With a little help of my peers: the supportive role of online contacts for the unemployed

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Abstract

Unemployment is an unfortunate reality, whose overcoming often depends on social support, among other factors. Online social media, such as social network sites and communities, may offer an additional source of such support for unemployed people. This paper posits that online social support plays an important role in unemployed people's ability to cope with unemployment and search for new employment. The paper develops and tests a structural equation model of the influence of online-mediated, enabling and caring social support on job search self-efficacy, which may foster the job search behaviour of unemployed persons. In addition, we control for gender, age, user experience, and attitude towards the Internet. Based on 1,322 telephone interviews with unemployed individuals in Germany, we find that online social support drives job search behaviour. Our results show that social support derived from new information and communication technology counteracts the adverse effect of being unemployed to a certain degree. Enabling support and caring support experienced through social media both lead to higher job search self-efficacy, which, in turn, fosters job search behaviour. Furthermore, our model shows that these relationships differ by gender, age, user experience, and attitude towards the Internet.

Keywords: *unemployment; social media; social support; self-efficacy*

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Introduction

Unemployment is generally an unpleasant life experience (Jahoda, 1982; Kanfer, Wanberg, & Kantrowitz, 2001; McKee-Ryan, Song, Wanberg, & Kinicki, 2005; Paul & Moser, 2009). In addition to the obvious loss of income, unemployed individuals may lose contacts with work colleagues and thus leave social networks and risk becoming socially isolated (Kronauer, 2010). Moreover, the loss of income and social networks from unemployment may have adverse effects on individuals' social and psychological well-being (Wanberg, Zhu, Kanfer, & Zhang, 2011). For the unemployed and their families, social support thus plays an important role in their ability to cope with unemployment and search for new employment (Hanisch, 1999; McKee-Ryan et al. 2005; Paul & Moser, 2009). Research shows that social support improves both job search intensity and quality and provides the unemployed with social capital to open up access to information and career opportunities (Wanberg, 2012, p.377). Friends, family, and acquaintances in one's social network may provide enabling and instrumental social support, such as giving advice, information, assistance, and feedback on job search activities, enhancing job search quality (Van Hooft, Wanberg & van Hoye, 2013). Social networks help a substantial number of job seekers find (re)employment (Franzen & Hangartner, 2006). Furthermore, social support increases the likelihood that individuals serendipitously find work through social connections (McDonald, 2010). In addition to providing instrumental assistance, social contacts also offer caring and emotional social support, such as encouragement and psychological nurturing (Blustein, Kozan & Connors-Kellgren, 2013, p. 263). Social support can thus increase self-esteem and self-efficacy (Ellis & Taylor, 1983; Mallickrodt & Fretz, 1988). According to the literature review of McKee-Ryan et al. (2005), core self-evaluations ameliorate adverse psychological symptoms during unemployment and allow the unemployed to better cope with unemployment.

The Internet has led to a large number of changes and innovations related to the experience of being unemployment. With the arrival of user-generated forms of Internet communication technologies, such as blogs and microblogs, social networking sites, virtual worlds, peer-to-peer file sharing sites, and wikis, which

require noticeably less technical expertise to (actively) participate in than previous iterations of the Internet, the Internet has become a focal point for most human activities and interests. Social media have changed how we search for information and communicate with relatives and friends (Ross et al., 2009; Walther, Van Der Heide, Kim, Westerman, & Tong, 2008). The Internet has altered how people seek employment, which has made using Internet technologies essential to avoid 'falling behind' in the employment search (Van Rooy, Alonso, & Fairchild, 2003, p.173; Boswell, Zimmerman & Swider, 2011). The most successful job search methods combine formal and informal job search strategies (Kuhn & Skuterud, 2000; Van Rooy, Alonso, & Fairchild, 2003), a finding that has become more important with the social evolution of the Internet (Wanberg, 2012, p. 381). Social networking sites provide bridges for job searchers to reach valuable embedded resources and distant parts of their social networks that might contain unique and valuable job information (Fountain, 2005).

The help from other people, mediated via the Internet, may also provide caring social support for the unemployed in the form of websites, message boards, online communities, and personal, mediated interactions, which enhance self-acceptance and self-efficacy and reduce social isolation. The online space has several advantages, such as accessibility, anonymity, invisibility, neutralised statuses, multiconversing capabilities, and archival search capabilities, as well as greater individual control over the time and pace of interactions, which complement more traditional forms of support (Barak, 2007, Barak, Boniel-Nissim, & Suler, 2008; McKenna & Bargh, 2000; Meier, 2004). Some individuals may prefer silent lurking, whereas others may receive additional benefits by actively interacting with others (Nonnecke, Andrews, & Preece, 2006; Shim, Cappella, & Han, 2011).

In summary, various Internet applications may offer additional sources of social support for the unemployed, which may contribute to the social (re)integration of individuals in danger of social isolation and despondency and facilitate the search for new employment. Online-enabled social networking may thus foster individuals' psychological stability by enhancing feelings of belonging and efficacy. To be able to actively search for new employment, individuals must feel able and motivated to face the challenges and frustrations of the job search process. Participation in and support from social media can therefore form a linkage between personal encouragement (the belief in self-capabilities) and life-situation improvement (in the form of employment).

In this study, based on social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1999), we hypothesise that contextual, online-mediated, enabling and caring social support influences job search self-efficacy, which fosters the job search behaviour of unemployed persons. We are interested in the question of how online social support influences unemployed individuals' job-search self-efficacy and how this self-efficacy, in turn, affects their job search behaviour. By postulating that social support affects unemployed individuals' job search behaviour, which is mediated by job-search self-efficacy, we expand current research on unemployment by including the role of online social media. We see considerable potential to extend research into the role of social media in balancing the negative consequences of unemployment. Both academics and practitioners should find it relevant to understand the role of social media in relation to the job search process and to identify ways of reducing and buffering the adverse effects of unemployment.

2. Literature Review and Research Model

2. 1 A Social Support Perspective on Coping with Unemployment

Becoming unemployed and living through prolonged periods of inadequate financial means and diminished social networks and social contact is experienced by many as a time of deep personal crisis (for a review see Wanberg, 2012). Research shows that social support helps people cope better with suffering and sorrow and that social support networks offer special support resources (Cohen & Wills, 1985; Wills & Shinar, 2000).

Previous research identifies a wide range of potential types of support offered by the Internet. In particular, socially disadvantaged persons can benefit from participating in social media. If desired, the anonymity that social media provide, the high level of control that participants have over their social interactions, and the simplicity with which one can find like-minded people contribute to this potential (Amichai-Hamburger & Furnham, 2007; Barak, 2007; Etzioni & Etzioni, 1997; McKenna & Bargh, 2000). In their research on virtual support groups, Ben-Ze'ev (2003) and Davis et al. (2002) show that online media can strengthen the perception of emotional proximity and openness. Accordingly, social media can become a protective environment in which disadvantaged persons can find new social contacts, experience social support, and partake in other online activities (Amichai-Hamburger & Furnham, 2007, Attard & Coulson, 2012). Online

social contacts may prove particularly useful when existing networks are unable to provide sufficient support (Heaney & Israel, 2002; McLaughlin et al., 2012; Chung, 2013). A number of studies examine the motives for user participation in online support groups, such as to exchange information and advice (Buchanan & Coulson, 2007; Coulson, 2005; Meier et al., 2007; Rodgers & Chen, 2005) or to exchange emotions (Buchanan & Coulson, 2007; Rodgers & Chen, 2005, Welbourne et al., 2013). Enabling social support helps individuals solve or rectify problems causing distress. By contrast, caring support offers encouragement and comfort without any direct effort to solve the problems causing discomfort (Cutrona, 1990; Cutrona & Russell, 1990; Cutrona & Suhr, 1992; Lakey & Cohen, 2000; Wills, 1985).

Enabling Social Support

Enabling support typically includes informational and instrumental support. Informational support consists of the communicative process of conveying knowledge and advice that is useful for solving a problem (Cutrona & Suhr, 1992). In the context of unemployment, informational support might include the mediation of information about various job opportunities and resources and competences required for the job search process. Instrumental support includes practical or material help, and related to unemployment, might entail help writing a resume or an application, financial help, or training.

Research shows that enabling support can diminish the negative effects of the job search process and unemployment by mitigating or eliminating the effects of low self-efficacy and self-esteem on individuals (Cohen & McKay, 1984; Cohen & Wills, 1985; Lackovic-Grgin & Dekovic, 1996; Uchino, Cacioppo, & Kiecolt-Glaser, 1996). Eden and Aviram (1993) report that jobseekers who receive supportive resources through a two-month training program have higher self-efficacy than jobseekers who do not receive such training. Russell, Holmstrom, and Clare (2011) similarly focus on the effects of enabling support on unemployed people and show that informational support can lead to higher job search self-efficacy. In turn, high self-efficacy also exerts a positive influence on behavioural intentions, leading to more active job search behaviour.

Caring Social Support

Positive relationships improve the experience of unemployment because some of the most difficult aspects of being unemployed include losing opportunities to socialise, losing large portions of social networks, and feeling disconnected from society (Blustein, Kozan & Connors-Kellgren, 2013, p. 260). Research indicates

that social media is instrumental in individuals' ability to maintain and, to a lesser degree, create relationships, virtual friendships, and communities (Brandtzæg, 2012; Ellison et al., 2007; Subrahmanyam et al., 2008). Furthermore, a positive relationship also exists between the use of social media and the perception of social support (Leimeister, Schweizer, Leimeister, & Krcmar, 2008; Lin & Anol, 2008; Walther et al., 2005). Research on online social support groups shows that social media are instrumental in bringing together people who are in the same situation and can express empathy, understanding, and compassion and provide company to one another (Barak, Boniel-Nissim, & Suler, 2008; McKenna & Bargh, 1998; Tanis, 2007). Moreover, research suggests that support experienced through online communities has the potential to increase feelings of empowerment and foster feelings of control and independence (Barak et al., 2008; van Uden-Kraan, Drossaert, Taal & Seydel, 2008). Participation in online support groups may not change the status of individuals by itself but may exert an indirect influence on the status of such individuals by improving their psychosocial states (Barak et al., 2008; Seckin, 2009).

Job Search Self-Efficacy

Many unemployed people find the job search process to be difficult and associated with negative emotions (Borgen & Amundson, 1987; Wanberg, Zhu, & Van Hooft, 2010). Van Hooft, Wanberg, and van Hoye (2013) argue that self-efficacy likely affects job search quality. Beliefs about self-efficacy influence whether an individual initiates coping behaviour, how much effort a person invests in attaining a goal, and how long he or she persists when facing difficulties or failures (Bandura, 1991, 1997, p.3). Generalised self-efficacy beliefs can be distinguished from domain-specific self-efficacy beliefs (Jaeckel, Seiger, Orth & Wiese, 2012). In the context of seeking employment, job search self-efficacy refers to the confidence people have that they can successfully perform specific job search tasks and find employment (Saks & Ashforth, 1999; Wanberg, Hough & Song, 2002). Job search self-efficacy influences self-regulation processes and predicts job search intensity (Côté, Saks, & Zikic, 2006; Kanfer et al., 2001; Moynihan, Roehling, LePine & Boswell, 2003; Zikic & Saks, 2009). People who have higher job search self-efficacy set higher goals, are more committed to these goals, and are less likely to give up after failures and setbacks (Van Hooft, Wanberg & van Hoye, 2013). With these findings as our foundation, we expand the current notion of social support by considering social media. By combining online social support with self-efficacy, we expect enabling and caring support experienced through social media to lead to a higher job search self-efficacy. Therefore, we postulate the following hypotheses:

H1.

Enabling social support experienced through social media will be positively related to job search self-efficacy.

H2.

Caring social support experienced through social media will be positively related to job search self-efficacy.

Job Search Behaviour

Overcoming unemployment is a process that requires many actions on the part of the unemployed, including looking for employment opportunities (sometimes in slightly different sectors and vocations), acquiring information about such opportunities, and actively applying for job openings (Barber et al., 1994; Bretz, Boudreau, & Judge, 1994). The job search process entails consulting online job platforms, reading personnel advertisements, preparing and emailing resumes, making inquiries to prospective employers, contacting acquaintances for help in finding employment, and going to job interviews (Blau, 1994). Job search behaviour is a major determinant of finding employment (Kanfer, Wanberg, & Kantrowitz, 2001). The process is largely self-organised and self-managed; it involves setting a goal and planning, monitoring, and evaluating progress towards the goal (Saks, 2005; Turban, Stevens & Lee, 2009). Job search behaviour can be measured quantitatively and, increasingly, qualitatively (Van Hooft, Wanberg and van Hoye, 2013), and the predominant measurements include job search effort and intensity, which is defined as the general amount of energy and time devoted to the job search and the frequency of engaging in job search activities during a given time period. Social support has an indirect effect on job search behaviour by helping reduce the adverse effects of unemployment and helping maintain commitment to job searches (Blustein, Kozan & Connors-Kellgren, 2013, p. 262; Hanisch, 1999; Paul & Moser, 2009; Vinokur & Schul, 2002; Vuori & Vinokur, 2005). By applying these findings in the online context, we propose that online social support indirectly influences job search behaviour and that such behaviour is determined by job search self-efficacy. Thus, we formulate the following hypothesis:

H3a.

Job search self-efficacy will be positively related to job search behaviour.

H3b.

Job search self-efficacy mediates the relationships between the social support variables and job search behaviour as reflected in Figure 1.

2. 2 Factors that may explain Individual Differences in the Proposed Model

As increasingly more people use the Internet to communicate, retrieve information, and contribute content, the discourse concerning the frequently discussed topic of the digital divide is shifting from a digital gap between those who do and those who do not have access to digital technologies (e.g., Hoffman & Novak, 1998; Katz & Aspden, 1997; van Dijk, 2005) to a digital gap between those who fail to make effective and purposeful use of digital opportunities and those who use the Internet productively. In other words, the focus is shifting from a simplistic and binary conceptualisation of Internet access to a more advanced and complex approach that involves the width and depth of Internet usage (Dholakia, Dholakia, & Kshetri, 2004; Livingstone & Helsper, 2007; van Dijk, 2005; Wei, Teo, Chan & Tan, 2010). In addition to the diverse types of Internet usage, social and strategic competencies that fully utilise the participatory potential of social media differ among the socially disadvantaged, particularly between the 'bottom of the digital pyramid' and 'elite' Internet users (Hargittai, 2002). Thus, Internet usage is not experienced the same by everyone. Thus, we propose that user demographic characteristics and web experience are important predictors for how the Internet is used. To explore the impact of user characteristics on the relationships among online social support, job search self-efficacy, and job search behaviour, we use multiple group analyses of the structural equation model developed above.

Age

Most research focuses on age and/or generational differences in information and communication technology (ICT) use. Prensky (2001) and Palfrey and Gasser (2008) propose that generations born after 1980 are 'Digital Natives' because they grew up immersed in digital technology. Prensky (2001) differentiates this group from 'Digital Immigrants', i.e., generations that had to adopt digital technologies later in life. Digital Natives are digitally literate, connected, social, and experimental in their ICT use (McMahon & Pospisil, 2005; Valkenburg & Peter, 2008), showing not only distinct usage patterns (e.g., personal social media use, synchronous written communication) but also a preference for personalised, intuitive, and interactive ICT systems (Vodanovich, Sundaram & Myers, 2010). In particular, Digital Natives have experienced techno-

logical socialisation that was shaped by a distinct ICT environment, which can be assumed to result in distinctive cognitive and behavioural patterns (Tapscott, 2008; Vodanovich, Sundaram & Myers, 2010). With respect to job search behaviour, we propose that older job seekers may be more hindered by antiquated notions of job seeking because of their inability or unwillingness to access contemporary job-seeking methods on the Internet. In terms of social support, evidence suggests that the perceived availability of different types of social support is related to age (Matthews et al., 2010). We expect that people narrow their social networks as they grow older and devote more emotional resources to fewer relationships with close friends and family. We thus expect cohort effects based upon the participants' age, based on the above considerations, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H4.

Age cohort will moderate the relationships posited in Figure 1.

Gender

A range of studies posit that gender influences ICT use. Frenkel (1990) proposes that ICT is still considered a predominantly male domain. Female students have lower computer self-efficacy and less exposure to ICT than their male counterparts (Wei, Teo, Chan & Tan, 2010). Women in general have distinct ICT attitude patterns, including lower self-efficacy and higher levels of anxiety about computers (Sheehan, 1999; Venkatesh & Moris, 2000). In addition, ICT use and learning among women is more peer-oriented than among men (Chai, Das & Rao, 2011). In some cases, female access to ICT is inhibited by socio-economic boundaries (Agarwal, Animesh & Prasad, 2009). In terms of social support, gender differences exist. In their meta-analysis of sex differences in coping behaviours, Tamres, Janicki, and Helgeson (2002) find that women are more likely than men to seek emotional support. Furthermore, women's need for social support in addressing stress is greater than men's. According to Schwarzer and Leppin (1989), social support is more beneficial for women than for men. In addition, Taylor, Klein, Lewis, Gruenenwald, Gurung, and Updegraff (2000) explain the gender differences in social support through biological differences between men and women with respect to how they respond to stress. Based on the above prior research findings, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H5.

Gender will moderate the relationships posited in Figure 1.

Experience and Attitude towards the Internet

Prior research posits that experience and attitude towards the Internet affect ICT use. In the extended Technology Acceptance Model 2, Venkatesh and Davis (2000) show that experience with technology operates as a mediator among the complex interdependencies that explain technology acceptance. Moreover, experience plays an important role in the so-called secondary digital divide that describes the gap between those who fail to make effective and purposeful use of digital opportunities and those who use the Internet productively. Thus, the secondary digital divide is characterised by differences in the width and depth of Internet usage (Dholakia, Dholakia, & Kshetri, 2004; Livingstone & Helsper, 2007; van Dijk, 2005; Wei, Teo, Chan & Tan, 2010). In this context, the degree of experience and the level of confidence in using IT emerge as significant factors (Brown & Czerniewicz, 2010). Because web experience constitutes a formative learning experience (Shankar, Urban & Sultan, 2002), we propose that experience helps individuals achieve the social and strategic competencies required to fully utilise the participatory potential of the Internet. Inexperienced users may have a tendency to adopt predominantly formal methods of job seeking, such as responding to advertisements, posting resumes, and registering with Internet job banks. Therefore, we expect them to have a greater need for support—mainly enabling support—than more experienced users.

Davis (1986) finds that attitude, measured as an individual's positive or negative feeling about performing a target behaviour (such as using a system), affects behavioural intention. In turn, behavioural intention is the critical factor for actual system use. Thus, whether individuals intend to use new technology depends on their attitude. Considering these findings, we expect that a positive attitude towards the Internet increases not only the intention to use the Internet but also the probability of using the Internet in a productive manner. We suggest that unemployed individuals with a positive perception of social media are more likely to use the Internet for job search purposes because their technology acceptance is higher; thus, they consider the Internet to be central to many activities. Based on the insights described above about user experience and attitude towards the Internet, the following two hypotheses are proposed:

H6.

Experience will moderate the relationships posited in Figure 1.

H7.

Attitude towards the Internet will moderate the relationships posited in Figure 1.

3. Methodology

3. 1 Sample and Measures

In this section, we present the findings of a quantitative investigation of the role of online support in coping with unemployment. In cooperation with the German Federal Employment Agency, we conducted an analysis of how those looking for work can best use the Internet in general and social media in particular to reenter the job market and how the unemployed can benefit by interacting in their established and new networked communities. The data were collected from 14,000 clients of the German Federal Employment Agency, randomly selected from the overall database of all unemployed in Germany at that time, and who were invited to participate in a telephone-based survey during February and March 2012. Overall, 2,414 unemployed individuals completed the questionnaire. The sample was drawn randomly and contained a disproportionate stratification in terms of age, gender, and region. Education, another key variable, was structured according to the overall German population. Thus, the sample contained 49.9% men and 50.1% women. One-third of the participants were aged between 18 and 25 years; another third, between 26 and 50 years; the last third, between 51 and 65 years. Most participants held a high school diploma that allows no direct access to a university or college (70.0%). Half of the respondents lived in urban areas; the other half, in rural areas. The profiles and demographics of the respondents are summarised in Table 1. Of the 2,414 respondents, 1,322 answered all items selected for the study, and used the Internet on a regular basis. Thus, the following analysis is based on this reduced subsample without any missing values.

TABLE 1 Sample Profile ABOUT HERE

The questionnaire was based on measures found in the literature on Internet usage, information utility, and job search experience, as well as the social psychology literature. The scales for enabling and caring online support were adapted from the Social Support Behaviours Scale (Vaux et al., 1987) to the online context. Job-searcg self-efficacy was measured with a seven-item scale based on items used in previous studies (Caplan, Vinokur, Price, & van Ryn, 1989; Saks & Ashforth, 1999, 2000). The scale for job search behaviour was derived from Caplan, Vinokur, Price, and van Ryn (1989). The attitude towards the Internet was measured by adopting the Online Cognition Scale (Davis, Flett & Besser, 2002). In order to differentiate

between positive and negative Internet perceptions, we created an index of the included items. Respondents with lower scores (from 6 to 18) were assessed to have positive perceptions of the Internet, while respondents with higher scores (from 19 to 30) were assessed to have negative perceptions of the Internet. All scales are listed in the Appendix. The precise phrasing of all items was adjusted based on a pilot-test in which 40 unemployed persons were asked to comment on the wording of the listed items. Each item was rated by the survey participants based on a five-point Likert scale (from 1 = absolutely applies to 5 =does not apply at all).

3. 2 Measurement Model

Overall, we considered four latent constructs with a total of 17 items for the measurement model. As suggested by Anderson and Gerbing (1988), we evaluated the measurement model by testing the structural model. Therefore, a confirmatory factor analysis was conducted to test for uni-dimensionality and scale reliability on the item and construct level. On the construct level, we used Cronbach's alpha (α), composite reliability (CR), and average variance extracted (AVE) to assess the internal consistency of the scales. Table 2 lists the results. After this procedure, one item was eliminated from the job search scale because its inclusion decreased the reliability coefficients. After this procedure, one item (JSB_3) was eliminated from the job search scale because its inclusion decreased the reliability coefficients. After this adjustment, α, CR, and AVE were above the required criterion values. The other measures for these constructs showed good results; therefore, scale reliability can be assumed. In addition to the confirmatory factor analysis, R2 was calculated, and all and all but one item from the job search self-efficacy scale (JSSE_2) w of 0.40 (Bollen, 1989; Netemeyer, Bearden, & Sharma, 2003). Because of its importance for the overall construct, the item that fell below the threshold was nevertheless retained.

TABLE 2 Measurement Model ABOUT HERE

Because of the applied pilot-test and scale development process, content and convergent validity can be assumed. Discriminant validity can be assumed if squared multiple correlations with any other construct are below the constructs' AVE. Thus, as shown in Table 3, the measurement model has discriminant validity. Overall, these statistics indicate an acceptable fit of the model.

TABLE 3 Fornell-Larcker Criteria ABOUT HERE

4. Results

4. 1 Structural Model

Based on the postulated hypotheses, we initially estimated the model shown in Figure 1 with Mplus for the adjusted sample (N = 1322). The results include the standardised coefficients based on robust Maximum-Likelihood-estimation (MLM) and the total variance explained (R^2) for each dependent construct for all participants without missing values. The results of the analysis are shown in Table 5. All of the hypothesised and estimated paths were significant. As shown in Table 4, the model provided good fitness indices.

FIGURE 1: Structural Equation Model ABOUT HERE

TABLE 4 Fit Indices ABOUT HERE

TABLE 5 Hypothesis Testing and Indirect Effects ABOUT HERE

Figure 1 shows that our analysis confirms the impact of online support on job search self-efficacy. Both caring support (β = 0.079) and enabling support (β = 0.211) affected self-efficacy, with job search self-efficacy influenced primarily by enabling support but also by caring support. The more an unemployed person perceived caring and enabling support through the Internet, the higher his or her perceived job-search self-efficacy was. Job-search self-efficacy, in turn, had a significant impact on job search behaviour (β = 0.209). The higher the perceived job-search self-efficacy of an unemployed person was, the more actively he or she engaged in job search behaviour. Enabling support also affected job search behaviour indirectly (β = 0.044). By contrast, caring support had no indirect impact on job search behaviour. In summary, the data indicate that online support leads to higher job-search self-efficacy and that higher job-search self-efficacy, in turn, results in more active job search behaviour. In total, the two latent variables, caring support and enabling support, accounted for 7.3% of the observed variance in job-search self-efficacy. Job search behaviour explained 4.4% of the observed variance.

TABLE 6 Means and Standard Deviations ABOUT HERE

4. 2 Multiple Group Analysis

To examine to what extent the variables and relationships in the online social support model differ by gender, age, user experience, and attitude towards the Internet, we conducted a multiple-group structural equation model for each control variable. To assess the equivalence of the measurement model for the different groups, we followed the three-step procedure suggested in the literature (e.g., Bollen, 1989; Byrne, Shavelson, & Muthén, 1989; Cheung & Rensvold, 2002; Mullen, 1995; Steenkamp & Baumgartner, 2000). In the first step, we tested the model for configural invariance (i.e., no constraints between the two groups and all parameters can be estimated separately). As shown in Table 7, the unconstrained model (M1) fit well. In the second step, we tested the model for metric invariance. All factor loadings were constrained to be equal between the groups in M2. The M2 model fit indices were comparable to those of M1. In other words, the fit indices between the unconstrained and constrained models did not decline. The last step was to constrain the intercepts between the two groups to be equal (M3) to test for scalar invariance. In comparison to M2, M3 did not fit significantly worse. The results in Table 7 show that configural, metric, and scalar invariance can be assumed for all models and their groups. Thus, we can compare the online social support model, meaning the path coefficients and means of the latent variables, between male and female, different age groups, individuals with more or less user experience, and individuals with positive or negative attitude towards the Internet.

TABLE 7: Multiple Group Analysis Fit Indices ABOUT HERE

Table 8 presents the online social support models for the groups analysed. Differences were observed in the relationship between the latent variables among groups. Notably, caring support affected job-search self-efficacy in the female sample ($\beta = 0.169$) but not in the male sample. Women who perceived caring support through online social interaction and online communities had higher job-search self-efficacy scores than women who did not perceive such support. By contrast, men did not have significant higher job-search self-efficacy scores if they experienced caring support online. Apparently, the relevance of caring support differs by gender. Thus, caring support is an antecedent of women's job-serach self-efficacy but not of men's job-search self-efficacy.

In the other group comparisons, caring support was not identified to have a significant direct impact on job-search self-efficacy: age, user experience, and attitude towards the Internet did not seem to play a considerable role in the link between caring support and job-search self-efficacy. Thus, whether caring support through the Internet is important for one's job-search self-efficacy is not dependent on these control variables. However, there were group differences in the effect of enabling support on job-search self-efficacy. This link was slightly stronger for women (β = 0.188) than for men (β = 0.178). Likewise, the effect was stronger for middle-aged people (β = 0.242) than for older people (β = 0.226) and for younger people (β = 0.158). Thus, receiving enabling support online is less important for younger people's job-search self-efficacy than for older people's, and, particularly, middle-aged people's job-search self-efficacy. For less experienced users (β = 0.287) and for respondents with a rather negative attitude towards the Internet (β = 0.158), the impact of enabling support on job-search self-efficacy was stronger than for more experienced users (β = 0.196) and for respondents with a positive attitude towards the Internet (β = 0.143). These results indicate that online enabling support is particularly important for people who are not confident in using the Internet because of a lack of experience or negative attitude. Obtaining practical information helps them achieve higher job-search self-efficacy. By contrast, people who are confident in using the Internet presumably consider enabling support to be less relevant because they have less need for practical information because of their greater expertise.

Regarding the link between job-search self-efficacy and job search behaviour, the impact was stronger for women (β = 0.266) than for men (β = 0.200). Regarding age, self-efficacy plays a more significant role in job search behaviour among younger persons (β = 0.208) than among older (β = 0.192) and middle-aged persons (β = 0.175). For less experienced users (β = 0.260) and respondents with a rather negative attitude towards the Internet (β = 0.195), self-efficacy has a stronger effect on job search behaviour than for more experienced users (β = 0.174) and respondents with a positive attitude towards the Internet (β = 0.187). Thus, for active job search behaviour, high self-efficacy is more important for women, younger people, less experienced users, and respondents with a negative attitude towards the Internet than for men, older and middle-aged people, more experienced users, and respondents with a positive attitude towards the Internet.

The data show that the same groups that were more likely to achieve higher job-search self-efficacy through online support were also more likely to perform an active job search if they had higher self-efficacy. However, age is an exception, as the only control variable where the strongest effects of both

examined paths were not observed in the same group. Although enabling support was most relevant for job-search self-efficacy in the middle-aged group, self-efficacy was most important for active job search behaviour in the youngest group. Although young people seem to require more job-search self-efficacy to stay motivated during a job search than middle-aged and older persons, they apparently require less online support to achieve self-efficacy than the other age groups. A possible explanation for this result might be that their need for informational support is lower because they are digital natives and therefore more familiar with new technologies.

The explained variance (R^2) also differed among the compared groups: the considered antecedents and cues better explained women's outcomes (job-search self-efficacy: 11.1%, job search behaviour: 7.1%) than men's outcomes (self-efficacy: 4.4%, job search behaviour: 4.0%). For user experience, a large difference was also found in the explained variance, with 18.7% in job-search self-efficacy and 6.8% in job search behaviour for less experienced users and 5.8% in self-efficacy and 3.0% in job search behaviour for the more experienced users. In terms of age, the explained variance did not differ much, neither in job-search self-efficacy (5.2% for younger people, 6.1% for middle-aged people, 4.7% for older people) nor in job search behaviour (4.3% for younger people, 3.1% for middle-aged people, 3.7% for older people). With respect to attitude towards the Internet, we were able to explain 4.0% in job-search self-efficacy and 3.8% in the job search behaviour for respondents with a rather negative attitude and 1.9% in job-search self-efficacy and 3.5% in the job search behaviour for respondents with a positive attitude. The results indicate that gender and user experience are important predictors of the online social support model, whereas age and Internet attitude seem to play a less important role.

TABLE 8: Parameter Estimates and Hypothesis Testing ABOUT HERE

5. Discussion and Conclusion

During unemployment, the Internet has become more important in facilitating the job search process. Research shows that unemployed individuals who use the Internet are more likely to find a job than people who do not use the Internet (Kuhn & Skuterud, 2000); nonetheless, not all unemployed individuals are equally ready to adopt and use the Internet. In the course of this paper, we argued that social support that is perceived online through emails, chat rooms, forums, and/or social network sites is an important factor in

predicting the job search behaviour of the unemployed—as mediated by job-search self-efficacy. To assess the influence of online social support on the use of the Internet for job-searching purposes, we used the framework of an integrative social support model. To examine the role of online support, we distinguished between two specific forms of support: caring support and enabling support. Caring support refers to solace, empathy, and care that the unemployed experienced online. Enabling support refers to practical online advice, such as suggestions for contact persons, help finding jobs, and references to job offers. The model fit of the social support model was excellent, and all the relationships in the model were significant.

All the hypotheses were supported. Further, the proposed relations were hypothesised to differ by gender, age, user experience, and attitude towards the Internet. Indeed, the current study found partially significant differences in the estimated coefficients. The model explained 7.3% of the variance of job-search self-efficacy and 4.4% of job search behaviour. These portions are rather low but are nonetheless remarkable for latent constructs. In addition, social support is only one of a number of various factors that influence job search behaviour. Because our study focuses on the role of social support, we did not consider additional antecedents or cues. However, by testing the model for control variables, we achieved higher values in the explained variance for women and less experienced users, which leads to the conclusion that gender and user experience are important factors in the relationships analysed in this study.

Influence of Online Support on Job-Search Self-Efficacy

With respect to the influence of online support on job-search self-efficacy, our results are consistent with prior studies on offline social support (Cohen & McKay, 1984; Cohen & Wills, 1985; Eden & Aviram, 1993; Lackovic-Grgin & Dekovic, 1996; Russell, Holmstrom & Clare, 2011; Uchino, Cacioppo, & Kiecolt-Glaser, 1996). Caring support and enabling support in the form of online communication lead to higher self-efficacy scores. For the purpose of our study, this result indicates that online support is a valuable instrument to strengthen the perceived job-search self-efficacy of unemployed individuals. Thus, although the experience of unemployment may lead to lower beliefs about one's own ability to complete tasks and reach goals, we conclude that an unemployed person may find relief if he/she perceives social support through an online community. The data show that enabling support had a greater impact than caring support on job-search self-efficacy. Moreover, in the multigroup comparison, caring support had even less of an effect. Of

all the groups analysed, women were the only group in which caring support affects job-search self-efficacy.

Caring support is an antecedent of women's job-search self-efficacy but not of men's self-efficacy. Considering the lower job-search self-efficacy and higher computer anxiety for women that has been identified in the literature (Sheehan, 1999; Venkatesh & Moris, 2000; Wei, Teo, Chan & Tan, 2010), caring social support may act as a compensator. In all other groups, we found no significant influence. Thus, whether online caring support is important for one's job-search self-efficacy depends on gender but not age, user experience, or attitude towards the Internet. By contrast, enabling support affected job-search self-efficacy in all the analysed groups. According to the data, enabling support is more important for the job-search self-efficacy of women, middle-aged people, less experienced users, and individuals with a rather negative attitude towards the Internet than for the self-efficacy of men, older and younger people, more experienced users, and individuals with a positive attitude towards the Internet. The results indicate that online enabling support is particularly important for people who are not confident with respect to using the Internet because of a lack of experience or negative attitudes. Obtaining practical information helps such people to achieve higher job-search self-efficacy. In turn, for people with confidence regarding the Internet, the need for practical information seems to be lower owing to their greater expertise. Surprisingly, older people do not require the most support compared with other age groups. Although they may not even be digital immigrants and therefore have not experienced technological socialisation, social support is more important for the job-search self-efficacy of the middle-aged group, a mixed group of digital natives and digital immigrants.

Influence of Job-Search Self-Efficacy on Job Search Behaviour

The data showed that job-search self-efficacy was a predictor of job search behaviour, supporting our hypothesis. Individuals with high job-search self-efficacy are more likely to actively seek a job using the Internet. Thus, beliefs about their own abilities to complete tasks and reach goals are likely important in helping them cope with unemployment. These findings are consistent with the majority of unemployment studies, in which job-search self-efficacy is considered essential to stay motivated during the job search process (Côté, Saks, & Zikic, 2006; Kanfer et al., 2001; Moynihan, Roehling, LePine & Boswell, 2003; Van Hooft, Wanberg & van Hoye, 2013; Zikic & Saks, 2009;).

Our analysis further showed that for women, younger people, less experienced users, and respondents with a rather negative attitude towards the Internet, in particular, job-search self-efficacy determined the job search behaviour in a highly significant manner. If job-search self-efficacy cannot be achieved, then these groups may not remain encouraged to continue looking for a job in times of unemployment. For the other groups, namely, men, older and middle-aged persons, more experienced users, and respondents with a positive attitude towards the Internet, self-efficacy is also important for job search behaviour, although to a lesser degree.

Limitations and Suggestions

In recent years, discourses about the potentials and pitfalls of social media have been manifold. For the unemployed, social media have changed how unemployment is experienced and how the unemployed find reemployment. We have observed that both enabling and caring support perceived through social media enhance unemployed individuals' job search self-efficacy and thus foster their job search behaviour. Inevitably, however, this study is subject to a number of limitations. First, the analysis does not provide insight into the distinctive demands of online support. The importance of online support is likely related to the extent of offline support. If one finds support in real life through friends and family, online support might be less critical. In our study, we could not consider this issue; thus, whether people who receive support offline rely on online support remains unclear. Similarly, our study does not elucidate whether an unemployed person may compensate for his/her lack of support in real life through online support. Second, we assume that self-reporting bias affects job search behaviour. When asked about their job search activities, social desirability might have influenced the responses of some of participants. Thus, we assume that a segment of the respondents overestimated their job-seeking efforts in the questionnaire. Therefore, our study provides insight only into the intended, but not the actual job search behaviour. To mitigate this issue, collecting performance data might be a useful complement going forward. Data on actual job search behaviour, as expressed for instance through the numbers of applications send or interview held, would be a more appropriate measure for the outcomes of social media's supportive function during phases of unemployment. This type of data would also be helpful to open research to enquire into potential intention-behaviour gaps, and context factors that might explain such possible gaps.

Unemployed individuals face the loss of income, their previous social networks, and contact with work colleagues and the risk of becoming socially isolated. We posit that the experience of unemployment might differ because of the social and institutional contexts as well as time use during unemployment, which might increasingly be filled with online media. Narrative inquiry approaches in understanding how unemployed and underemployed persons understand and cope with their situations are promising approaches for understanding the frequently unique life circumstances of the unemployed, as shown, for instance, by Gabriel et al. (2010), and Blustein, Kozan and Connors-Kellgren (2013).

Contacts are believed to be a primary source of information about available jobs (Lambert, Eby, & Reeves, 2006; Leana & Feldman, 1995; Russell, 1999; Wanberg, 1997; Wanberg, Watt, & Rumsey, 1996). Considering the context of social media, concomitant with the importance of contacts is the use of social networks to expand job-seeking opportunities through impression management. Whether one chooses to present one's status as 'seeking work' thus becomes an important issue. As discussed above, unemployed individuals tend to be rather unwilling to openly express that they are jobless. Although individuals might share their feelings with close friends or family for emotional support, the topic is paradoxically excluded from the context of the job search. Thus, engaging in social media is not perceived as an opportunity to receive job offers from contacts but as an opportunity to lower their reputation and other's impression of them. Therefore, unemployed individuals do socially segregate or isolate themselves from important job information networks (Russell, 1999), and existing contacts (professional or private) tend to be avoided in the job search.

Extending the research into online impression management (Krämer & Winter, 2008; Walther et al., 2008) and into whether an online persona might be created that may be considered detrimental to image formation but beneficial from a reemployment perspective could be an interesting avenue of research to pursue. Similarly, the skill aspects of using online media might be an interesting topic to research. Wanberg (2012, p.380) argues that not all unemployed persons may be comfortable or able to use informal search methods or networking; thus, extending research into the online space and analysing the antecedents of weak networks or factors systematically affecting feelings of being uncomfortable with networking and requesting help from friends, family, and online acquaintances during the job search process could further our knowledge in this regard.

Saks and Ashforth (1997) show that informal sources of job information typically yield better search results than formal sources. Whether this finding holds for informal networks created and maintained through online media remains unclear. Additional evidence from Saks (2006) suggests that formal sources may perform better and that informal sources may even have negative effects under certain circumstances. Thus, adapting measures for job search quality to the online sphere (i.e., Saks, 2005; Van Hooft & Noordzij, 2009; Van Hoye, Van Hooft, & Lievens, 2009; Vinokur & Schul, 2002; Vuori & Vinokur, 2005; Wanberg et al., 2002; Wanberg, Kanfer, & Banas, 2000) that increasingly complement more traditional measures of job search behaviour might provide interesting insights. Unfortunately, this study could not examine these measures and their application to the online space in detail, but we think that the concept offers interesting opportunities for further research in the online space. We argue that, particularly in the online domain, information overload and social filtering could also predict job search quality; too much information or misleading information might have adverse consequences (Fountain, 2005). Large amounts of uncategorised or unverified data from the Internet data, procrastination in seeking new knowledge, and reduced self-efficacy in the use of such information might all prove to be detrimental to job search quality. In addition to questions about skills in evaluating information from nontraditional sources and coping with information overload caused by excessive amounts of information, questions about escapist tendencies via online media and their effect on job search quality and mental well-being, for instance, might be interesting.

Social support as a factor in helping individuals cope with and overcome unemployment remains a vexing issue. In particular, to gain more insight into the significance of online social support in the context of unemployment, we propose that further research test its impact on not only job search behaviour but also reemployment success. One interesting aspect that might be worth exploration concerns matters of reciprocity and the potential adverse effect of receiving high levels of support on self-efficacy (Jaeckel, Seiger, Orth & Wiese, 2012). Research maintains that being supported can be unpleasant because receiving social support might lead people to doubt their abilities to accomplish their goals and cope with difficulties on their own (Gleason, Iida, Bolger, Shrout, 2003; Gleason et al, 2008; Liang, Krause & Bennett, 2001). This finding may also be relevant in explaining the underadoption of online social networking for reemployment because some people may confuse networking with accepting help, as has been reported by Lu (1997).

Thus, the social support derived from new ICT counteracts, to a certain degree, the adverse effects of being unemployed. The unemployed might build more social relationships and use better-suited forms of infor-

mation reception and production to catch up with the labour market. Therefore, the possibilities and opportunities enabled by the new generation of social media technologies are highly relevant for the unemployed. Furthermore, new digital media provides additional possibilities to overcome exclusionary processes and structures and to influence the subjective perception of precariousness—and therefore the feeling of social exclusion—that has been expressed by unemployed persons. Finally, governmental and corporate actors' responsibility to foster societal cohesion should be addressed, which may ultimately lead to the development of new digital product offerings tailored to the needs of the unemployed. For instance, the people at the 'bottom of the digital pyramid' might benefit from more sophisticated Internet usage by gaining enhanced autonomy and by improving their capacity to accomplish more productive tasks for and by themselves.

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Table 1
Sample Profile (N = 2414)

Variables	Distribution	n	Percent	Missing
Gender	male	1205	49.9	-
	female	1209	50.1	
	Total	*2414*	*100*	
Age	18 - 25	804	33.3	-
	26 - 50	802	33.2	
	51 - 65	808	33.5	
	Total	*2414*	*100*	
Education	no high school diploma	90	3.9	86
	high school diploma not allowing direct access to college/ university	1631	70.0	
	high school diploma allowing access to college/university	607	26.1	
	Total	*2328*	*100*	
Region	urban	1209	50.1	-
	rural	1205	49.9	
	Total	*2414*	*100*	
User Experience[1]	no experience	497	20.6	4
	less than four years	353	14.7	
	More than four years	1560	64.7	
	Total	*2410*	*100*	
Internet Attitude	no usage	497	24.8	410
	positive	583	29.1	
	negative	924	46.1	
	Total	*2004*	*100*	

[1] The years of experience are with relation to the year 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
Measurement Model

Construct	Item	Standardised loading	t-values	R^2	α	CR	AVE
Caring Support	CSS_1	0.880	68.744***	0.775	0.900	0.901	0.753
	CSS_2	0.909	78.578***	0.825			
	CSS_3	0.812	52.225***	0.660			
Enabling Support	ESS_1	0.730	36.212***	0.533	0.834	0.843	0.642
	ESS_2	0.848	53.692***	0.718			
	ESS_3	0.821	48.625***	0.673			
Job Search Self-Efficacy	JSSE_1	0.804	59.632***	0.646	0.896	0.897	0.557
	JSSE_2	0.627	26.981***	0.393			
	JSSE_3	0.716	37.107***	0.513			
	JSSE_4	0.790	56.858***	0.624			
	JSSE_5	0.750	48.935***	0.562			
	JSSE_6	0.722	38.892***	0.522			
	JSSE_7	0.799	59.159***	0.639			
Job Search Behaviour	JSB_1	0.842	43.612***	0.709	0.825	0.827	0.615
	JSB_2	0.774	32.553***	0.600			
	JSB_3	0.733	31.462***	0.538			
Criterion		≥ 0.5	min*	≥ 0.4, < 0.9	≥ 0.7	≥ 0.6	≥ 0.5

*** $p \leq 0.001$

Table 3
Fornell-Larcker Criteria

Construct	**AVE**	**CARE_SUPP**	**ENAB_SUPP**	**SELF_EFF**
CARE_SUPP	0.75			
ENAB_SUPP	0.64	0.44		
SELF_EFF	0.56	0.00	0.01	
JOB SEARCH	0.62	0.00	0.03	0.01

Figure 1: Structural Equation Model

Table 4
Fit Indices

Index	Measurement model	Criterion
Chi-squared (p)	266.905 (0.000)	-
Degrees of freedom (df)	100	-
Chi-squared/d.f.	2.669	≤ 3
CFI	0.982	≥ 0.90
TLI	0.979	≥ 0.90
SRMR	0.037	< 0.08
RMSEA	0.036	≤ 0.05

Table 5
Parameter Estimates and Hypothesis Testing

Relationship	**Std. Estimate (t-value)**	**Result**
Caring Support → Job-Search Self-Efficacy	0.079 (1.960)*	supported
Enabling Support → Job-Search Self-Efficacy	0.211 (5.101)***	supported
Job-Search Self-Efficacy → Job Search	0.209 (5.804)***	supported
Indirect Relationship		
Caring Support → (Job-search Self-Efficacy) → Job Search	0.017 (1.900)	-
Enabling Support → (Job-Search Self-Efficacy) → Job Search	0.044 (3.570)***	-

* $p \leq 0.05$ ** $p \leq 0.01$ *** $p \leq 0.001$

Table 6
Means and Standard Deviations

Construct	Mean	Std. Deviation
Caring Support	3.76	1.34
Enabling Support	3.95	1.23
Job-Search Self-Efficacy	2.36	1.02
Job Search	1.86	1.12

Note: higher values denote lower agreement

Table 7

Multiple Group Analysis Fit Indices

	Constraints	**M_1** *Unconstrained (Configural)*	**M_2** *Factor Loading (Metric)*	**M_3** *Intercepts (Scalar)*	**Criterion** -
			Gender		
Chi-squared Test of Model Fit	Value (Chi-squared)	433.271	444.220	495.052	-
	df	200	212	224	-
	P-Value	0.000	0.000	0.000	-
	Chi-squared/df	2.17	2.10	2.21	≤ 3
RMSEA	Estimate	0.042	0.041	0.043	< 0.05
CFI/TLI	CFI	0.979	0.979	0.975	≥ 0.90
	TLI	0.975	0.976	0.974	≥ 0.90
SRMR	Value	0.040	0.041	0.044	≤ 0.08
			Age		
Chi-squared Test of Model Fit	Value (Chi-squared)	564.390	598.666	641.526	-
	df	312	336	348	-
	P-Value	0.000	0.000	0.000	-
	Chi-squared/df	1.81	1.78	1.84	≤ 3
RMSEA	Estimate	0.043	0.042	0.044	< 0.05
CFI/TLI	CFI	0.976	0.975	0.972	≥ 0.90
	TLI	0.972	0.973	0.971	≥ 0.90
SRMR	Value	0.045	0.050	0.052	≤ 0.08
			User Experience		
Chi-squared Test of Model Fit	Value (Chi-squared)	425.975	444.151	461.890	-
	df	200	212	224	-
	P-Value	0.000	0.000	0.000	-
	Chi-squared/df	2.13	2.10	2.06	≤ 3
RMSEA	Estimate	0.041	0.041	0.040	< 0.05
CFI/TLI	CFI	0.979	0.979	0.978	≥ 0.90
	TLI	0.975	0.976	0.977	≥ 0.90
SRMR	Value	0.041	0.043	0.044	≤ 0.08
			Internet Attitude		
Chi-squared Test of Model Fit	Value (Chi-squared)	399.306	423.663	453.825	-
	df	200	212	224	-
	P-Value	0.000	0.000	0.000	-
	Chi-squared/df	2.00	2.00	2.03	≤ 3
RMSEA	Estimate	0.043	0.043	0.044	< 0.05
CFI/TLI	CFI	0.976	0.974	0.972	≥ 0.90
	TLI	0.971	0.971	0.970	≥ 0.90
SRMR	Value	0.044	0.047	0.047	≤ 0.08

Table 8

Parameter Estimates and Hypothesis testing

Relationship	**Std. Estimate (t-value)**		
Gender	**Male**	**Female**	
Caring Support → Job-Search Self-Efficacy	0.047 (0.855)	0.169 (2.412)*	
Enabling Support → Job-Search Self-Efficacy	0.178 (3.176)***	0.188 (2.612)**	
Job-Search Self-Efficacy → Job Search	0.200 (4.723)***	0.266 (6.130)***	
Age	**18-25 years**	**26-50 years**	**51-65 years**
Caring Support → Job-Search Self-Efficacy	0.098 (1.508)	0.007 (0.089)	-0.014 (-0.178)
Enabling Support → Job-Search Self-Efficacy	0.158 (2.410)*	0.242 (3.258)***	0.226 (2.781)**
Job-Search Self-Efficacy → Job Search	0.208 (4.054)***	0.175 (3.295)***	0.192 (3.410)***
User Experience	**< 4 years**	**> 4 years**	
Caring Support → Job-Search Self-Efficacy	0.182 (1.920)	0.062 (1.290)	
Enabling Support → Job-Search Self-Efficacy	0.287 (2.970)**	0.196 (4.033)***	
Job-Search Self-Efficacy → Job Search	0.260 (3.865)***	0.174 (5.010)***	
Internet Perception	**Positive**	**Negative**	
Caring Support → Job-Search Self-Efficacy	-0.011 (-0.153)	0.060 (1.018)	
Enabling Support → Job-Search Self-Efficacy	0.143 (1.980)*	0.158 (2.591)**	
Job-Search Self-Efficacy → Job Search	0.187 (3.329)***	0.195 (4.471)***	

Appendix A: List of Variables in the Structural Equation Model

Construct	Item	Translated Wording (Scale)[2]
Caring Support	CSS_1	People who I know on the Internet comfort me when I am in a bad mood (e.g., in an email, while chatting in a forum, or in a social network).
	CSS_2	People on the Internet feel for me when I am feeling blue (e.g., in an email, while chatting in a forum, or on a social network).
	CSS_3	People on the Internet show me that they care about me (e.g., in an email, while chatting in a forum, or on a social network).
Enabling Support	ESS_1	People who I know on the Internet recommend contacts to me (e.g., in an email, while chatting in a forum, or on a social network).
	ESS_2	People who I know on the Internet help me in the process of finding a job (e.g., by giving me recommendations for job searches or vacancies).
	ESS_3	People on the Internet point me to job openings.
Job Search Self-Efficacy	JSSE_1	When I run into a problem, I am able solve it if I try.
	JSSE_2	I can realise my goals and ambitions without problems.
	JSSE_3	When encountering unexpected situations, I know how to act.
	JSSE_4	I am calm in the face of adversity because I trust my abilities.
	JSSE_5	For each problem that I run into, I can find a solution.
	JSSE_6	When a new challenge arises, I know how I can handle it.
	JSSE_7	If a problem occurs, I am able to solve it on my own.
Job Behaviour	JSB_1	I am very active in searching for a job.
	JSB_2	I plan to continue actively searching for a job.
	JSB_3	I am always working on further improving my job search.
Online Cognition Scale	OCS_1	I am most comfortable online.
	OCS_2	I can be myself online.
	OCS_3	People accept me for who I am online.
	OCS_4	I say or do things on the Internet that I could never do offline.
	OCS_5	I am less lonely when I am online.
	OCS_6	The Internet is an important part of my life.

[2] 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

Appendix B: Tests for Common Method Variance

We applied some ex-ante measures in the survey design to address CMV, such as randomization of items, separating the independent and dependent variables, and reverse coding some items. We also tested for CMV, conducting the CFA marker technique proposed by Williams, Hartman, and Cavazotte (2010). The CFA marker test requires a marker uncorrelated to the model constructs (Williams et al., 2010). We used a factor comprised of four items derived from the Mood Adjective Check List (Nowlis, 1965), measuring affective Internet involvement. It can be assumed that this factor is not correlated with caring support, enabling support, job-search self-efficacy, and job search behavior. Table C.1 shows the results of the different models for the comprehensive CFA marker test, as suggested by Williams et al. (2010). First, there exists hardly any difference between the baseline model and the first model with marker loadings present (Method-C). The absence of a significant difference points to weak or non-existent method effects. Comparing the models Method-C, Method-U and Method-R, Model-C performs best. This is a model where all loadings of the substantial constructs on the marker factor are constrained to be equal. Method-U, where the items are allowed to load freely on the marker could not be computed. Model-R, containing constrained correlations between the substantial constructs (obtained from the baseline model), did not converge.

Table Appendix B1
Results of the Comprehensive CFA Marker Technique Test

Model	Chisquare	df	CFI
CFA	358.583	160	0.987
Baseline	352.025	167	0.988
Method-C	349.688	166	0.988
Method-U	could not be computed	-	-
Method-R	no convergence	-	-
Chisquare Model Comparison Tests			
Diff Models	Diff Chisquare	Diff df	Chisquare Critical Value; 0.05
Baseline vs. Method-C	2.337	1	3.84

The average squared loadings of the items on the marker construct are 0.01 (0.109*0.109) and none of the marker loadings are significantly different from 0 at the 5 percent level. Thus, about 1 percent of the total variance in the items may be attributed to the marker–or CMV. We therefore conclude that strong CMV can be excluded (Podsakoff et al., 2003).