant comparative method, and were assisted by the qualitative data analysis software ATLAS.ti. By identifying similarities and dissimilarities, we developed categories that were enhanced further by dimensions following the first inspection of the material, and that served as the basis for a (quantitative) counting of the daily routines.



## 4 Results

### 4.1 Descriptive Statistics

#### 4.1.1 Usage

In our survey, approximately 79% of the unemployed (n = 1917) used the Internet on a regular basis, approximately 9% (n = 216) had tried out the Internet at one time or another during the last several years but did not use it on a regular basis (making them essentially non-users), and 12% (n = 281) had never used the Internet. Focusing on those unemployed persons who were using the Internet on a regular basis, we examined the frequency of such usage by employing several scenarios.

TABLE 2: *Frequency of Usage of Different Internet Applications* ABOUT HERE

Platforms providing a potential benefit with respect to being unemployed were used the most, i.e., platforms, on the one hand, that offered information to help search for potential job offerings, for information relevant to the application process, and for organizational issues (for which the transactions category is also valuable), and platforms that offered messaging for communicating with potential employers and case workers at an employment agency, on the other.

#### 4.1.2 Motivations of Usage

The usage of Internet applications was typically governed by four overarching motivations, which can be expressed by the following four factors derived from the factor analysis: (1) “Communication & Interaction”, (2) “Entertainment”, (3) “Job Search” and (4) “Information & Help” (depicted below).

TABLE 3: *Motivations of Usage—Final Exploratory Factor Analysis Solution* ABOUT HERE

(1) Communication & Interaction involves using the Internet to both meet new people and maintain ties with existing contacts, and has a rather low overall average (M = 3.357) in our

examination. Respondents were more likely to use Internet applications to maintain existing contacts than make new contacts. Overall, using Internet applications to communicate and interact with others was somewhat low in importance for the unemployed.

(2) Entertainment had a comparatively low mean but a high standard deviation ( $M = 3.292$ ). It denotes multiple motives to pass time during the day or to forget about the worries of being unemployed. Both the Entertainment and Communication & Interaction motivations are comparatively detached from actual efforts to secure employment.

(3) Job Search was the most important motive for using Internet applications and involves searching and applying for jobs ( $M = 1.979$ ), which is special compared with other studies of usage motives related to the specific needs of unemployed individuals. Searching for job offers and applying for jobs can be understood as a substitute for work-related usage motives.

(4) The Information Seeking factor had an alpha value (.477) below the standard cut-off of .7 and is, therefore, not discussed further.

#### ***4.1.3 Skills and Literacy***

Consistent with usage and motivations of usage, we examined the Internet skill levels among the unemployed. Again, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure presented a value of 0.870, which was adequate. The four computed factors that were derived with Varimax rotation and Kaiser normalization explained 61.6% of the total variance. There are four underlying skills dimensions: ‘Information Assessment’ abilities; the skills for ‘Creating & Sharing’ content; knowledge about the effects of ‘Data Disclosure’; and the capability to use the Internet for finding employment, i.e., ‘Job Search’.

*TABLE 4: Skills & Literacy—Final Factor Solution ABOUT HERE*

The respondents reported the highest level of skills with respect to competencies related to job searches, which were rated at an average of 1.57. Although these are self-reported assess-

ments, the high mean and low standard deviation suggest that the unemployed felt well equipped from a skills perspective to use the Internet as a tool for finding jobs. Slightly fewer competencies were reported with respect to the second skill dimension, which involves avoiding the dangers of Internet usage ( $M = 1.61$ ). The third skill dimension denotes those competencies that are related to creating content, whether written, visual or video; respondents reported few problems in at least potentially being able to create such content ( $M = 1.94$ ). The least rated—but still relatively highly assessed—skill dimension was connected with critically assessing information ( $M = 2.38$ ).

## 4.2 Differentiating for User Types

### 4.2.1 *Deriving User Typologies*

Based on a hierarchical cluster analysis, we identified four different types of Internet users: non-users ( $N = 497$ ), novices ( $N = 666$ ), passive users ( $N = 814$ ) and heavy-users ( $N = 420$ ). With the exception of skills related to data disclosure (Kruskal Wallis  $p = 0.041$ ), novices, passive users and heavy users exhibited different skill levels (table 5).

*TABLE 5: Skills of User Types ABOUT HERE*

Different user types could be explained, at least partially, by the different motivations of usage. Table 6 compares the four motivations of usage among user types. Ranking the four motives was similar for novices and passive users; they only differed concerning the rating of the importance of motivation.

*TABLE 6: Motives of Usage for User Types ABOUT HERE*

In the following, all user types are described in more detail taking the following criteria into account: usage, access, skills, motives, frequency of usage and daily routine. The detailed descriptions combine the quantitative results with qualitative statements derived from the interviews and with three diaries representing each user type.

#### 4.2.2 User Types

**Non-Users:** Out of our sample, 21% of respondents were identified as “Non-users” (N = 497), i.e., those who have never (or just once) used the Internet. They had no experience with Internet applications. At 66%, the percentage of older people (> 50 years) in this category was overrepresented. Although they did not use the Internet, 51% of those respondents had at least theoretically the means of material access, i.e., they had a computer at home: *“I have a computer at home, but as I said, no Internet access”* (#15). The majority of non-users and minimal users were convinced that the Internet holds major benefits for finding reemployment. This finding is consistent with the qualitative interviews in which most interviewees indicated that if they did not previously have a computer, they purchased one when laid off to write applications or to have access to the Internet’s “vast listing of vacancies” (as indicated by 71% of non-users). Of the non-users, 51% were capable of writing applications on a computer, which presupposes different competencies, e.g., the creation of text, its formatting, inserting images, creating pdf-files, etc. Overall, the results indicate that non-users only had skills required within their individual usage scenario, which is characterized by offline usage. Nearly 40% of non-users would have used the Internet if they had had someone to teach them the necessary skills (36%) or if they had help (38%): *“A few months ago, my supervisor at the employment agency created a profile for me. From there, I can send my applications via e-mail or print them. This is an advantage”* (#15). Only 8% of non-users avoided the Internet due to a fear of using Internet applications.

**Novices:** 28% of respondents were characterized as inexperienced users. Women were overrepresented within this type (55%). Most novices used the Internet only on an irregular basis; 8% used the Internet daily, and nearly half of all novices used the Internet monthly. Novices described their computer as an object of utility and only as a means to an end. Depending on their housing situation, a relatively simple desktop computer with legacy software, a printer and an external hard drive next to it were typically installed in an extra home office:

*“It is located in the living room, in the computer cabinet. Therefore, I am not always online”* (#9).

*FIGURE 1: The Internet of the Novice ABOUT HERE*

Being on the Internet was mostly understood as working time and separated from extracurricular activities. Novices mainly used the Internet passively for job search and for everyday business (such as information seeking, booking or banking activities that were spread over their “online-days”), depending on the time of the day: *“I do not use the Internet daily. When I am online, I first look at the website of the employment agency; otherwise I use Google. I read there a lot. I do not have a Facebook profile and I write emails but only to the employment agency”* (#6).

Their first activity in the morning was job search. Organizational matters were undertaken at noon (shopping or information seeking) or in the afternoon or evening (online banking). They did not use the Internet for leisure purposes. Messaging applications was the only regular and important form of usage for this group. Activities that depended on a higher level of participation (such as writing one's own semi-public content) were used sparingly, if at all. They felt insecure browsing unknown sites and demonstrated inadequate research skills: *“I have difficulties because security cannot be guaranteed 100% of the time. I am a timid person and I did not grow up with a computer. I get along, but I have respect”* (#19). This insecurity was also evident in their online resource and critical skills. Novices were hesitant to disclose personal data and preferred not to provide any information about themselves online. In their perception, social media was one and the same with Facebook and was associated with data disclosure problems, whereas professional social media networks remained largely unknown to this segment (although novices considered such professional networks useful after learning about them): *“I think that the website (XING, a German competitor to LinkedIn), without registering, looks interesting. I do not have a profile on this website, but I am thinking of uploading*

*one now*” (statement in the diary of #16). Novices showed the highest competencies regarding job-search (1.723), which was apparent in routinized job-search strategies via search engines and confirms that their Internet usage relates to the context of their unemployment, as shown in their material access: *“I am not that modern. I acquired Internet access rather late, at the time when I became unemployed”* (#19). However, they had difficulties similar to non-users regarding the use of a computer, *“like photos on a CV; I cannot do it, I just cannot get it done”* (#6).

**Passive Users:** At 34%, passive users were the largest type within our sample. These users had been using different Internet applications for more than four years and did so at least once a week. The respondents in this group had an above average amount of experience with the Internet and the percentage of individuals with a higher education (40%) was conspicuous in this group of users. These users emphasized the importance of more flexible access to the Internet by using laptop computers in their home offices but also in the garden or on holiday: *“I use it at home or on the way; I have a computer at home and a notebook for traveling”* (#9). Passivity and utility were predominant in their Internet usage. Passivity found expression in a general pattern of consumption and not creation, whereas the utility aspect was found in the nature of their hardware and in their usage motives.

#### *FIGURE 2: The Internet of the Passive User ABOUT HERE*

Despite being unemployed, passive users structured their days like typical working days, beginning with their job search in the morning, organizational matters and newspapers at noon and ending the day with leisure-time activities, such as music or online TV: *“I get up in the morning at 6am, my wife goes to work, and the first thing I do is turn on the computer and look if there are jobs for me”* (#23). They emphasized the fast and comfortable handling of various everyday business matters. With the help of the Internet, they were able to save leg-work (online banking), time (information searches) and money (online newspapers). They

drew mainly on well-known web content and felt insecure when browsing unknown sites. In addition to websites, passive users used forums to obtain information or answers to questions. Compared with novices, they added the aspect of communication to their set of motives. Messaging with a predefined and closed audience was the centerpiece of Internet usage, but they seemed to forgo social media and social networking sites more or less consciously: “[B]ecause I only do things I feel secure doing, I say pfffft to Facebook—what is the benefit of Facebook?” (#9).

**Heavy Users:** In our sample, 21% of respondents were extremely frequent and experienced users. Individuals in this group were predominately young (mean = 29 years). The majority of heavy users were online at least once a day: “Well, my computer is running twenty-four hours, it is never turned off” (#21). They visited their preferred websites daily, often several times. Accordingly, they had mobile access to the Internet via laptop computers or smartphones. Moreover, they emphasized the importance of hardware brands, technical details and/or decorative elements, such as “a wonderful black keyboard” (#22), “a very beautiful monitor” (#3). They understood hardware as an accessory of everyday life rather than as a working utility.

### *FIGURE 3: The Internet of the Heavy-User ABOUT HERE*

Heavy users took advantage of the Internet for more information and more direct information. However, their communication motives appeared to be far more detailed. In particular, social media were used to contact friends, family and/or even firms with a variety of dialogue partners: “Well, it just keeps it simple to contact friends and stuff. This is handy and that's a bit like my address book” (#25). Compared with the other user types, heavy users used a wide variety of applications the Internet had to offer. Whenever possible, social media networks were used to execute tasks. Their well-trained “social network activity skills” were reflected in the variety of functions they used, such as chatting, uploading and downloading content

(video, music, photos, text), commenting on, or playing games, and in their knowledge and use of specific vocabulary (e.g., status updates), expressions (e.g., \*yawn\*) or symbols (e.g., emoticons or x).

Another difference among heavy users and other user types involved their infrequent job searching. They typically searched for information until noon, two times per week on general job listing websites, and engaged in leisure time activities, such as gaming or videos (e.g., YouTube), afterwards: *“First, I check my mails because of the job-search, and my list of ‘favorites’. Then, online games to relax. And I have the Windows messenger to stay in touch with family and friends”* (#3). Communication applications (such as chatting and Facebook) were used at all times of the day, which might bring the possibility of an intentional or unintentional diversion: *“Well, sometimes, you are on Facebook and forget to look for companies. Yes, sometimes, it is a bit distracting”* (#18). Additionally, they felt comfortable on unknown websites: *“It is simple. It is self-explanatory. You have to be a little bit brave, click around, and then you will find your way”* (#26). Although heavy users were critical of online information with respect to finding trustworthy sources, they seemed to think less about the negative aspects of disclosing personal data online, which is associated with their high evaluation of their competencies. Heavy users ascribed themselves the highest skills with respect to searching for work (1.552) and protecting personal data on the Internet (1.537).

## 5 Discussion

Not all individuals experienced the Internet in the same way during their unemployment. It is important to be sensitive to the lives of the unemployed, to listen to the challenges they face and not to treat them as a homogenous group. This treatment holds true not only for the sake of maintaining analytical rigor but also for creating support measures that are tailored for specific needs. The different strata observed among the unemployed were not particularly based



on material (access) restrictions or skill limitations; instead, they were premised on different motivations that determine skill acquisition, material access and usage.

Considering this sample's distinctions, unemployed Internet users can be divided into three different user types. The first group consists of unemployed individuals who are primarily interested in overcoming unemployment. They use the Internet as a tool. For these users, being online is work. They equip an extra computer room in which they get things done, which is compatible with their purely instrumental usage. For the second group, the Internet is a facilitator of social life and a tool for social use. In addition to expanding their knowledge, it helps them organize social functions that might otherwise be unfeasible. These users include the Internet in their “real-life” and their computer in their living world, e.g., in their living room. Alternatively, the third group finds a unique community online, which does not have to be connected to their “real-life”. The Internet has a reality of its own, in which unemployment may be less obvious and in which job searching might have a lower priority. However, their Internet usage is not solely recreational (Douglas et al., 2008). The Internet is integrated into all parts of their lives. Therefore, their computer is more central in their (physical) life/world.

The user types differ with regard to their skill levels. The ongoing digitalization of the application process requires skills to successfully handle tools and platforms. People must not only adapt their existing skills to the new context but also develop new ones, beginning with the writing of an application on a computer (skill level of non-users), subsequently moving to communication skills, such as using email or social media (skill level of novices) and crossing into different research skills, such as resource literacy (finding the source), research literacy (evaluating the source) or critical literacy (comparing sources) (skill level of passive users). The final activity involves networking and self-promotion, i.e., impression management skills (skill level of heavy users).

In addition, it is important to bear in mind that the defined skill levels are based on self-

reported skills. We have tried to counter this issue and observe the phenomena from different perspectives: estimating usage behavior (quantitative survey), offering detailed descriptions of usage behavior (qualitative interviews), and illustrating usage behavior over an extended period of time (usage diaries). Based on the triangulation of methods, we determined a discrepancy between the reported skills and the user's online behavior. From the user's perspective, they have certain skills: they use (a few) applications confidently and they know how to protect their data online. However, the qualitative data show that they excluded various applications they might have used with their skill level, or they avoided applications that required data input.

All in all, for our special sample, the Internet was a tool used to search or apply for jobs but only to a certain degree. The motivations for using the Internet changed with the loss of employment for only certain individuals. For other individuals, the Internet had its own value, in which job search was of secondary interest; these individuals were driven by similar motives that Internet usage research has revealed on a more general scale (e.g., Nardi and Schiano, 2004; Park et al., 2009;). Nonetheless, the perception of the Internet as workplace (McKee-Ryan et al., 2005) was also prominent within this type. For people who are unemployed, the Internet may serve as a connection to work life for some; simultaneously, it may function as a connection to a different life and as a call to action, i.e., a constant reminder that things must change. Of course, this analysis departs from previous classifications based on instrumental, recreational and social usage (Chen et al., 2002; Douglas et al., 2008).

As discussed above, material access and skills or literacy limitations are important criteria to identify different user types (see Brandtzæg et al., 2011). Our sample of the unemployed featured no digital divide in terms of material access, which might be due to the design of the German social security system. As has been discussed in the literature, there was a "skill gap" (see van Dijk and Hacker, 2003), but the most striking divide revealed by our research is the

motivation gap. Skill differentials determined how individuals use the Internet only to a certain extent. Actual usage—what people do online—depended on what they wanted to achieve.

If we think about what might be done to close these gaps, we must consider each user type separately. (a) We analyzed inequalities among novices based on their skill levels. Novice users lack the skills and motivation to enlarge their portfolio of online job searching possibilities. In addition, they do not see the opportunities to obtain information or further applications relating to job searching via the Internet or via social networks in particular. With outside help, novices could make “better” use of the Internet and its job search possibilities. (b) Passive users balance their “real” and virtual lives, and their motivation centers upon finding a job. However, they tend to be skeptical about the more participative forms of social media and generally do not break out of their passive usage to reach out for help. They do not use the Internet for informal networking except to maintain contact with an immediate social circle. Passive users might run the risk of stagnation and miss opportunities to broaden their perspectives; in the final analysis, they could miss job offers from other circles. (c) With heavy users, the motivation gap regarding online activities is drawn into focus. The heavy user runs the risk of using the Internet as an escapist device—avoiding job searching and underemphasizing real-life activities. Their participatory activities do not automatically lead to social inclusion, and their online communities might become echo chambers disconnected from real life challenges. If they are online during regular working hours, they might be in contact primarily with other unemployed individuals; therefore, they might be living in a type of unemployed parallel online society. They are involved in informal networking that may or may not be used with the intention of changing their offline lives.

The results show that the large majority of respondents do not know about or use professional social networks in their job searches. Nevertheless, if we understand the digital divide as a problem linked with low income, lower educational levels and precarious living conditions, this result is less striking because it merely extends pre-existing offline social divides that are

replicated in the digital world to a certain extent. It is troubling that 21% of our respondents did not use the Internet at all, despite the disproportional sampling. With regard to the result that non-users in our sample were significantly older, it can be assumed that the proportion of older non-users within the population of unemployed persons will be much larger. As application procedures become increasingly digitized, it should be acknowledged that non-users are at risk of becoming even more disconnected from the labor market.

However, by offering access to information, opportunities to exchange information and places to meet online the Internet provides unemployed individuals opportunities for involvement that might not be obtainable otherwise due to lack of material. The Internet may not only help an unemployed person feel part of society during unemployment but may also facilitate such individual's reintegration into society after re-employment. Therefore, for the unemployed the Internet serves two overarching functions: first (and foremost), it is a tool to overcome unemployment; and second (but less pronounced), it is an instrument that may be used to address the social exclusion of no longer being part of the workforce.

## 6 Conclusion

We examined different usage types based on how individuals outside the workforce use the Internet and what differences they demonstrate in terms of Internet access, skills and literacy. We found that motives play an important role in this differentiation. Skills make certain activities possible but the frequency, intensity and type of usage is largely determined by the motivation behind such usage. Individuals tend to acquire certain skills if they want to achieve certain goals.

Our study narrows its focus to an area that has been previously neglected. In considering Internet usage and different types of usage, it is helpful not only to look at specific demographics or different social statuses but also to look at Internet usage in certain situations or life stages. We consider unemployment to be a particular life stage with its own challenges

and use motivations with respect to the Internet. Therefore, research might progress by incorporating what people want to achieve with media in specific life situations. Life situations such as unemployment have been shown to become overarching in usage and in individuals' feelings with regard to the medium.

As our society becomes increasingly complex and fragmented into sub-societies, the individual and his/her worldviews and interpretative patterns becomes more important. Therefore, future research should define and look for particular life stages as they might complete the picture. The results of our study underscore that context is important, and we stress the importance of being sensitive to context in individuals' lives in order to gain deeper insight into patterns of and motives for the use of media and technology.

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Table 1  
*Sample Profile (N = 2414)*

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Distribution</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Missing</b>
Gender	male	1205	49.9	-
	female	1209	50.1	
	<i>Total</i>	<i>2414</i>	<i>100</i>	
Age	18 - 25	804	33.3	-
	26 - 50	802	33.2	
	51 - 65	808	33.5	
	<i>Total</i>	<i>2414</i>	<i>100</i>	
Education	no high school diploma	90	3.9	86
	high school diploma allowing no direct access to college/ university	1631	70.0	
	high school diploma allowing access to college/university	607	26.1	
	<i>Total</i>	<i>2328</i>	<i>100</i>	
Region	urban	1209	50.1	-
	rural	1205	49.9	
	<i>Total</i>	<i>2414</i>	<i>100</i>	
User Experience <sup>1</sup>	no experience	497	20.6	4
	less than four years	353	14.7	
	more than four years	1560	64.7	
	<i>Total</i>	<i>2410</i>	<i>100</i>	
Internet Attitude	no usage	497	24.8	410
	positive	583	29.1	
	negative	924	46.1	
	<i>Total</i>	<i>2004</i>	<i>100</i>	

<sup>1</sup> The years of experience are related to 2012. For practical reasons, we gave our respondents the choice between less than one year, more than one year, more than two years, more than three years, and more than four years.

Table 2  
*Frequency of Usage of Different Internet Applications*

	<b>Information</b>	<b>Messaging</b>	<b>Reading Posts</b>	<b>Multimedia</b>	<b>Gaming</b>	<b>Writing Posts</b>	<b>Transactions</b>	<b>Sharing</b>
<i>daily (%)</i>	53.9	43.9	39.2	24.8	10.8	8.8	6.4	0.9
<i>at least weekly (%)</i>	93.0	79.1	68.9	54.5	22.7	30.6	38.0	8.4
<i>at least monthly (%)</i>	98.6	88.9	78.0	68.9	28.6	41.6	70.1	22.0
<i>at least once a year (%)</i>	99.5	95.4	88.1	81.1	37.5	56.4	83.4	38.7
<i>total online (n)</i>	1916							
<i>offline (n)</i>	498							
<i>all respondents (n)</i>	2414							

Table 3  
*Motivations of Usage – Final Exploratory Factor Analysis Solution*

<b>Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.</b>				0.850
<b>Barlett's Test of Sphericity</b>	Approx. Chi-Square			7503.890
	df			78
	Sig.			0.000
	<b>Communi- cation &amp; Interaction</b>	<b>Entertain- ment</b>	<b>Job Search</b>	<b>Infor- mation &amp; Help</b>
<b>Mean (SD)</b>	<b>3.357 (1.728)</b>	<b>3.292 (1.762)</b>	<b>1.979 (1.423)</b>	<b>2.118 (1.092)</b>
<b>Cronbach's Alpha</b>	<b>0.832</b>	<b>0.781</b>	<b>0.76</b>	<b>0.477</b>
I use the Internet to meet new people.	<b>.607</b>	.398	.064	-.098
I use the Internet to communicate with like-minded people.	<b>.676</b>	.306	.049	.100
I use the Internet to communicate with people other than my acquaintances.	<b>.727</b>	.195	.012	.041
I use the Internet to find out what old friends are doing now.	<b>.701</b>	.223	.064	.059
I use the Internet to keep in touch with people from my everyday life.	<b>.727</b>	.136	.038	.082
I use the Internet to keep in touch with people who live far away.	<b>.780</b>	-.031	.016	.180
I use the Internet to occupy my time.	.160	<b>.834</b>	.034	.079
I use the Internet to entertain myself.	.325	<b>.724</b>	-.050	.162
I use the Internet to forget my worries.	.200	<b>.793</b>	.039	.029
I use the Internet to look for job offers.	.014	.020	<b>.887</b>	.138
I use the Internet to apply for jobs.	.102	.013	<b>.885</b>	.107
I use the Internet to seek information.	.066	.018	.132	<b>.826</b>
I use the Internet to find help.	.138	.156	.102	<b>.732</b>
<b>% of variance explained</b>	<b>24.52</b>	<b>17.17</b>	<b>12.43</b>	<b>10.36</b>

Table 4  
*Skills & Literacy – Final Factor Solution*

<b>Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.</b>				0.870
<b>Barlett's Test of Sphericity</b>	Approx. Chi-Square			8384.000
	df			105
	Sig.			0.000
	<b>Information Assessment</b>	<b>Creating</b>	<b>Data Disclosure</b>	<b>Job Search</b>
<b>Mean (SD)</b>	<b>2.381 (.949)</b>	<b>1.939 (1.611)</b>	<b>1.660 (.912)</b>	<b>1.566 (.748)</b>
<b>Cronbach's Alpha</b>	<b>0.801</b>	<b>0.766</b>	<b>0.734</b>	<b>0.725</b>
I know what information on the Internet is reliable.	<b>.607</b>	.398	.064	-.098
I am able to compare information.	<b>.676</b>	.306	.049	.100
I am able to assess whether information on the Internet is correct.	<b>.727</b>	.195	.012	.041
I am able to detect which information on the Internet is relevant.	<b>.701</b>	.223	.064	.059
I am able to create and edit texts on the computer.	<b>.727</b>	.136	.038	.082
I am able to upload texts.	<b>.780</b>	-.031	.016	.180
I am able to save and edit photos and videos on the computer.	.160	<b>.834</b>	.034	.079
I am able to upload photos or videos.	.325	<b>.724</b>	-.050	.162
I know the dangers on the Internet.	.200	<b>.793</b>	.039	.029
I know which data I should not post on the Internet.	.014	.020	<b>.887</b>	.138
I am able to reduce the dangers of the Internet.	.102	.013	<b>.885</b>	.107
I know how to protect my personal data on the Internet.	.066	.018	.132	<b>.826</b>
I am able to look for job offerings on the Internet.	.138	.156	.102	<b>.732</b>
I know sites where I can find job offers.	.070	.090	.122	<b>.843</b>
I know sites where I can find advice for my job search.	.227	.118	.073	<b>.662</b>
<b>% of variance explained</b>	<b>17.17</b>	<b>16.07</b>	<b>14.45</b>	<b>13.95</b>

Table 5  
*Skills of User Types*

	<b>I. Non-User</b>	<b>II. Novices</b>	<b>III. Passive User</b>	<b>IV. Heavy User</b>	<b>Kruskal Wallis Test (Asymp. Sig)</b>
Information Assessment	-	2.623 (1.053)	2.243 (.887)	2.274 (.770)	0.000
Creating & Sharing	-	2.382 (2.031)	1.799 (1.375)	1.508 (.806)	0.000
Data Disclosure	-	1.875 (1.199)	1.563 (.779)	1.537 (.626)	0.041
Job Search	-	1.709 (.933)	1.475 (.616)	1.511 (.640)	0.001

Table 6  
*Motives of Usage for User Types*

	<b>I. Non-User</b>	<b>II. Novices</b>	<b>III. Passive User</b>	<b>IV. Heavy User</b>	<b>Kruskal Wallis Test (Asymp. Sig)</b>
Communication & Interaction	-	3.805 (1.584)	3.405 (1.549)	2.550 (1.291)	0.000
Entertainment	-	3.702 (1.626)	3.313 (1.645)	2.593 (1.432)	0.000
Job Search	-	2.129 (1.646)	1.867 (1.290)	1.955 (1.236)	0.004
Information & Help	-	2.403 (1.302)	1.977 (0.940)	1.942 (0.925)	0.000



Figure 2: The Internet of the Passive User

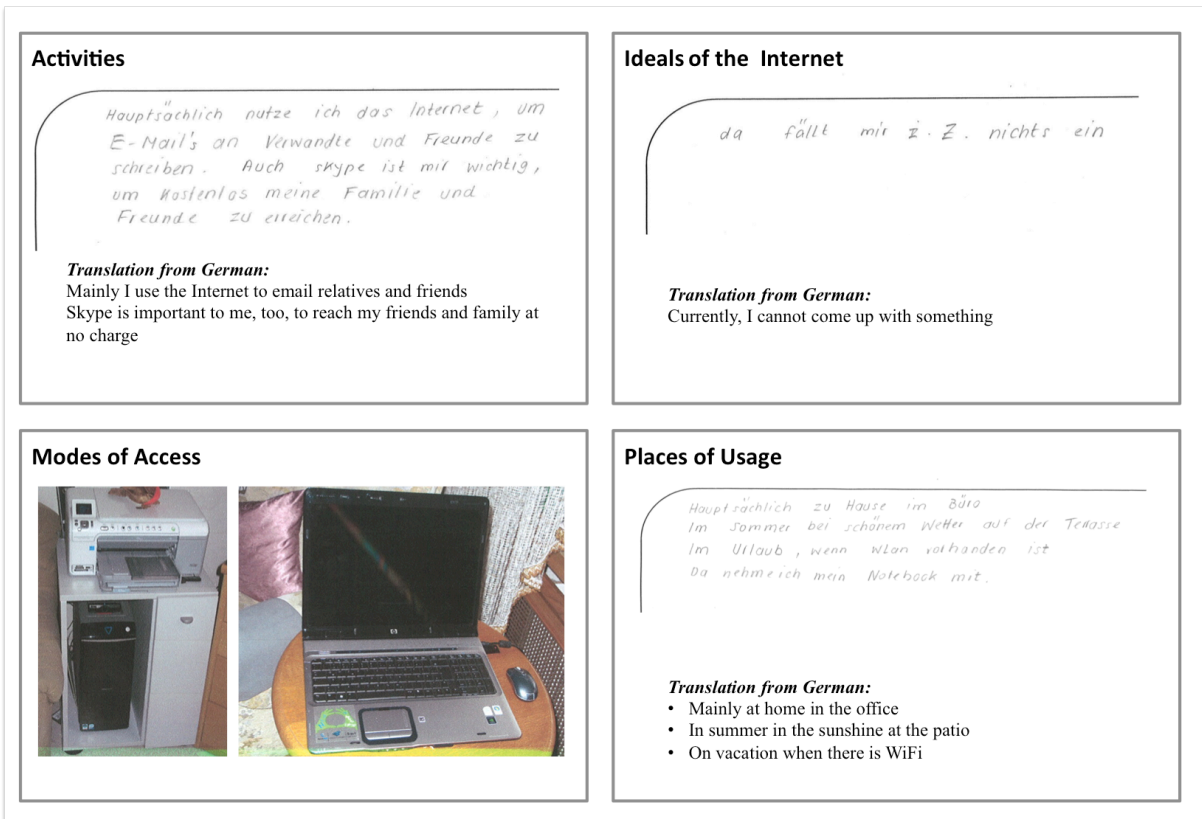
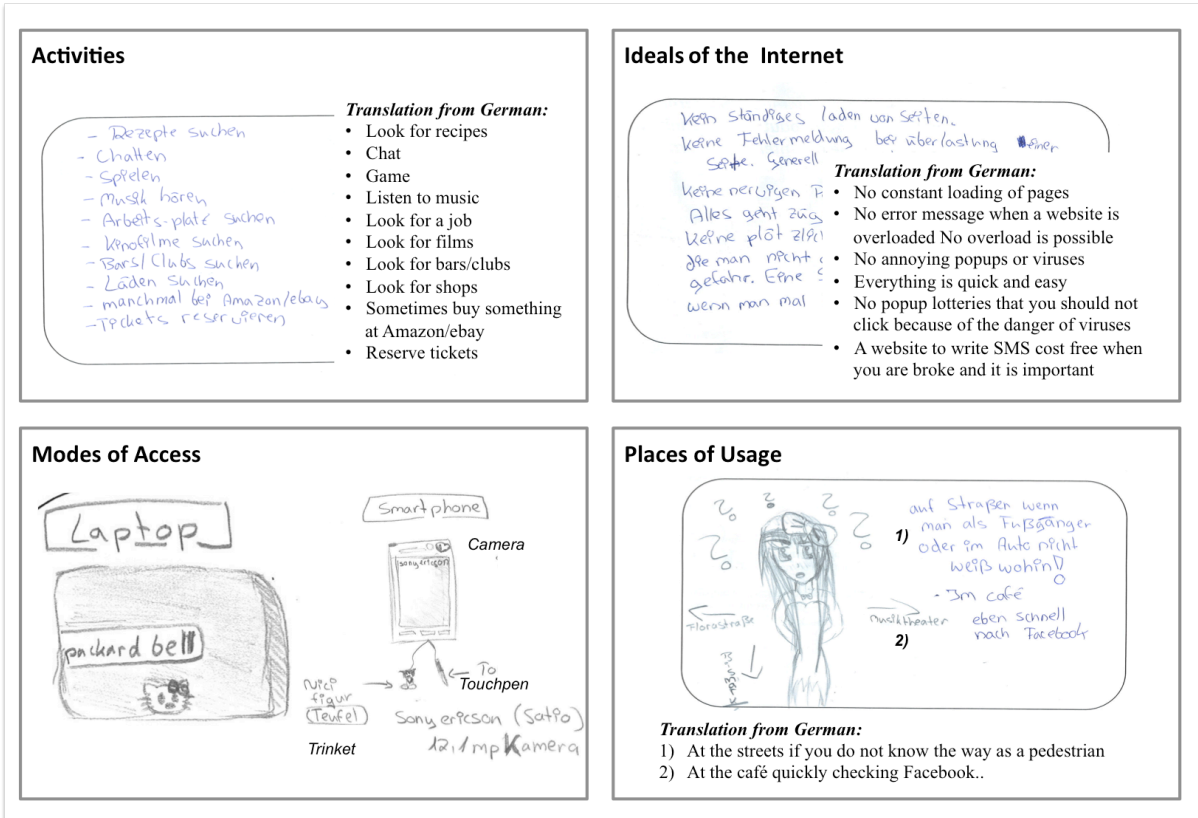




Figure 3: The Internet of the Heavy-User



# Appendix

## Questionnaire

<b>Construct</b>	<b>Translated Wording</b>
Forms of Usage (Scale) <sup>2</sup>	How often do you send personal messages on the Internet, e.g. emails or messages on Facebook? How often do you read the contributions of others, such as on news sites, blog posts or status updates? How often do you write your own contributions, for example, comments, blog posts or status updates? How often do you listen to music or view photos or videos on the Internet? How often do you upload photos, videos and music on the Internet, e.g. on Facebook or Youtube? How often do you use the Internet for shopping, reservations or banking? How often do you use the Internet for games? How often do you use the Internet to search for information?
Motivations of Usage (Scale) <sup>3</sup>	I use the Internet to meet new people. I use the Internet to communicate with people other than my acquaintances. I use the Internet to communicate with like-minded people. I use the Internet to communicate with people other than my acquaintances. I use the Internet to find out what old friends are doing now. I use the Internet to keep in touch with people from my everyday life. I use the Internet to keep in touch with people who live far away. I use the Internet to occupy my time. I use the Internet to entertain myself. I use the Internet to forget my worries. I use the Internet to look for job offers. I use the Internet to apply for jobs. I use the Internet to seek information. I use the Internet to find help.
Skill and Literacy	I am able to search the Internet for jobs.

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<sup>2</sup> Likert Scale: 1 - on a daily basis, 2 – several times a week, 3 – once a week, 4 – several times a month, 5 – once a month, 6 – rarely at all, 7 - never

<sup>3</sup> Likert Scale: 1 – Absolutely applies, 2 – Tends to apply, 3 – Applies in some cases, not in others, 4 – Tends not to apply, 5 – Does not apply at all

(Scale)<sup>4</sup>

- I know websites where I find jobs.
- I know of sites that give me tips for the job search.
- I know what information is credible on the internet.
- I am able to critically compare information.
- I able to assess whether information on the Internet is accurate.
- I recognize what information is relevant on the internet.
- I am able to create and edit text with computer programs.
- I am able to write posts on the Internet
- I am able to process my photos or videos on the computer.
- I am able to upload my videos or photos to the Internet.
- I am aware of the dangers of the internet.
- I am able to reduce the dangers of the Internet, by, for example, using privacy settings.
- I know what data I should not post to the web.
- I know how I can protect my personal data on the Internet

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<sup>4</sup> Likert Scale: 1 – Absolutely applies, 2 – Tends to apply, 3 – Applies in some cases, not in others, 4 – Tends not to apply, 5 – Does not apply at all