Beyond Networking: Does Social Comparison on LinkedIn Influence Job Search

Anxiety by Reducing Career-Related Self-Efficacy of Graduate Students?

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Abstract

The landscape of career development is evolving constantly, and digital tools play an increasingly important part in exploring and finding a job. Social networking services (SNS) such as LinkedIn are becoming more influential with an increasing number of active users. There is a growing interest in understanding the impact of LinkedIn use on the individual's mental health, particularly their self-efficacy and job search anxiety. Existing research offers conflicting perspectives on the role of social comparison in the context of LinkedIn, and it is debated whether viewing successes of peers promotes or decreases the belief in one's abilities. This study aims at adding to this debate by providing insights through primary data from German graduate students currently looking for their first employment. Particularly, this research investigates to what extent social comparison on LinkedIn influences job search anxiety by affecting the career-related self-efficacy of graduate students. To address this research question, a quantitative approach is utilized to aggregate insights from a variety of respondents. The statistical analysis finds that, in contrast to other academic literature, social comparison on LinkedIn actually increases career-related self-efficacy, and significantly reduces job search anxiety at all stages of LinkedIn usage intensity. Based on these insights, the role of LinkedIn use amongst graduate students is highlighted, however, correct use is recommended to avoid negative impact on mental health. Therefore, one can suggest that universities and other academic institutions should increasingly include correct LinkedIn use into the curriculum of the study programs, to prepare their students better for the first step into the professional world. Future research should focus on expanding on the results of this study and confirm the generalizability and applicability of the found results. Here, particular focus should be given to qualitative research in the form of interviews, as well as longitudinal data to account for economic shifts, and enhance the overall quality of the insights. In conclusion, this research expands on existing literature streams and discovers an interesting dynamic between social comparison and job search anxiety through the use of LinkedIn.

Keywords: *social comparison, career-related self-efficacy, job search anxiety, cultivation, LinkedIn*

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Introduction

Thousands of university students enter the job market each year (Eurostat, 2021). This step is critical, as it turns career dreams into reality, enabling fulfilling careers (Strapp et al., 2020, p. 145). However, the process of finding a desirable job opening is often frustrating and demotivating (van Hooft et al., 2021, p. 676), especially for students seeking their first real job (Kim et al., 2022, p. 2; Reitz et al., 2019, p. 693). Thus, self-doubt rises as graduate students start to question their qualifications when things do not go their way (Kim et al., 2022, p. 2). Career-related self-efficacy, the concept of an individual's belief in their capacity to fulfill their career aspirations, is crucial for mental health and success during applications (Ballout, 2009, p. 665).

Within this challenging landscape, the relevance of social networking services (SNS) has increased over the years (Davis et al., 2020, p. 2). While job search has become much more digitized during the last decades (Masarova & Gullerova, 2020, p. 38), LinkedIn stands out globally as the online platform to connect with peers and share professional content (Davis et al., 2020, p. 1; Risdarmawan, 2023, p. 63). Despite the various benefits of the platform for networking and career development, it is known to be a place of perfection, where users aim to only show the best version of themselves (Tobback, 2019, p. 651; Zhang et al., 2024, p. 95). Furthermore, social comparison is fueled by SNS, and is a critical topic that can have significant influence on mental health and self-belief (Marder et al., 2024, p. 494). This phenomenon is common for social media (Camacho-Miñano & Gray, 2021, p. 725; Hellmann, 2016, p. 2), but can have implications in the context of graduate students comparing amongst themselves, which can lead to increased levels of state anxiety and reduced levels of self-worth (Pisarik et al., 2017, p. 339; Zhang et al., 2024, p. 95).

Although academics have analyzed the concept of anxiety, self-efficacy and social comparison with regards to the process of finding a job, there is a gap in understanding LinkedIn use and how personal characteristics contribute to career-outcome expectations and state anxiety (Pena et al., 2022, p. 788). While previous studies analyzed the effect of social media on promoting employability (Badoer et al. 2020, p. 200) and the influence of social networking sites on career development (Avci, 2020, p. 652; Ma & Leung, 2019, p. 1060), little attention has been given to specific dynamics of LinkedIn usage and its effects on self-efficacy and consequences to mental health. Furthermore, it is essential to note that the listed studies mostly focus on future stages of career development. In contrast, the current study seeks to fill this gap by analyzing the experience of graduate students, shedding light on the early stages of their professional journey. It is important to further investigate the impact of professional SNS usage on job search anxiety, based on a number of reasons. One aspect is that it is important to better understand career transition challenges. Many graduate students often face unique challenges when moving from the context of studying and learning to the actual workforce (Herbert et al., 2020, p. 6; Teichler, 2018, p. 26). By further investigating job search anxiety, one can gain further insights into the particular causes for rising anxiety statistics, as well as other roadblocks during this critical phase of professional development. Thus, the issue at hand can

be investigated under the following research question:

To what extent does social comparison on LinkedIn influence job search anxiety among graduate students?

Better understanding the self-efficacy and mental health of graduate students is important for the development of a confident workforce (Busselle & van den Bulck, 2019, p. 76). Insights can lead to valuable implications for policymakers, businesses, and the affected individuals themselves (Ng et al., 2021, p. 853). For instance, institutions could better prepare their students for their first job by acknowledging possible struggles, pressures and common conditions that evolved during recent years (Garcia-Aracil et al., 2018, p. 50), and practitioners in the field of career development can use these insights to better understand where issues occur and work on strategies to help students make that first step. Furthermore, LinkedIn itself could benefit by making their platform a safer space for its younger users by addressing potential negative impacts on mental health themselves. Policymakers may utilize these insights to create frameworks and guidelines that ensure that social media are nourishing an environment of support that shield young professionals from negative effects through using these platforms.

This research attempts to contribute to the literature stream of social comparison, job search anxiety and career-related self-efficacy by providing novel, primary data and subsequent implications that add to the academic debate. By highlighting limitations and areas of future research, this study aims to spark interest in this topic area and promote further research in this field. It is clear that LinkedIn is a powerful tool for both end-users and recruiters. However, despite the drastic increase in the popularity of LinkedIn, only little academic research has been conducted to explore the usefulness and impact of using professional SNS (Johnson & Leo, 2021, p. 1262). Therefore, understanding the consequences of its use becomes important, given the likelihood of further growth in active users.

Theoretical Framework

The Role of LinkedIn in Professional Networking and Career Development

It is crucial to establish a theoretical background to understand the argumentation and purpose of this research paper. The first concept that needs to be defined is social networking services (SNS), also known as social media. These are applications that facilitate the creation and transmission of different content formats, such as words, pictures, videos and audio (Koch et al., 2018, p. 4). Communities of people share content, knowledge, and opinions, driving a discourse of information that everyone can access oftentimes for free (Koch et al., 2018, p. 4). Hoffman and Fodor (2010, p. 41) argue that users are interested in joining these SNS based on four motivations: to connect, create, consume, and control. These motivations differ in strength based on the user, yet one can posit that

users obtain certain value from using these platforms. Moreover, multiple types of SNS can be attractive to users. For instance, Facebook emphasizes personal profiles on which users can share their favorite interests and stay in touch with family and friends through connection features, driving millions to the platform (Utz, 2016, p. 2688). Another example is Twitter, now "X", which has driven success by offering ways for users to create and consume, where following interesting people and sharing thoughts on subjects are appealing features (Utz, 2016, p. 2689). Hence, it is classified as a microblogging tool (Koch et al., 2018, p. 4).

Next to entertainment and communication purposes, social networking services are recognized as a crucial resource for career-related aspects (Levine & Aley, 2020, p. 445; Pena et al., 2022, p. 790). The changing nature of work underscores the importance of social connections (Badoer et al., 2020, p. 198), thus effective networking can catalyze professional advancement. Established in 2003 and with 745 million users globally from over 200 countries (Florenthal, 2015, p. 17), LinkedIn is the largest professional social networking site and plays a considerable part in changing the way people search and apply for jobs (Risdarmawan, 2023, p. 63). In contrast to other popular SNS, LinkedIn focuses on professional life. Profiles on LinkedIn resemble a CV, and people are most likely to follow colleagues, fellow students, professors, and other people of interest such as celebrities or influencers (Utz, 2016, p. 2689)

About 46 million LinkedIn users are currently studying at university or are recent graduates (Daniels et al., 2021, p. 91). Although it is generally free, the platform offers paid features unlocking additional capabilities (LinkedIn, 2024). Since its creation in 2003, the platform has metamorphosed into a comprehensive professional ecosystem, including job search features and training programs. LinkedIn offers several affordances that make it a comprehensive networking tool, empowering individuals to enhance their skills, engage with businesses and other professionals and explore career opportunities (Tobback, 2019, p. 650; Quast, 2015, para. 5). Masciantonio and Bourguignon (2023, p. 31) underline that instead of promoting one's personal self, such as on Facebook or Instagram, LinkedIn is clearly showcasing the professional self. LinkedIn allows users to display information about their educational background, career steps, the projects they have worked on, other professional experiences, and skills they possess (Cubrich et al., 2021, p. 3). These skills might highlight and boost the credibility of someone showcasing valuable skills in certain areas (Cubrich et al., 2021, p. 4). Additionally, LinkedIn users can provide written recommendations and endorsements, create personal posts, as well as like and comment on other users' activity. Researchers find that networking through LinkedIn can benefit students as they learn to promote themselves, build a social network and develop career knowledge, as well as the possibility of obtaining career sponsorship and job assistance (Davis et al., 2020, p. 2; Slone & Gaffney, 2016, p. 207). Additionally, users can enhance their network and develop their personal brand (Pena et al., 2022, p. 790).

Not only do students and professionals connect to their peers but companies are also using the platform to attract new talent to their firms. Daniels et al. (2021, p. 91) discovered that about 90% of recruiters use LinkedIn when searching for potential employees. LinkedIn offers job search features, where companies can post their openings to the public, and individuals with a LinkedIn profile can directly apply. In addition to this component, recruiters use LinkedIn to evaluate individual characteristics of job applicants (Cubrich et al. 2021, p. 4; Hosain & Liu, 2020, p. 55). As the LinkedIn profile of an individual is usually more extensive than a regular CV, recruiters use the platform as an evaluation tool to decide whether the prerequisites of a candidate are adequate for their open positions. Hiring managers believe that LinkedIn can be seen as an equivalent to regular CVs in terms of construct validity to assess personality and slightly lower predictive validity for assessing skills and cognitive ability (Cubrich et al., 2021, p. 5; Hosain & Liu, 2020, p. 65).

Understanding Job Search Anxiety of Graduate Students

One negative effect of using SNS such as LinkedIn is that they can worsen the mental health of the users, inducing depression and anxiety through mechanisms of social comparison (Marder et al., 2024, p. 494; Ozimek & Bierhoff, 2019, p. 1111). This phenomenon can be observed for both regular, as well as professional SNS (Beyari, 2023, p. 8; Naslund et al., 2020, p. 249; O'Reilly et al., 2018, para. 29). Anxiety is particularly interesting to investigate, as the concept has received a drastic increase in awareness over the past years (Freiling et al., 2021, p. 146). Anxiety is defined as the continuous feeling of nervousness, worrying and fear, with physical symptoms such as headaches, nausea and shortness of breath. It is a common mental condition mainly caused by stress (Chi et al., 2023, p. 2). This condition is also characterized by temporary, recurring concerns and thoughts of worry (American Psychological Association, 2022). Spielberger (1983, p. 146) makes an important differentiation between trait anxiety and state anxiety. Trait anxiety are the individual differences in terms of proneness to anxiety as a personality trait. Individuals that show higher trait anxiety are more likely to manifest anxiety states compared to non-anxious persons. In other words, the predisposition for this condition differs between individuals. In contrast, state anxiety describes the complex emotional state which varies in intensity and changes over a certain period of time as a function of situational stress. State anxiety promotes feelings of tenseness as well as heightened autonomic nervous system activity (Spielberger, 1983, p. 146). In short, state anxiety is the temporary state of this condition that is caused by immediate factors. Throughout this paper, the term "anxiety" always refers to state anxiety, as this denotes a temporary condition as a consequence of a variety of factors.

Graduate students frequently suffer from anxiety (Bekkouche at al., 2021, p. 550; Garcia-Williams et al., 2014, p. 554; Tan & Yates, 2011, p. 392). Estimates for the prevalence of anxiety among graduate students range between 13% and 47% (Eisenberg et al., 2007, p. 537; Evans et al., 2018, p. 282; Hyun et al., 2006, p. 260) and are two to six times higher than the general population

(Hyun et al., 2006, p. 260). This is in line with findings within a German sample, which showed that 31.8% of students suffer from anxiety and depressive syndromes (Wörfel et al., 2013, p. 2). Chi et al. (2023, p. 12) provide more precise research and show that from the respondents from around the world, such as the US, UK, China and India, around 19.1% of graduate students had mild anxiety, 15.1% had moderate anxiety and 10.3% had severe anxiety.

Several reasons contribute to these high numbers. First, life after university can be frightening (Belle et al., 2021, p.1126). There is uncertainty about employment expectancies and social pressures, often triggered through social comparison that can trigger anxiety. Secondly, the fear of unemployment or starting a job perceived to be below one's capabilities can be significant (De Castella et al., 2013, p. 862). This fear is likely driven by societal judgment, contributing to anxiety as students struggle to cope with the possibility of not living up to expectations (De Castella et al., 2013, p. 862; Risdarmawan, 2023, p. 63). Thirdly, financial concerns can build additional pressure as students want to gain independence from their families (Cho & Hayter, 2020, p. 763).

When narrowing the greater concept of anxiety, one specific type is very applicable to the context of this study. Job search anxiety relates to the worrying and fear that people experience before and during their application phase for a job (Britton, 2019, p. 3). According to Britton (2019, p. 3), the transition from university to employment is a crucial stage in a student's life. For this, the student must search and apply for a job, which includes collecting information about the job market, and specifically looking at existing jobs, examining job openings, and identifying characteristics of each job (Britton, 2019, p. 3). Symptoms for job search anxiety are nervousness towards getting a job, as well as the feeling of worry and tenseness about finding a position that is the right fit for this individual (Britton, 2019, p. 3). Britton (2019, p. 4) finds that people with job search anxiety might not believe in their capabilities to find a job that is desirable for them or to find a job at all.

Pisarik et al. (2017, p. 339) discover that career-related anxiety has a negative relationship with career information-seeking behavior, general decision-making and career choice certainty. According to the authors, there are two causes for this anxiety. The first one relates to existential concerns. Students are contemplating their career decisions particularly thoroughly as there is a strong desire to find a job that is meaningful and fulfilling in the foreseeable future (Barhate & Dirani, 2021, p. 152; Kim et al., 2022, p. 2, Ulrich et al., 2021, p. 2). The second cause is pressure. Pressure from parents, friends who work already, or peers who exhibit greater certainty regarding their future career. Apparently, this peer pressure has been affecting students even before they start their degree (Sarkar et al., 2022, p. 8119; Yang et al., 2022, p. 3).

Furthermore, LinkedIn, as well as other professional SNS, are becoming more prevalent and important in the digital age (Risdarmawan, 2023, p. 63). Understanding to what extent these platforms contribute to negative mental health effects allows these platforms to implement measures that spark positivity and confidence, rather than nervousness and fear. Here, it is critical to better understand the root-causes of our mental health and what aspects are driving negative effects.

Social Comparison Theory: How Comparing Oneself Impacts Mental Health

A key element of why users of professional SNS claim to experience a negative impact on their mental health is the fact that they can constantly compare themselves to others. To better understand how humans behave and why they make certain decisions, particularly with regard to their career and professional development, social comparison theory is an important concept to understand. In particular, the theory provides evidence and explanation as to how individuals base their opinions and desires, namely on the comparison to others (Festinger, 1954, p. 133). There is a drive within humans, which causes them to look to outside images in order to evaluate their own opinions. These images may be a comparison to physical or mental abilities of other people (Festinger, 1954, p. 133). According to Festinger (1954, p. 133), the intensity and frequency of social comparison can differ and are influenced by several factors such as personality traits, self-esteem and feeling of achievement. Gerber (2020, p. 1) states that current models of social comparison expand beyond Festinger's initial definition. Social comparison can be divided into four different parts: who people compare with, why they compare, the effects of those comparisons, and who is likely to compare.

Gerber (2020, p. 2) argues that the level of similarity between individuals is important, as a high school student might choose someone of similar age and schooling for a comparison of intelligence. It is more difficult to determine why we compare, rather than who we compare to, as there are a variety of factors involved. Most social comparison research has examined the effects of comparison on individuals and potential moderators of these effects. An important model that supports in analyzing these effects is the selective accessibility model (SAM) by Mussweiler and Strack (1999, p. 139), under which individuals make a judgment of overall similarity between themselves and a target. Naturally, individuals differ in the frequency with which they compare with others, called comparison orientation, and gender differences can be observed as well (Gerber, 2020, p. 4). Females tend to compare themselves more frequently, which is strongly linked to appearance, causing low body satisfaction, eating disorders and depression.

Social media platforms arguably intensify social comparison, and several papers identify possible effects on, for example, users' body image (Lewallen & Behm-Morawitz, 2016, p. 2), feelings of loneliness (Yang, 2016, p. 704) or identity distress (Yang et al., 2022 p. 98). Tifferet and Vilnai-Yavetz (2018, p. 34) state that one of the strongest motivations to use social networks is self-presentation, as individuals seek to feel superior to their peers. This finding is closely connected to social comparison theory, as self-presentation can be seen as a tool to fit in and outperform others when making comparisons. Placing value on self-presentation on LinkedIn has benefits. For instance, profiles that are extensively and well-designed tend to attract more recruiters since recruiters can more readily infer characteristics and strengths that are relevant for the positions (van de Ven et al., 2017, p. 425).

It is in the nature of SNS that individuals always want to portray the best version of themselves, often leading to a misrepresentation of people's lives (Marder et al., 2024, p. 494). This is closely

linked to the concept of self-presentation, where individuals seek to show the best version of themselves to the outside world (Tifferet & Vilnai-Yavetz. 2018, p. 34). Pisarik et al. (2017, p. 344) argue that through the omnipresence of SNS these constant opportunities for self-comparison about themselves and their career development can be damaging for the confidence in one's abilities. As graduate students are increasingly turning towards LinkedIn for their job searching and networking needs (Johnson & Leo, 2020, p. 1265; Risdarmawan, 2023, p. 63), this can pose a real danger. Oziek and Bierhoff (2020, p. 1111) stress that SNS use intensity offers an immense amount of information, which can be extracted and digested by the users to socially compare themselves, thus often impairing their self-esteem. In the context of graduate students looking for jobs and career development opportunities, these individuals can quickly start feeling symptoms of anxiety and depression, especially when their life feels less fulfilling than the one of their peers, which they observe on SNS (Britton, 2019, p. 3; Kim et al., 2022, p. 7).

Accordingly, graduate students start to think that they are less competent than others, which fuels negative emotions, occasionally resulting in a feeling of not belonging while browsing LinkedIn (Marder et al., 2024, p. 494). The authors state that it is not only a comparison to others but oftentimes also a comparison against an ideal self, which can often be unrealistic and difficult to live up to, causing negative emotions. Studies underline that social media serve as comparison tools for students, which worsen their anxiety (Pisarik et al., 2017, p. 339; Zhang et al., 2023, p. 95). When investigating LinkedIn specifically it was proven that the platform has a negative impact on self-efficacy, driven by self-comparison, which conclusively can lead to frustration (Fukubayashi & Fuji, 2021, p. 7; Johnson & Leo, 2020, p. 1274). Thus, the users' self-beliefs are negatively impacted.

While previous studies have acknowledged the role of social comparison in causing anxiety on social media platforms (Marder et al., 2024, p. 494; Ozimek & Bierhoff, 2019, p. 1111), there is limited research focusing on LinkedIn and its usage effects on job search anxiety, in particular among graduate students (Johnson & Leo, 2020, p. 1274; Fukubayashi & Fuji, 2021, p. 7). Therefore, the first hypothesis of this study investigates the direct relationship between the degree of social comparison, the independent variable of this study, and job search anxiety, the dependent variable and is formulated as follows:

H1:   The likeliness to compare oneself to others increases job search anxiety

Exploring the Concept of Self-Efficacy and its Implications for Career Development

The social cognitive theory (SCT), developed by Albert Bandura (2002, p. 94), is a comprehensive concept, which emphasizes the dynamic interaction between environmental influences, personal factors and behavior (Lent et al., 2006, p. 14). According to Bandura (2002, p. 94), people are actors as well as products of the environment (Luszcynska & Schwarzer, 2015, p. 128). Bandura (2002, p. 94) stresses the concept of self-efficacy, the individual's belief in their capacity to execute a certain behavior successfully. According to Luszcynska and Schwarzer (2015,

p. 128), this causes people to lead more active and self-determined lives. In contrast, people with lower levels of self-efficacy tend to show aspects of depression, anxiety, and helplessness. This perceived self-efficacy is an important psychological component which can strongly affect human functioning throughout their life (Johnson & Leo, 2020, p. 1263; Saks, 1995, p. 211). While different types of successes build a robust belief in one's personal efficacy, failures undermine it (Bussey & Bandura, 1999, p. 691). Saks (1995, p. 211) states that the concept of self-efficacy is fluid and dynamic and changes over time in response to new experiences and information. Therefore, the individual's self-efficacy is rarely kept stable as new influences boost and weaken their self-confidence depending on the situation.

According to Johnson and Leo (2020, p. 1264), self-efficacy can be built in three ways. First, through mastery experience, the practicing of a behavior and overcoming obstacles related to that behavior. Second, by receiving encouragement and feedback on having the skills to succeed, also named verbal persuasion. Third, through social modeling when comparing oneself to others (Bussey & Bandura, 1999, p. 692; Johnson & Leo, 2020, p. 1264). This third reason is particularly interesting in the context of this study. LinkedIn provides opportunities to socially model by suggesting connections, and giving access to other users' profiles from which individuals get inspired and build self-efficacy for their own outward presentation (Johnson & Leo, 2020, p. 1264). This can be linked to social comparison theory, as the user is actively comparing and acting on these comparisons. Johnson and Leo (2020, p. 1264) also argue that the characteristics of LinkedIn can impact these aspects and thus influence the level of self-efficacy of an individual. Networking with others and developing skills to differentiate themselves from others can help create a mastery experience. Social modeling occurs naturally as access to other users' profiles allows for comparison and influence based on appearance. Verbal persuasion can also be achieved through features like endorsements and recommendations from others on the platform (Meier & Johnson, 2022, p. 1; Vogel et al., 2015, p. 250).

Lent et al. (2006, p. 14) built on Bandura's work and developed the social cognitive career theory (SCCT). This framework expands on the classical SCT and focuses on the cognitive processes of individuals when making career-related decisions and the role of social factors in shaping these decisions. The authors hypothesize that if humans act differently depending on how they view their own abilities, they might show contrasting behaviors in the field of career decision-making, job applications and performance. Lent et al. (2006, p. 15) discover that increased self-efficacy is linked to positive outcomes in career preparation and planning, thereby reinforcing motivation to explore diverse career paths. These findings are supported by other studies, which underline a positive association between high levels of self-efficacy and job search initiatives, the ability to cope, and job performance (Eden & Aviram, 1993, p. 354; Pinquart et al., 2003, p. 331; Saks, 1995, p. 211; Zikic & Saks, 2009, p. 122). Researchers expect that students with higher self-esteem and perception of

preparedness will be more successful, but they call for additional research on this relationship (Masciantonio & Bourguignon, 2023, p. 40).

It is very relevant to better understand the interplay between career-related self-efficacy and job search anxiety, as this relationship has not yet been investigated. Studies have found links between self-efficacy and job search initiatives (Eden & Aviram, 1993, p. 354; Pinquart et al., 2003, p. 331; Saks, 1995, p. 211; Zikic and Saks, 2009, p. 122), but did not consider job search anxiety as a dependent variable. This is why this study analyzes this specific relationship in an effort to discover whether career-related self-efficacy acts as a mediator between the tendency to compare oneself to others and job search anxiety. The second hypothesis analyzes the relationship between the independent variable and career-related self-efficacy, while the third hypothesis investigates the relationship between self-efficacy and job search anxiety. Together, these hypotheses assess the mediation effect of career-related self-efficacy and are formulated as follows:.

H2: The likeliness to compare oneself to others will be negatively associated with career-related self-efficacy.

H3: Career-related self-efficacy will be negatively associated with the level of job search anxiety.

Applying Cultivation Theory in the Era of Social Media

Cultivation theory is another important concept that is relevant for this study. Cultivation theory was developed as a critical alternative to the then-dominant approaches to media effects research that mainly focused on behavioral change (Hermann, 2023, p. 2493). In the 1970s, George Gerbner was interested in how the entire system of symbolic cultural messages disseminated by television helped shape and sustain the collective consciousness of large communities over prolonged periods of time. The prolonged exposure to media content shapes one's perceptions of reality (Gerbner & Gross, 1976, p. 5). According to Gerbner, mass communication was driven by large commercial institutions that used television to take over storytelling and create a cultural mainstream, negatively affecting society (Hermann, 2023, p. 2493). Several studies have used cultivation theory to examine television's contributions to images about different topics, such as gender roles (Scharrer & Blackburn, 2018, p. 149), minorities (Mastro & Robinson, 2000, p. 386), or health (Record, 2011, p. 2). Although this original cultivation theory was mainly based on television, the research focus has nowadays shifted to social media to assess whether this theory still holds in today's world (Hermann et al., 2023, p. 2493; Nevzat, 2018, p. 2).

Hermann (2023, p. 2494) argues that in many ways cultivation and social media do not fit together since the original cultivation hypotheses were premised on the notion that most viewers were watching the same television programs. This contrasts social media, where the abundance of content makes it very unlikely that two individuals are exposed to the exact same content (Hermann, 2023, p. 2494; Nevzat, 2018, p. 2). Social media has influencers and viral content but does not share

stories in the same sense that television does. Content is highly personalized based on the users' social network, content engagement and browsing behavior. Stein et al. (2021, p. 8) argue that cultivation theory has rarely been used in combination with social media, and they base this statement on two reasons. Firstly, the negative effects of using social media can occur quite quickly, sometimes even after one-time only exposure, which is why there is no apparent need for cultivation theory research as it may not be a prolonged process like in television (Fardouly et al., 2015, p. 37; Stein et al., 2021, p. 8). Secondly, for such a cultivation to take place it requires certain stimuli, for example a standardized and predetermined TV schedule, in order to be effective (Stein et al., 2021, p. 8). This is not applicable to social media.

Despite these arguments, several researchers have tested social media effects using the theoretical framework of cultivation theory and argue that it also holds for social media (Nevzat, 2018, p. 2; Stein et al., 2021, p. 6; Williams & Fedorowicz, 2019, p. 3110). Researchers state that social media platforms are oftentimes more homogeneous than it might seem at first glance (Busselle & Van den Bulck, 2019, p. 76; Krcmar, 2019, p. 118; Shamsian 2018, para. 2; Yau & Reich, 2018, p. 197). The different platforms thrive through user-generated content and try to align their posts to trends and mainstream dynamics in order to get the highest visibility, causing quite similar content despite the variety of users (Hermann et al., 2023, p. 2494).

Furthermore, Krcmar (2019, p. 118) argues that social media seem to function similarly to traditional media, and cultivation effects might even be stronger with the capabilities of the internet. His work builds on Bandura's (2002, p. 96) argumentation and suggests that identification with the actor of modeled behavior is important to determine the imitation outcomes (Krcmar, 2019, p.121). In other words, as users adapt their posting and consumption behavior to others, they do not only consume similar content, but are actively changing their behavior, which can be interpreted as an even stronger effect of cultivation compared to television. In the case of LinkedIn, the individuals that are to be imitated are often friends or peers, causing homogenization within networks which gets stronger the more time users interact with the platform (Krcmar, 2019, p. 118). Hermann et al. (2023, p. 2507) recommend that going forward, social media researchers can draw on relevant aspects of cultivation theory despite its fit with social media being far from seamless given the many important ways in which social media diverge from the theory's assumptions. Nonetheless, the authors encourage researchers studying social media to continue to develop theoretical frameworks that may lead to new and different ways of thinking about and testing social media effects that can better capture their own distinctive characteristics (Hermann et al., 2023, p. 2507).

Cultivation research underlines that increased consumption can lead to anxiety, as users are more likely to compare themselves to others (Gu et al., 2023, p. 11; Stein et al., 2021, p. 6). This is a clear link between social comparison theory and cultivation theory, as both can serve as driving forces for why job search anxiety may increase when using professional SNS, such as LinkedIn. Cultivation theory focuses on prolonged exposure to certain content, thus causing effects based on long-term

consumption (Gerbner & Gross, 1976, p. 5; Krcmar, 2019, p. 118; Yau & Reich, 2018, p. 197). Social comparison theory on the other hand emphasizes the immediate effect in terms of what emotional effect an individual feels when seeing content from another user (Festinger, 1954, p. 133; Marder et al., 2024, p. 494; Pisarik et al., 2017, p. 339; Zhang et al., 2024, p. 95). One can argue that both work together, as longer exposure to content that leads to social comparison can amplify negative effects.

Research on the effects of cultivation theory within social media suggests that longer, and particularly a more intense exposure to these platforms can shape an individual's perception and beliefs (Nevzat, 2018, p. 2; Stein et al., 2021, p. 6; Williams & Fedorowicz, 2019, p. 3110). According to Stein et al. (2021, p. 2), mere usage time of social media cannot predict assumed outcomes with regards to cultivation, as the intensity of use during that time is critical. Furthermore, investigating use intensity rather than only the time consumed on the platform may lead to more profound effects with regards to the other variables as the concept adds an important dimension (Stein et al., 2021, p. 2). This is important in the context of this research, as this suggests a causal relationship between the usage intensity on a SNS and the consequential negative effects that it brings forth. When looking at the research topic introduced in this study, these theoretical insights create a potential link between the usage intensity of LinkedIn and a negative effect on job search anxiety, as prolonged exposure causes negative effects. This research poses the possibility that usage intensity can have a moderating effect on the main relationship, the likelihood to compare oneself to others on LinkedIn and job search anxiety. Based on the research conducted on social comparison and cultivation theory (Bilandzic & Busselle, 2012, p. 261; Hermann et al., 2023, p. 2496), one can suspect that two people with a similar disposition to compare themselves to others may have different levels of job search anxiety if one uses LinkedIn very intensely, whereas the other does not at all. In a similar logic, two individuals equally likely to compare themselves on LinkedIn may have different levels of career-related self-efficacy based on how intensely they interact with the platform as one is significantly more often exposed to relevant content. Therefore, LinkedIn use intensity is considered as a moderator in this study, both on the main relationship and on the connection between the IV and mediator, rather than an independent variable. Such a relationship has not been tested in any other research study previously (Gerbner & Gross, 1976, p. 5; Krcmar, 2019, p. 118; Yau & Reich, 2018, p. 197), yet it may drive the literature stream forward and is relevant to better understand how LinkedIn use can affect the mental health of graduate students. This moderation effect will be tested on both the direct relationship between social comparison and job search anxiety, as well as the direct relationship between social comparison and career-related self-efficacy.

H4: Intensity of LinkedIn use positively moderates the relationship between the likeliness to compare oneself to others and job search anxiety.

H5: Intensity of LinkedIn use positively moderates the relationship between the likeliness to compare oneself to others and career-related self-efficacy.

Research Framework

When putting the different hypotheses together, the conceptual model *Figure B1* can be created. The model depicts the key variables of the study, the relationship between the independent and dependent variable, as well as the mediating and moderating effect that this study attempts to identify.

Figure B1

Conceptual Model of Research Study
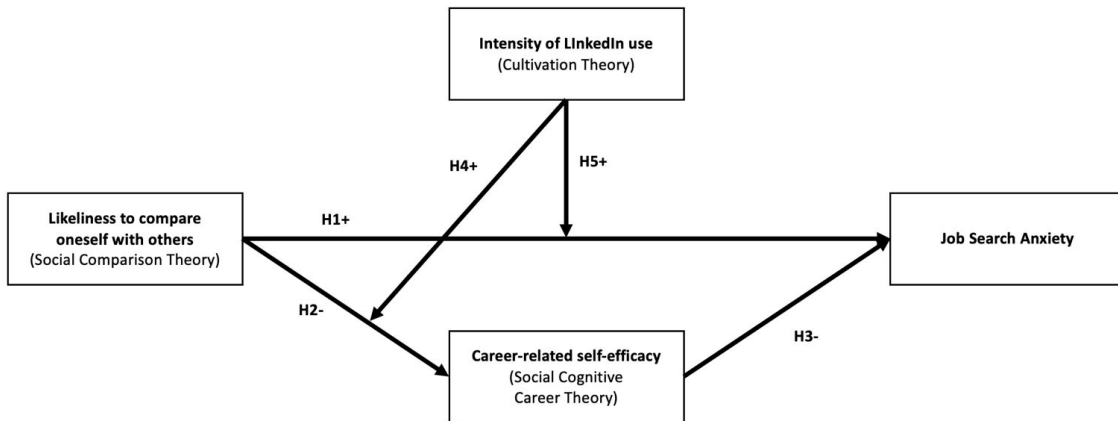
Model will be tested while controlling for "fear of negative evaluation", "financial anxiety", "age" and "gender".

To effectively answer the research question, this study follows a quantitative research approach, where a potential relationship through linear regression will be investigated (Neustadtl & Babbie, 1989, p. 50).

Control Variables

Four control variables are included in this research to account for other factors that can impact the results of this study. One factor that graduate students could worry about is the uncertainty of financial stability. Students with financial struggles during their studies may feel pressured to take the highest paying job or the first offer available (Gicheva & Thompson, 2015, p. 3; Moore et al., 2021, p. 5), which can arguably cause additional pressure during this process. Tran et al. (2018, p. 855) find that financial stress was moderately-to-strongly associated with symptoms of anxiety, which is why it is likely to have an influence on the interplay between the different variables of this study. Another aspect that may impact job search anxiety in this context is fear of career rejection, which is very common for individuals entering the workforce (Hoover & Lucas, 2024, p. 196). Individuals more prone to fear of career rejection may thus show higher levels of job search anxiety. This was found in a study conducted by Gao et al. (2017, p. 72), where results showed significant associations between career rejection sensitivity and mental health conditions such as depression, anxiety, and loneliness. With these findings, one can suspect that fear of career rejection can impact

the effects of this study, which is why it is included as a control variable. Lastly, both gender and age are considerable control variables, as they will account for differences between males and females, as well as contrasting perceptions of respondents at varying stages in their lives, depending on whether they are joining the workforce earlier or have some additional years studying and gaining experiences.

Methodology

Sampling Strategy and Procedures

In this study, students with a German nationality were chosen, as they are a large population with close to 3 million students (Statista, 2023), and 15 million active LinkedIn users (Polomski, 2023). The investigation focuses on one nationality of graduate students to refine the sample, aiming for advantages such as cultural homogeneity and contextual relevance (Babbie, 2018, p. 193). Furthermore, this study defines graduate students as individuals that are pursuing their graduate studies, for instance, master's or doctorate studies. Additionally, all people that graduated the earliest in 2022 and are still looking for a job will also be included in the study, as they are likely to have the same concerns which increases the sample size Besides, an age limit is set at 30 years old, as entering the workforce for the first time after this age is very unlikely in Germany (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2022).

The independent variables are focusing on the user behavior on LinkedIn, particularly the comparative behavior and time spent on the platform. Effects on anxiety are investigated, while career-related self-efficacy may mediate this relationship. For this quantitative analysis, a structured survey approach is arguably best suited to quantify the variables of interest and create primary data (Babbie, 2018, p. 248). Additionally, quantitative methods also enable the collection of more data, which in turn makes the research easily replicable and more applicable (Neustadtl & Babbie, 1989, p. 50). The sampling method employed in this study is purposive sampling (Tongco, 2007, p. 151), which involves selecting participants based on specific criteria. In this instance, participants were chosen based on their use of LinkedIn, and other factors, such as pursuit of a graduate degree.

The participants are contacted digitally to facilitate answering the digital survey. For this, several ways are being pursued to reach the target sample group and maximize respondents. Naturally, convenience sampling is most fitting as resources for this study are limited, yet convenience sampling is a commonly used method to attract valuable respondents (Sedgwick, 2013, p. 2). First, German contacts will be leveraged to access additional distribution channels, such as email lists, Facebook groups and other WhatsApp group chats of graduate students. Secondly, a snowball sampling technique (Parker et al., 2019, p. 4) is intended, so initial participants are asked to refer to other eligible graduate students. Additional respondents are reached via the paid-service Prolific to ensure an adequate sample size of the study. Sociodemographic differences, such as gender and age are taken into consideration to provide an additional layer of depth to the analysis.

In conducting this survey, utmost care is taken to ensure that the questionnaire does not cause the respondents discomfort or harm in any possible way. Prior to participation, clear informed consent will be obtained from all respondents after outlining the purpose of the study without giving away the exact topic of research. Additionally, it will be outlined that participation is fully voluntary and participants own every right to withdraw from the survey at any point without any consequences. All responses will be anonymized and stored securely in SPSS V.29. The collected data shall be used solely for the purpose of academic research (Holmes, 2009, pp. 391-401). The survey was created and shared through the software Qualtrics, as the tool provides the most comprehensive features to operationalize the research (Gartner, 2023, para. 1). The collected data is then imported into the statistics tool SPSS V.29 to generate the results of the study. The demographics are extracted through descriptive statistics, which will allow detection of certain patterns in the sample. Investigating the correlations between the variables of insights is helpful as it enables us to identify relationships and conduct a preliminary exploration of the dynamics in the dataset. Afterwards, a linear regression model was run with a Hayes macro (Rockwood & Hayes, 2017) to check the relationships between the key variables, identifying their significance and answering the research hypotheses.

Survey Design

As the survey is targeted for German graduate students, the survey is translated to German, while the answers are then translated back to English, using forward-backward translation. This is done in line with the process of Lee et al. (2018, p. 2), namely, to translate the survey and results from English to German and then translating everything back from German into English. To provide an accurate translation both into German and English, this process is supported by a bilingual person who is not only fluent in German and English but is also familiar with the German and English culture. Thus, accuracy can be guaranteed since the method confirms that the original meaning of the text is preserved. Furthermore, the iterative nature of this process supports in identifying any discrepancies in the translation. The survey consists of 69 questions and took an average of 7.7 minutes, which matched the goal of having a shorter questionnaire to maximize respondents and participation, while at the same time ensuring that all the relevant variables can be quantified. The survey starts with a few demographic questions, as well as filter questions to ensure that only respondents of the target group are taking the survey. This excludes individuals that do not study at a university and did not recently graduate, non-Germans, respondents under 18 or over 30 and non-LinkedIn users. Afterwards, the respondent's LinkedIn behavior and characteristics are investigated, before focusing on the concept of career-related self-efficacy, the main part of the survey. After all variables have been quantified, the survey also provides an open text field in which the respondent can add additional input that they might want to share, to add additional qualitative information. To prevent unreliable results due to survey fatigue, all matrix statements are randomized. The full survey can be found in the appendix.

Descriptive Statistics

Before conducting any analyses, it is important to investigate the data that was collected to better understand the sample and to obtain information about the different variables, which will help in interpreting the results of the statistical tests. The data was collected in a three-week period between the 5th and 27th May 2024, generating 223 respondents. However, due to the different sample filters, such as the necessity to be a German national, be an active LinkedIn user or being between 18 and 30 years old, 58 respondents were directed to the end of the survey and could not participate as they were not in the target sample. The total number of respondents of this study that fit the required criteria and was used for the analysis is 165. The average duration of the survey was 7.7 minutes, which was below the target of 8 minutes and was thus not too long and tiresome, which is confirmed by the negligeable number of individuals that did not finish the survey. The average age of the respondents was 24.54 with a standard deviation of 2.35, matching the targeted population of individuals that are about to, or just completed their university degree. Of all respondents, 70% were still enrolled at a university at the time of taking this survey (n = 116), while the rest recently graduated. The gender split was somewhat equal, with a slight tendency towards females (54%, n = 89). Most respondents (43%) were pursuing a career in general programs such as business studies, whereas the rest of the sample was distributed across the entire range of professions.

Measures

Likeliness of Social Comparison. The tendency to engage in social comparison on LinkedIn was assessed with the Social Comparison Rating Scale (SCR; Allan & Gilbert, 1995, p. 295). This is a 11-item scale, which gives respondents an incomplete sentence followed by a series of diverging answers. The instructions were slightly modified to include LinkedIn as the focal platform instead of Facebook as used by Feinstein et al. (2013, p. 161). For instance, one item begins with "When I compare myself to others on LinkedIn, I feel…". Respondents then select a number from 1 to 10 that best describes their position between the two extremes (e.g. inferior/superior; Feinstein et al., 2013, p. 161). To check the sampling adequacy and whether each item of this variable contributes meaningfully to the construct of social comparison, a factor analysis was conducted for each variable. Looking at the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure, which examines whether the items show enough common variance to justify a factor analysis (Shrestha, 2021, p. 6). A high KMO value suggests that the data has high potential to yield distinct and reliable factors. The KMO statistic ranges from 0 to 1, with values under 0.5 being unacceptable and values closer to 1 being particularly good (Shrestha, 2021, p. 6). In the case of social comparison, the scale used in this study shows a KMO value of 0.93, which is a good sign for the validity of the scale. Additionally, the Bartlett's Test of Sphericity is significant at $p < .001$, confirming that the correlations between the items are sufficiently large for a factor analysis (Shrestha, 2021, p. 6). Looking at the communalities of the factor analysis, the values of the items range between 0.6 and 0.8, indicating that all items in the

social comparison variable are well represented by the factor solution and that each item has a meaningful contribution to the construct of the variable (Shrestha, 2021, p. 6). Next to the factor analysis, it is important to analyze the reliability of the scale as well, which can be captured by measuring the Cronbach's Alpha. This statistic investigates the consistency of the different items in capturing the same underlying construct (Shrestha, 2021, p. 5). Similar to the KMO, the Cronbach's Alpha ranges between 0 and 1, with values closer to 1 indicating the greatest reliability of the scale. For the variable social comparison with its 10-item scale by Allan & Gilbert (1995, p. 295), the Cronbach's alpha is 0.91, indicating that there is an excellent level of internal consistency reliability within the variable. In other words, all items used in the scale add meaningful information to the construct of social comparison. On the 10-point Likert scale, the mean of the respondents was 4.44 with a standard deviation of 1.61, indicating that most respondents see themselves as being in the middle of the spectrum leaning slightly towards feeling worse compared to others when using LinkedIn.

Job Search Anxiety. Anxiety can be quantified using Britton's (2019) job search anxiety scale. The scale consists of ten items that are rated on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). One example is "I feel self-confident about my ability to search for a job". This scale fits best to detect anxiety triggered through career-related issues and was therefore chosen to be presented to the respondents of this survey. Within these ten items, some questions are phrased positively, while others are phrased negatively. To ensure that the average value used for further analysis was meaningful, these items had to be reverse coded in order for the high and low levels of job search anxiety to be on the same side of the scale. It is also important to investigate the validity of this scale after receiving the responses. With regards to the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure, the constructed job search anxiety variable shows a value of 0.89, with a significant Bartlett's Test of Sphericity at $p < .001$. Both measures indicate a good sampling adequacy and significant relationships between the items. With regards to the communalities of the factor analysis, all are above 0.5 with most being above 0.7, indicating that the items of the scale meaningfully contribute to the job search anxiety construct and can therefore be used in further analysis. Cronbach's Alpha is 0.93, providing additional evidence that this scale is reliable. On the 7-point Likert scale, the mean of all respondents was 4.47, with a 1.18 standard deviation. This shows that most participants were quite neutral in their responses, however many slightly leaned towards having higher levels of anxiety with regards to their job search.

Career-related self-efficacy. The job search self-efficacy scale (JSSE; Saks et al., 2015, p. 215) was used to test the mediated variable. The JSSE consists of two dimensions, each composed of ten items. One dimension focuses on job-search self-efficacy behavior. The other dimension investigates the job-search self-efficacy outcomes. All items are rated on a 10-point Likert scale from 1 (not confident at all) to 10 (completely confident). In line with the statistical procedure of Saks et al. (2015, p. 215), the average of these two dimensions will generate a job search self-efficacy metric

that will be used in the analysis. Statistically, this scale is also reliable with a KMO score of 0.933 with a significant Bartlett's Test of Sphericity at $p < .001$ and factor analysis communalities of over 0.5 with most being over 0.7. Furthermore, the Cronbach's Alpha of this scale is 0.928, indicating that the reliability of this variable is accurate. This confirms that this variable is captured well with the items of the scale by Saks et al. (2015, p. 215). The mean of the 165 respondents on the 10-point Likert scale is 5.28, with a standard deviation of 1.52, showing that most respondents have medium levels of self-efficacy with regards to their abilities to successfully launch their career.

Intensity of LinkedIn use. The intensity of LinkedIn use is measured through the variable "Intensity of LinkedIn use". The 6-item scale is derived from Ellison's work on Facebook (Ellison et al., 2007, p.1150). Since the authors used the scale to test a possible relationship between Facebook usage and the formation of social capital, all wording from the questions was adjusted from "Facebook" to "LinkedIn". However, the scale is also widely used to test the usage of other social media platforms, which is why it made sense to include it in this study (Fioravanti et al., 2021, p. 6; Javornik et al., 2022, p. 8; Li et al., 2022, p. 4). Answers about certain usage behavior are measured on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Looking at the statistical relevance of the scale, the results show a KMO value of 0.86, with a significant Bartlett's Test of Sphericity at $p < .001$. The factor analysis communalities are all above 0.6, showing that the items are well-represented by the external factors. In other words, the scale by Ellison et al. (2007, p. 1150) shows solid consistency in this study and the results can be used in further analyses. The mean score of this scale is 2.75 with a standard deviation of 1.10, indicating that again, most respondents were quite neutral in their perceptions of intensity of LinkedIn use. Additionally, respondents shared insights about the number of LinkedIn connections with 115 out of the 165 respondents reporting to have below 250 connections. In terms of daily usage, the large majority (n = 121) reported to use LinkedIn less than 30 minutes per day. In interpretation, one can argue that most respondents of this survey use LinkedIn on an occasional basis, rather than as an omnipresent part of their lives.

Control Variables. In order to ensure the robustness of the results, four control variables are added in the study. The purpose of control variables is to account for predictors other than the variables included in the model that can have an effect on the dependent variable. In other words, why would some individuals be more anxious about their job search capabilities than others (Bernerth & Aguinis, 2015, p. 230). The first control, *fear of career rejection*, is measured via the "brief fear of negative evaluation" (BFNE-S) scale. This scale consists of eight items measured on a 5-point Likert scale, showing excellent internal consistency in previous studies (Ali et al., 2021, p. 10). In this research, the KMO value of this scale is 0.91, with a significant Bartlett's Test of Sphericity at $p < .001$ and factor analysis communalities of 0.6 or higher. Cronbach's Alpha is 0.91, indicating strong reliability of the scale. The mean in this study is 3.48 on the 5-point scale with a standard deviation of 0.87, showing that many have increased levels of fear of career rejection. Nevertheless, depending on the individual's value on this scale, this may have an impact on the

dynamics of the key variables, which is why it is being controlled for.

The *financial struggles* variable is operationalized using the scale by Archuleta et al. (2013, p. 54) consisting of seven items, using a 7-point Likert scale. In argumentation, depending on an individual's financial struggles, this may have an effect on the dependent variable job search anxiety, which is why it is included in this study. Looking at the factor analysis and reliability of this scale, the KMO value is 0.90, significance of $p < .001$ on Bartlett's Test of Sphericity, and factor analysis communalities of 0.6 and above, indicating that the items fit well within the factor structure. The Cronbach's Alpha is 0.91, showing a strong level of reliability. *Age* is measured with a slider ranging from <18 to >30 to account for the target group of this study. The average age of the respondents was 24.54 with a standard deviation of 2.35. *Gender* is a category variable with the baskets female (n = 89), male (n = 74), diverse (n = 2) and prefer not to say (n = 0), while the two latter are dropped from further analysis due to their limited relevance as well as the necessity of dichotomous variables in the regression and correlation analyses.

Results

Correlations

The correlation table (Table A1) shows the results of the study regarding the linear relationships between the key variables. By analyzing and interpreting these values one can obtain insights into the relationships between the different concepts and better understand the interplay amongst the variables (Privitera, 2014, p. 479). Correlation coefficients are particularly interesting to investigate as it is possible to identify the direction and strength of the relationships, creating an understanding of the different dynamics (Privitera, 2014, p. 480).

Several things can be noted. Looking at the correlation between the likeliness of social comparison (IV) and the level of job search anxiety (DV), the coefficient is -0.64, significant at $p < .001$. This means that higher levels of social comparison are associated with lower job search anxiety, so if someone is more likely to compare themselves on LinkedIn, their anxiety with regards to finding a job position reduces. The independent variable also shows a strong positive correlation with the mediator, career-related self-efficacy, with a coefficient of 0.72 at $p < .001$. Higher levels of social comparison also seem to increase the self-efficacy of an individual with regards to their career, which aligns with the previous finding. The correlation coefficient between career-related self-efficacy (mediator) and job search anxiety (DV) is -0.74 at $p < .001$, showing that higher levels of self-efficacy are significantly associated with lower levels of job search anxiety. This seems logical as a higher belief in oneself is likely to reduce anxiety levels. Intensity of LinkedIn use negatively correlates with the likeliness of social comparison and career-related self efficacy at $p < .001$, however the effect is very small with coefficients of -0.22 and -0.30 respectively. With regards to the effects of the control variables on the dependent variable, additional insights can be extracted. One interesting insight is that higher levels of fear of negative evaluation are associated with higher job

search anxiety (r = 0.49, p < .001). The same applies to financial anxiety, where increased levels moderately correlate with a higher perceived job search anxiety (r = 0.43, p < .001). Although age does not show any significant correlations with the other variables, gender has a weak, significant correlation with job search anxiety (r = -0.18, p < .05). In other words, females are slightly more likely to have higher levels of job search anxiety compared to the males in the study.

Table A1

Pearson Correlation Coefficients of this research study

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
(1) Likeliness of Social Comparison	--							
(2) Job Search Anxiety	-.639**	--						
(3) Career-related Self-Efficacy	.716**	-.738**	--					
(4) Intensity of LinkedIn Use	-.313**	.295**	-.283**	--				
(5) Fear of Negative Evaluation	-.556**	.491**	-.510**	.311**	--			
(6) Financial Anxiety	-.375**	.433**	-.463**	.278**	.358**	--		
(7) Age	.022	.019	.039	.024	.069	.071	--	
(8) Gender	.218**	-.181*	.236**	-.014	-.251**	-.105	.039	--

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Gender coding: (1 = female; 2 = male)

Assumption Tests

Before conducting the regression, it is important to run some preceding tests on the data in order to ensure the validity of the results and the following interpretation. One important factor to consider is multicollinearity between the different variables, as it would make the coefficients less reliable. Multicollinearity occurs when two or more independent variables in the model are highly correlated, as this would cause significant problems to the model (Kyriazos & Poga, 2023, p. 405). To check whether this is an issue in the study at hand, one can check the variance inflation factor (VIF). This measure analyzes what proportion of the variance of an estimated regression coefficient increases if the predictor variables show a certain correlation (Kyriazos & Poga, 2023, p. 405). The VIF starts at a value of 1, where there is no correlation between the predictor and the other predicting variables in the study, below 5 is moderate, but acceptable, values between 5 and 10 would need additional investigation, whereas values over 10 indicate high correlation and significant multicollinearity

concerns (Kyriazos & Poga, 2023, p. 407). The variance inflation factors of the different variables are listed in Table A2 below. One can see that the VIF scores of the relevant variables in this study are all quite low, indicating that multicollinearity is no concern when interpreting the regression.

Table A2

Collinearity Statistics

Variable	Variance Inflation Factor
Likeliness of Social Comparison	2.29
Career-related Self-Efficacy	2.35
Intensity of LinkedIn Use	1.17
Fear of Negative Evaluation	1.63
Financial Anxiety	1.33
Age	1.03
Gender	1.10

Note: Job search anxiety as the dependent variable

Another important preceding test is to check for heteroscedasticity in the dataset. This is another crucial step because it helps ensure the validity and reliability of the regression results. As the regression model assumes that the residuals have a constant variance, heteroscedasticity can cause biased estimates, which may affect the interpretation and hypothesis testing (Privitera, 2014, p. 492). To check for this, one can generate a scatterplot of the residuals against the predicted values and interpret the results. If there are clear patterns, such as a funnel shape, further investigation would be necessary (Privitera, 2014, p. 492). However, the values are all very random without a strict pattern. This allows us to continue with running the regression as heteroscedasticity does not seem to be a problem in this study.

Regression Analysis

To fully answer the research hypotheses of this study, a thorough regression analysis must be run and analyzed. Based on the hypothesized relationship of the variables, the selected type of regression was a moderated mediation model. The exact model was the Model 7 macro of the PROCESS Procedure for SPSS by Andrew F. Hayes (Rockwood & Hayes, 2017, p. 1), which enables this type of analysis. The variables included in this analysis are the independent variable, *likeliness of social comparison*, the dependent variable *job search anxiety*, the mediator *career-related self-efficacy*, and *intensity of LinkedIn use* as a moderator. Additionally, several control variables are added, *fear of*

negative evaluation, *financial anxiety*, *age*, and *gender*.

In order to draw the correct conclusion about the interplay between the different variables, Hayes macro creates two separate regression tables, one mediation model with the mediator, career-related self-efficacy, as the dependent variable, and a moderated mediation model with job search anxiety as the dependent variable. When analyzing the first model, several things can be noted. With regards to the overall model fit, the R-squared value represents the proportion variance of the dependent variable *career-related self-efficacy* in this model, that can be explained by the other variables. The R-squared value here is 0.58, which means that about 58% of the variability of career-related self-efficacy is explained by the model. This value is also statistically significant at $p < .001$. Looking at the effects of the variables, the independent variable *likeliness of social comparison* shows a significant positive coefficient of 0.72 at $p < .000$. This shows that the level of social comparison is a positive predictor of career-related self-efficacy, in other words, the more you compare yourself with social contacts on LinkedIn, the higher your self-efficacy becomes. This significantly contradicts the second hypothesis of this research study as it was predicted to be the other way around. The moderation effect of LinkedIn intensity on the relationship between social comparison and career-related self-efficacy shows a low negative, insignificant coefficient ($r = -0.07$, $p = .144$), which forces the fifth hypothesis to be rejected.

The second model of the regression places the actual dependent variable, job search anxiety, as the DV of the model, quantifying the rest of the research framework. The model shows a similar R-squared value at 0.58 ($p < 0.000$) compared to Model 1 and can also be interpreted as a moderately good fit. This means that 58% of the variance of the variable *job search anxiety* can be explained by this model, while the first model looked at the variance of the mediator variable *career-related self-efficacy*. With regards to the main relationship, between social comparison and job search anxiety, the regression analysis finds a coefficient of -0.13 at $p = .019$. This means that for every one-unit increase of social comparison, job search anxiety reduces by -0.13 units with all other variables held constant. This significantly contradicts the first research hypothesis of this study. Looking at the effect of the mediator career-related self-efficacy on job search anxiety, a strong significant negative effect is found (-0.41, $p < .000$). For each one-unit increase in career-related self-efficacy, job search anxiety reduces by 0.41 units. Thus, the more an individual believes in their ability to succeed professionally, the lower their perceived job search anxiety. This finding shows support for hypothesis 3. The second model also includes the moderated mediation effects. These are measured through conditional indirect effects of social comparison on job search anxiety through career-related self-efficacy (mediator) at different values of LinkedIn use intensity (moderator). The index of moderated mediation in Table A5 shows the difference in the indirect effect based on the changes in the moderator. The index is .028, which indicates a small change in the indirect effect across different levels of LinkedIn use intensity. Importantly, the confidence interval of -.002 and .062 contains the value zero, which indicates that the moderated mediation effect is statistically

insignificant (Hayes, 2017, p. 335). Together with the fact that the interaction term between the IV and the moderator is also not significant, the fourth hypothesis has to be rejected. The regression tables as well as an overview of the different hypotheses is shown below.

Table A3

Results of Linear Regression: Model 1

Variables	Estimate	*SE*	95% Confidence Interval		*p*
			LL	*UL*	
Constant	3.05	.950	1.18	4.93	.002
Likeliness of Social Comparison	.724	.149	.430	1.02	.000
Intensity of LinkedIn Use	.197	.206	-.209	.604	.339
Interaction Term	-.069	.047	-.161	.024	.144
Financial Anxiety	-.337	.096	-.525	-.148	.001
Fear of Negative Evaluation	-.155	.116	-.384	-.075	.185
Age	.031	.034	-.037	.098	.037
Gender	.200	.157	-.111	.510	.206

Note: Career-related self-efficacy as dependent variable; Interaction term: Likeliness of social comparison x intensity of LinkedIn use

Table A4

Results of Linear Regression: Model 2

Variables	Estimate	*SE*	95% Confidence Interval		*p*
			LL	*UL*	
Constant	6.45	.583	5.20	7.50	.000
Likeliness of Social Comparison	-.135	.057	-.247	-.022	.019
Intensity of LinkedIn Use	-.406	.061	-.526	-.286	.000
Financial Anxiety	.114	.076	-.036	.264	.136
Fear of Negative Evaluation	.126	.088	-.049	.300	.157
Age	.015	.026	-.037	.067	.565
Gender	.030	.121	-.209	.269	.003

Note: Job search anxiety as dependent variable

Table A5

Results of Linear Regression: Index of Moderated Mediation

Intensity of LinkedIn Use	Effect	*BootSE*	*BootLL*	*BootUL*
1.50	-.252	.053	-.359	-.154
2.50	-.224	.043	-.313	-.142
4.07	-.180	.039	-.260	-.108

Mediator	Index	*BootSE*	*BootLL*	*BootUL*
Intensity of LinkedIn Use	.028	.016	-.002	.062

Note: Number of Bootstrap samples for percentile bootstrap confidence intervals: 5000

Table A6

Overview of Research Hypothesis after Statistical Analysis

Hypothesis	Statistical Result
H1: The likeliness to compare oneself to others increases job search anxiety.	Rejected, but significant contradicting effect found.
H2: The likeliness to compare oneself to others has a negative relationship with career-related self-efficacy.	Rejected, but significant contradicting effect found.
H3: Career-related self-efficacy is negatively associated with the level of job search anxiety.	Supported
H4: Intensity of LinkedIn use positively moderates the relationship between the likeliness to compare oneself to others and job search anxiety.	Rejected
H5: Intensity of LinkedIn use positively moderates the relationship between the likeliness to compare oneself to others and career-related self-efficacy.	Rejected

Discussion

The goal of this research was to better understand the interplay between different concepts such as social comparison, career-related self-efficacy, intensity of LinkedIn use and the resulting job search anxiety amongst German graduates. The results of this study provide new insights into how these concepts interact and contribute to a better understanding of job search behavior in the digital age. Looking at the relationship of social comparison and job search anxiety, the statistical analysis

shows that higher levels of social comparison are associated with lower job search anxiety. This result contradicts previous research (Marder et al., 2024, p. 494; Ozimek & Bierhoff, 2019, p. 1111) which argues that social media use may harm users through increased social comparison mechanisms. However, this study shows an opposite impact, namely that the more you socially compare yourself, the lower your job search anxiety becomes. One possible explanation might be that observing a peer's professional success on platforms like LinkedIn might provide valuable and inspirational information for oneself (McCabe, 2017, p. 90). As LinkedIn operates as a professional network, it is possible that a more positive and supportive environment is fostered in comparison to other social platforms like Facebook and Instagram. Instead of negatively comparing one's personal life with others, users might see the success stories posted on LinkedIn by their peers as an attainable goal rather than a personal threat (Verduyn, et al., 2020, p. 36; Vogel et al., 2014, p. 207). Additionally, young graduates often connect to a variety of people, since a high connection count seems prestigious. Thus, the users are exposed to diverse career paths which might help to identify possible job opportunities or desired career goals (Davis et al., 2020, p. 6; Gati & Kulcsár, 2021, p. 9). Consequently, this could reduce uncertainty about the job market and shine a light on possible career options, thereby lowering job search anxiety. However, this is only a potential explanation for these results, and additional research is needed to confirm this argumentation. The discovered positive relationship between social comparison and career-related self-efficacy also challenges previous research. Researchers have argued that frequent social comparison leads to undermining one's self-efficacy by highlighting personal shortcomings (Johnson & Leo, 2020, p. 1265; Pisarik et al., 2017, p. 344; Risdarmawan, 2023, p. 63). Nevertheless, this study indicates that LinkedIn might reinforce positive rather than negative self-assessment. While users can follow the achievements of their connections, especially those with similar capabilities and career paths, data of this study shows that this can have a positive effect on their self-efficacy and job search anxiety. Through following the success stories of others on LinkedIn, young graduates might feel more motivated and capable of achieving similar milestones, which could lead to an increase in proactive behavior in career development activities (Johnson & Leo, 2020, p. 1264). Additionally, following role models can play an important factor, as individuals can develop clear goals and feel a sense of encouragement (Johnson & Leo, 2020, p. 1264). One distinction can be made and has not been in focus of this study is the difference between upward and downward social comparison. Upward social comparison occurs when an individual compares themselves to someone they view as superior or desirable, which can highlight their own perceived flaws (Tiggemann & Polvi, 2010, p. 357). This can lead to a negative impact on mental health and self-perception, although some may also see it as a form of motivation and gain something positive from the comparison. In contrast, downward social comparison is the act of comparing oneself to someone that the individual perceives as being inferior or worse in some shape of form, which can lead to a boost in self-confidence (Tiggemann & Polvi, 2010, p. 357). Reflecting on this theory, the results of this study, particularly the finding that

increased comparison leads to higher levels of self-efficacy and lower levels of job search anxiety, point to the fact that positive upward or downward social comparisons frequently occur on LinkedIn, which give value and reinforcement to the individual. Exploring this nuance further could lead to interesting insights that drive this literature stream forward.

While the first two hypotheses could not be supported and thus do not align with the findings of previous studies, the strong negative relationship between career-related self-efficacy and job search anxiety underlines what other researchers have discovered (Eden & Aviram, 1993, p. 354; Pinquart et al., 2003, p. 331; Saks, 1995, p. 211; Zikic & Saks, 2009, p. 122). According to the results of this study, individuals who believe in their own ability to succeed in their careers are less likely to experience job search anxiety. This finding suggests that working on and improving one's self-efficacy could be a key strategy in reducing job search anxiety. Graduate students that feel more confident in their own skills, are more likely to approach job search with a positive mindset and a lot more resilience which protects the individual from the negative effects (Lent et al., 2006, p. 15). In interpretation, such higher career-related self-efficacy could drive individuals to be more proactive, to network more and to develop additional soft skills which eventually increase the likelihood of getting a job.

Lastly, the intensity of LinkedIn use as a moderator proved to be insignificant. Although some academics have found significant effects with this intensity of LinkedIn use as an independent variable (Marder et al., 2024, p. 494; Oziek and Bierhoff, 2020, p. 1111; Zhang et al., 2023, p. 95), a significant moderation effect was not found in this study. Based on the results of this research, one can say that the intensity of LinkedIn use does not significantly alter the dynamics of social comparison, job search anxiety and career-related self-efficacy. This may be due to the fact that the findings are based on different statistical approaches, yet according to this study, the intensity of LinkedIn use does not play a role in the dynamics between the other variables. This suggests that the intensity of LinkedIn use does not have a clear impact on how users are impacted by the platform. This could indicate that being an active LinkedIn user that posts updates and connects with other individuals via the platform does not have as great an influence on career-related self-efficacy and job search anxiety. Instead, thoughtful engagement with professional content, active participation in discussions and more meaningful networking might be the shaping factor of young graduates' perceptions of their professional abilities and outlook on a future career. In interpretation, the context of the interactions between users and the timing in which they happen are likely to matter more than the effects that occur over a prolonged period of use.

One model that may be applicable here is the uses and gratification theory (UGT). As explained by Urista et al. (2009, p. 218), this theory suggests that individuals are not passive recipients of media messages, but are active agents that choose media on the basis of their goals and motivations. Young adults have been found to be heavily dependent on the Internet, and information seeking is a key driver of why so many individuals engage with SNS on such a regular basis (Urista et al., 2009,

p. 216). The uses and gratification perspective is focusing on the social and psychological origins of needs, which drives individuals to seek for need gratifications. In this context, this theory might help understand why users are active on LinkedIn and what type of gratification they receive by using it. In the context of the findings of this study, graduate students may receive significant gratification from LinkedIn through the variety of features, such as networking with potential employers, informing themselves about the job market, or gaining industry insights even if this is done in a short time span. Such goal-oriented behavior can lead to immediate gratification (Whiting & Williams, 2013, p. 366), and a prolonged or more intense use might thus not add much to this original sense of gratification, at least not significantly more as seen in the results of this study. Potentially, this gratification, which may then translate into reduced job search anxiety, is experienced already at short use durations, such as the average usage time of under 30 minutes daily, which could explain why the moderation effect of use intensity was found insignificant. However, this is only a suggestion of why these results could have been found, exploring this concept further in upcoming studies may help explain the results better and expand our knowledge in this field..

Limitations & Directions for Future Research

Despite the insightful results, this study has several limitations that must be acknowledged. One limitation is the generalizability of the results. As 165 respondents was the maximum number of respondents that could be generated in the given timeframe, it does not offer as definitive insights as a larger sample, which means the margin of error is higher (Boef et al., 2014, p. 1259; Varoquaux, 2018, p. 68). Simultaneously, the narrow scope of the study constrains the generalizability of the findings. Since the target population only focused on German nationals aged 18 to 30, the results give valuable insights into a specific group, but it limits the applicability of the findings to other age groups, nationalities or even cultural contexts (Degtiar & Rose, 2023, p. 507). This study focuses on graduate students that enter the workforce for the first time, but many individuals use professional SNS during the later stages of their career as well (LinkedIn, 2024, para. 6), which are not included in this study. Investigating how individuals that are more progressed in their career use LinkedIn, particularly with regards to social comparison, career-related self-efficacy and job search anxiety could offer new insights whether the discovered effects are solely based on a younger age or whether more experienced professionals experience the same feelings and impressions.

Furthermore, due to the self-reporting nature of the survey used, various biases but especially social desirability bias might have affected the overall results (Donaldson & Grant-Vallone, 2002, p. 247; Jürgens et al., 2019, p. 601). Survey participants have a tendency to be subject to self-response bias and answer questions in a way they perceive to be favorable or socially acceptable, even more so when asked about sensitive topics such as anxiety (Fadnes et al., 2009, p. 4; Rosenman et al., 2011, p. 190). Thus, there is a risk of results being skewed due to respondents distorting their true feelings. Although this study aimed at keeping this bias at a minimum through the digital and

anonymous nature of the survey with neutral wording and no form of visibility to common answers or examples, future research should aim at lowering this bias to ensure that all answers are truthful and honest.

While this study provides significant insights into how social comparison, career-related self-efficacy and job search anxiety interact in a German sample of young professionals, addressing the limitations through future research can deepen the understanding and the credibility of these findings. One direction of future research is the focus on cross-cultural studies. By narrowing down the target population to only German nationals, the regional significance was increased, but the generalizability of the findings was negatively affected. With 45 million users globally from over 200 countries (Florenthal, 2015, p. 17), including participants with different nationalities, cultures and backgrounds would determine if the positive relationship between social comparison and self-efficacy and its mitigating effect on job search anxiety are also applicable in different cultural settings. For instance, it would be interesting to identify whether these findings can be replicated with graduate students from other nationalities, such as India, US, South America, all of which have quite different cultural values to Germany (Hofstede, 2009, p. 3). As different cultures may use LinkedIn in different ways, this could make this discovery additionally relevant as the concept of social comparison on LinkedIn might differ across cultures.

Furthermore, future research should follow an in-depth qualitative research design to form a greater understanding of graduate students' feelings and emotions with regards to the different concepts. Detailed interviews can uncover contextual factors that are not easily captured through a survey, eventually providing a richer picture of how the target population interprets and reacts to comparison on LinkedIn, how they build career-related self-efficacy and what other concepts might affect their job search anxiety. Additionally, interviews can shine light on factors that are difficult to predict or consider beforehand, as well as capture subjective experiences that can give additional insight in understanding the complexity of the different concepts. Interviews can extend our understanding of people's motivations, perceptions and experiences, allowing us to form a more complex understanding in comparison to quantitative research (Johnstone, 2016, p. 67).

Another important direction for future research is to conduct longitudinal studies. Due to the nature of this study being a master thesis the time frame and resources were limited, which restricted the data collection. The dataset is cross-sectional and was collected in less than a month, which is a great tool to capture a snapshot in time, yet one can argue that the complexity of this topic extends beyond a short time period. Longitudinal studies would track changes in social comparison, self-efficacy and job search anxiety over several years, thus allowing to measure and understand how these variables interact over prolonged periods of time (Farrington, 1991, p. 370). This would enable researchers to trace changes to different life situations, changing economic conditions or job market dynamics. It would be interesting to understand whether the discovered effects are only a temporary phenomenon or whether these findings could be recreated over a prolonged period of time.

Furthermore, longitudinal research could explore to what extent major macroeconomic events such as economic recessions or industry shifts impact the relationship between the key variables. It is clear that economies behave in cycles, Juglar cycles specifically, where economic booms are followed by recessions and crises, followed by new growth and booms in 7-11 year periods (Grinin et al., 2016, p. 5). Ideally, a longitudinal study would capture data across all stages to drill down on whether concepts such as job search anxiety or social comparison change significantly. Due to the cross-sectional nature of this study, claims about causality are impossible to make, which is a clear limitation. A longitudinal study could remove the risk of the findings at hand being biased by a specific economic state and fluctuating job market characteristics and could thus produce differing results compared to this research.

Practical Implications

To translate these findings into actionable strategies, practical implications can be drawn. Universities and other educational institutions should improve their career development programs and think of incorporating LinkedIn training. By teaching students how to build professional connections on LinkedIn and how to best gain industry insights, young graduates learn to use the professional network as a tool for self-improvement and career planning instead of being a cause for lower self-worth and anxiety (Bárcenas, 2023, p. 15, English et al., 2021, pp. 649-650). Hence, the career-related self-efficacy of students would rise and simultaneously reduce job search anxiety. Additionally, universities and job fairs could place increased focus on success stories and use cases, as these could elevate the self-efficacy of graduate students looking for their first position (Finley, 2021, p. 9; Budzanowska-Drzewiecka & Proszowska, 2015, p. 278).

Furthermore, universities should include career counseling and mentor programs into their curriculum or at least recommended as extra-curricular opportunities for their students (Huang et al., 2024, para. 28; Kleine et al., 2022, p. 195; McIver & Murphy, 2021, p. 216). Personalized guidance and support can be offered in the form of workshops or group counseling programs that focus on soft skills such as problem-solving and communication (Finley, 2021, p. 32; Kim et al., 2022, p. 8). Another alternative would be pairing students with experienced professionals who can always provide advice, support and industry insights. This way young graduates can increase their confidence in their own abilities, ultimately leading to a high career-related self-efficacy (Hazzam et al., 2024, p. 10).

LinkedIn seems to be a social media platform that can reduce job search anxiety through the means of social comparison as found in this study, which is why graduate students should be encouraged to actively use LinkedIn (English et al., 2021, p. 657). In combination with teaching students the significance of networking and goal setting, as well as pointing out how social comparison can be used as a motivational tool, a growth mindset should be portrayed as desirable (Burnette et al., 2019, pp. 879-880; Woods, 2020, p. 6). Students should learn that constructive self-

assessment is a valuable tool that supports high self-efficacy (Chung et al. 2021, p. 1889; McIver & Murphy, 2021, p.208). Furthermore, it is important that students understand that merely using LinkedIn frequently is not enough. Rather it is important that any workshops or classes on LinkedIn underline the importance of quality interactions and meaningful engagement (López-Carril et al., 2022, p.4; Wanberg et al., 2019, p.560). Individuals must learn that consuming insightful professional content, actively participating in discussion about a certain industry or establishing genuine connection with not only peers but also other professionals could be the key to success (Bárcenas, 2023, p. 13; Hazzam et al., 2024, p.4).

Conclusion

Acknowledging these insights, it is possible to answer the research question posed in the introduction. Statistical evidence shows that higher levels of social comparison on LinkedIn increase career-related self-efficacy and reduce job search anxiety at all levels of LinkedIn usage. By proving that increased social comparison leads to an increase in self-efficacy and a decrease in anxiety levels, the study suggests that LinkedIn can be leveraged even stronger as a valuable platform. In other words, young graduates can gain confidence and alleviate job search anxiety by actively using LinkedIn. This underscores the significance of utilizing the professional network as a tool for self-assessment and networking. However, students must first learn how to properly use LinkedIn in order for them to benefit from the possible growth mindset that LinkedIn is able to promote. Conclusively, this study underlines the positive impact of professional networks, in particular LinkedIn, in empowering graduate students to navigate the job market with less anxiety and greater self-efficacy.

This study has provided valuable insights into the relationship between social comparison on LinkedIn, career-related self-efficacy and job search anxiety among young German graduates. The findings suggest that higher levels of social comparison via LinkedIn enhance career-related self-efficacy and reduce job search anxiety, challenging previous research that oftentimes highlighted negative outcomes of social comparison on social media. Despite the study's limitations the results underline the potential of LinkedIn and other professional SNS being a positive tool for career development and growth. By leveraging these insights and continuing research in this literature stream, the journey of young professionals into the job market can be changed for the better, creating a more confident workforce for the future.

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Appendix A: List of Tables

Appendix B: List of Figures

Appendix C: Survey Instrument

English	German
Please read the following information carefully. **Description**: You are invited to participate in a survey about your LinkedIn usage. Taking this survey will cost you **5-10 minutes** of your time. The purpose of this study is to understand how young graduate students use LinkedIn and how this might affect other areas of their life. Please be aware that participating is completely **voluntary**, meaning that you can quit at any time during your participation. Furthermore, your personal information will be kept strictly **confidential**, and the findings of this survey will be used solely for thesis purposes. Hence, your **anonymity** is guaranteed. **No risks or discomforts** are expected while participating in this study. For questions about the study, your rights as a study participant, or if you are dissatisfied with any aspect of this study, please contact: **Sarah Klein**, 653308sk@student.eur.nl	Bitte lies die folgenden Informationen sorgfältig durch. **Beschreibung**: Du bist eingeladen, an einer Umfrage über deine LinkedIn-Nutzung teilzunehmen. Die Teilnahme an dieser Umfrage wird ca. **5-10 Minuten** dauern. Der Zweck dieser Masterarbeit ist es, zu verstehen, wie junge Student/innen LinkedIn nutzen und wie sich dies auf andere Bereiche ihres Lebens auswirken könnte. Bitte beachte, dass die Teilnahme an der Studie völlig **freiwillig** ist, d. h. du kannst während deiner Teilnahme jederzeit aufhören. Außerdem werden deine persönlichen Daten streng **vertraulich** behandelt, und die Ergebnisse dieser Umfrage werden ausschließlich für die Zwecke der Masterarbeit verwendet. Deine **Anonymität** ist also gewährleistet. Es sind **keine Risiken oder Unannehmlichkeiten** während der Teilnahme an dieser Studie zu erwarten.Bei Fragen zur Studie, zu deinen Rechten als Studienteilnehmer/in oder wenn du mit irgendeinem Aspekt dieser Studie unzufrieden bist, wende dich bitte an: **Sarah Klein**, 653308sk@student.eur.nl

Question 1:

Do you consent? ● Yes / No	Stimmst du zu? ● Ja / Nein

Question 2:

Are you currently enrolled at a university? ● Yes / No	Bist du momentan an einer Universität eingeschrieben? ● Ja / Nein

Question 3:

Did you recently graduate in 2022 or later? ● Yes / No	Hast du dein Studium 2022 oder später abgeschlossen? ● Ja / Nein

Question 4:

Is your nationality german?	Ist deine Nationalität deutsch?
● Yes / No	● Ja / Nein

Question 5:

Are you younger than 18 or older than 30?	Bist du jünger als 18 oder älter als 30 Jahre?
● Yes / No	● Ja / Nein

Question 6:

Do you have a LinkedIn Account?	Besitzt du einen LinkedIn Account?
● Yes / No	● Ja / Nein

Question 7:

What is your age?	What is your age?
● Drop-Down-Option 18-30	● Drop-Down-Option 18-30

Question 8:

What is your gender?	Mit welchem Geschlecht identifizierst du dich?
● Female ● Male ● Diverse ● Prefer not to say	● Weiblich ● Männlich ● Divers ● Keine Angabe

Question 9:

What is your field of study?	Was ist dein Studienbereich?
● General programmes ● Education ● Humanities and Arts ● Science ● Engineering, Manufacturing and Construction ● Agriculture ● Health and Welfare ● Services ● Other	● Generelle Studienrichtungen ● Bildung / Lehramt ● Kunst / Kultur ● Naturwissenschaften ● Maschinenbau / Produktion / Handwerk ● Landwirtschaft ● Gesundheitswesen ● Dienstleistungen ● Andere

Question 10:

When I compare myself to others on LinkedIn, I feel… (10-Item Likert Scale)	Wenn ich mich mit anderen auf LinkedIn vergleiche, fühle ich mich… (10-Item Likert Scale)
- Inferior (0) – Superior (10) - Incompetent (0) – Competent (10) - Unlikeable (0) – Likeable (10) - Left Out (0) – Accepted (10) - Different (0) – Same (10) - Untalented (0) – More Talented (10) - Weaker (0) – Stronger (10) - Unconfident (0) – More Confident (10) - Undesirable (0) – More Desirable (10) - Unattractive (0) – More Attractive (10) - Outsider (0) – Insider (10)	- Schlechter als andere (0) – Besser als andere (10) - Inkompetent (0) – Kompetent (10) - Unsympathisch (0) – Sympathisch (10) - Außen vor (0) – Akzeptiert (10) - Anders (0) – Gleich (10) - Untalentiert (0) – Talentiert (10) - Schwächer (0) – Stärker (10) - Unselbstbewusst (0) – Selbstbewusst (10) - Nicht begehrenswert (0) – Begehrenswert (10) - Unattraktiv (0) – Attraktiv (10) - Außenseiter (0) – Dazugehörig (10)

Question 11:

About how many total LinkedIn connections do you have?	Wie viele LinkedIn Connection hast du?
10 or less 11-50 51-100 101-150 151-200 201-250 251-300 301-400 - more than 400	10 or weniger 11-50 51-100 101-150 151-200 201-250 251-300 301-400 - mehr als 400

Question 12:

In the past week, on average, approximately how many minutes per day have you spent on LinkedIn?	Wie viele Minuten hast du in der letzten Woche im Durchschnitt pro Tag auf LinkedIn verbracht?
- Less than 10 10-30 31-60 1-2 hours 2-3 hours - more than 3 hours	- Mehr als 10 10-30 31-60 1-2 hours 2-3 hours - Weniger als 3 hours

Question 13:

(1) Strongly disagree (2) Somewhat disagree (3) Neither agree nor disagree (4) Somewhat agree (5) Strongly agree	(1) Stimme überhaupt nicht zu (2) Stimme nicht ganz zu (3) Stimme weder dafür noch dagegen (4) Stimme zum Teil zu (5) Ich stimme voll zu
LinkedIn is part of my everyday activity.	LinkedIn ist Teil meines Tagesablaufs.
I am proud to tell people that I am on LinkedIn.	Ich bin stolz, Menschen zu erzählen, dass ich auf LinkedIn bin.
LinkedIn is part of my daily routine.	LinkedIn ist Teil meiner Routine.
I feel out of touch when I haven't logged onto LinkedIn for a while.	Ich fühle mich, als würde ich etwas verpassen, wenn ich länger nicht auf LinkedIn bin.
I feel I am part of the LinkedIn community.	Ich fühle mich als wäre ich Teil der LinkedIn Community.
I would be sorry if LinkedIn shut down.	Ich fände es schade, wenn es LinkedIn nicht mehr geben würde.

Question 14:

English	German
(1) Strongly disagree (2) Somewhat disagree (3) Neither agree nor disagree (4) Somewhat agree (5) Strongly agree	(1) Stimme überhaupt nicht zu (2) Stimme nicht ganz zu (3) Stimme weder dafür noch dagegen (4) Stimme zum Teil zu (5) Ich stimme voll zu
I feel self-confident about my ability to search for a job.	Ich fühle mich selbstbewusst, was meine Fähigkeit zur Arbeitssuche angeht.
I feel stressed about the idea of starting a job search.	Ich fühle mich gestresst von dem Gedanken, die Arbeitssuche zu beginnen.
I am worried about being able to find a job in the current economic climate.	Ich mache mir Sorgen, ob ich bei der derzeitigen Wirtschaftslage einen Job finden kann.
I am nervous about approaching organizations to find a job.	Ich bin nervös, wenn es darum geht, auf Organisationen zuzugehen, um einen Job zu finden.
I feel confused about what organizations are looking for in job applicants.	Ich bin verunsichert darüber, was Unternehmen bei Bewerbern suchen.
I feel positive about having to find a job.	Ich habe ein gutes Gefühl, wenn es darum geht, einen Job zu finden.
I am tense when I think about having to find a job.	Ich bin angespannt, wenn ich daran denke, dass ich einen Job finden muss.
I am concerned that I will not be able to find my dream job.	Ich bin besorgt, dass ich meinen Traumjob nicht finden werde.
I feel it will be easy for me to find a job.	Ich habe das Gefühl, dass es für mich leicht sein wird, eine Stelle zu finden.
I feel comfortable in my ability to obtain a job.	Ich fühle mich sicher in meiner Fähigkeit, einen Arbeitsplatz zu finden.

Question 15:

On a scale of 1-10 (0= No confidence at all, 10 = Complete Confidence), how confident are you of your ability to successfully…	Wie zuversichtlich bist du auf einer Skala von 0-10 (0 = überhaupt nicht zuversichtlich, 10 = vollkommen zuversichtlich), dass du in der Lage sein wirst ...
1. …plan and organize a weekly job search schedule? No confidence (0) – Complete Confidence (10) 2. …use social networks to obtain job leads? No confidence (0) – Complete Confidence (10) 3. …find out where job openings exist? No confidence (0) – Complete Confidence (10) 4. …prepare a persuasive talk that will attract the interest of employers? No confidence (0) – Complete Confidence (10) 5. …conduct information interviews to find out about careers and jobs that you are interested in pursuing? No confidence (0) – Complete Confidence (10) 6. …make unsolicited calls that will get you a job interview? No confidence (0) – Complete Confidence (10) 7. …impress interviewers during employment interviews? No confidence (0) – Complete Confidence (10)	1. ...soziale Netzwerke zu nutzen, um Jobangebote zu erhalten? Überhaupt nicht zuversichtlich (0) – Vollkommen zuversichtlich (10) 2. …einen wöchentlichen Zeitplan für die Stellensuche zu planen und zu organisieren? Überhaupt nicht zuversichtlich (0) – Vollkommen zuversichtlich (10) 3. ...herauszufinden, wo es offene Stellen gibt? Überhaupt nicht zuversichtlich (0) – Vollkommen zuversichtlich (10) 4. …einen überzeugenden Vortrag vorzubereiten, der das Interesse von Arbeitgebern weckt? Überhaupt nicht zuversichtlich (0) – Vollkommen zuversichtlich (10) 5. ...Informationsgespräche zu führen, um sich über Berufe und Tätigkeiten zu informieren, an denen du interessiert bist? Überhaupt nicht zuversichtlich (0) – Vollkommen zuversichtlich (10) 6. ...unaufgeforderte Anrufe zu tätigen, die dir ein Vorstellungsgespräch verschaffen? Überhaupt nicht zuversichtlich (0) – Vollkommen zuversichtlich (10) 7. ...bei Vorstellungsgesprächen die Gesprächspartner zu beeindrucken? Überhaupt nicht zuversichtlich (0) – Vollkommen zuversichtlich (10)

Question 16:

On a scale of 1-10 (0= No confidence at all, 10 = Complete Confidence), how confident are you of your ability to successfully…	Wie zuversichtlich bist du auf einer Skala von 0-10 (0 = überhaupt nicht zuversichtlich, 10 = vollkommen zuversichtlich), dass du in der Lage sein wirst,...
1. …be invited for site visits? No confidence (0) – Complete Confidence (10) 2. …be invited for second interviews? No confidence (0) – Complete Confidence (10) 3. …obtain more than one good job offer? No confidence (0) – Complete Confidence (10) 4. …get a job with a very good salary? No confidence (0) – Complete Confidence (10) 5. …get a job as soon as possible? No confidence (0) – Complete Confidence (10) 6. …get a job offer in an organization that you want to work in? No confidence (0) – Complete Confidence (10) 7. …be successful in your job search? No confidence (0) – Complete Confidence (10) 8. …be invited to job interviews? No confidence (0) – Complete Confidence (10) 9. …obtain a very good job? No confidence (0) – Complete Confidence (10)	1. ...zu Standortbesichtigungen eingeladen zu werden? Überhaupt nicht zuversichtlich (0) – Vollkommen zuversichtlich (10) 2. ...zu zweiten Vorstellungsgesprächen eingeladen zu werden? Überhaupt nicht zuversichtlich (0) – Vollkommen zuversichtlich (10) 3. ...mehr als ein gutes Jobangebot zu erhalten? Überhaupt nicht zuversichtlich (0) – Vollkommen zuversichtlich (10) 4. ...einen Job mit einem sehr guten Gehalt zu bekommen? Überhaupt nicht zuversichtlich (0) – Vollkommen zuversichtlich (10) 5. ...so schnell wie möglich einen Job zu finden? Überhaupt nicht zuversichtlich (0) – Vollkommen zuversichtlich (10) 6. ...ein Stellenangebot in einem Unternehmen zu erhalten, in dem du gerne arbeiten würdest? Überhaupt nicht zuversichtlich (0) – Vollkommen zuversichtlich (10) 7. ...bei deiner Arbeitssuche erfolgreich zu sein? Überhaupt nicht zuversichtlich (0) – Vollkommen zuversichtlich (10) 8. ...zu Vorstellungsgesprächen eingeladen zu werden? Überhaupt nicht zuversichtlich (0) – Vollkommen zuversichtlich (10) 9. ...einen sehr guten Job zu bekommen? Überhaupt nicht zuversichtlich (0) – Vollkommen zuversichtlich (10)

Question 17:

How often do you experience the following situations? (1) Never (2) Sometimes (3) About half of the time (4) Usually (5) Always	Wie oft erlebst du folgende Situationen? (1) Nie (2) Manchmal (3) Ungefähr die Hälfte der Zeit (4) Meistens (5) Immer
I feel anxious about my financial situation.	Ich bin besorgt über meine finanzielle Situation.
I have difficulty sleeping because of my financial situation.	Ich kann wegen meiner finanziellen Situation nur schwer schlafen.
I have difficulty concentrating on university because of my financial situation.	Aufgrund meiner finanziellen Situation habe ich Schwierigkeiten, mich auf das Studium zu konzentrieren.
I am irritable because of my financial situation.	Ich bin wegen meiner finanziellen Situation gereizt.
I have difficulty controlling worrying about my financial situation.	Es fällt mir schwer, die Sorgen über meine finanzielle Situation zu kontrollieren.
My muscles feel tense because of worries about my financial situation.	Meine Muskeln sind angespannt, weil ich mir Sorgen um meine finanzielle Situation mache.
I feel fatigued because I worry about my financial situation.	Ich fühle mich erschöpft, weil ich mir Sorgen um meine finanzielle Situation mache.

End of Survey Text:

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey. I truly value the information you have provided. If you would like to receive any updates and final results of my research, feel free to reach out to me: 653308sk@student.eur.nl Many thanks, Sarah Klein	Vielen Dank, dass Du dir die Zeit genommen hast meine Umfrage zu beantworten. Deine angegebenen Informationen helfen mir sehr. Falls Du Updates und das Endergebnis meiner Studie erhalten möchtest, kannst Du mich gerne kontaktieren: 653308sk@student.eur.nl Vielen Dank, Sarah Klein