



The less you know, the better you'll sleep – Perceived job insecurity in the Internet age



Sabina Lissitsa ^{a, *}, Svetlana Chachashvili-Bolotin ^b

^a School of Communication, Ariel University, Ariel, Israel

^b School of Social & Community Sciences, Ruppin Academic Center, Netanya, Israel

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ABSTRACT

By applying theories from different fields of study in the labor market context, we investigated the effect of Internet use and digital uses on perceived job insecurity during the years 2003–2012. Our study is based on data from nationwide Annual Social Surveys of the CBS in Israel, drawing on a representative sample of 45,988 employed respondents. Our findings show that Internet use negatively correlated with job insecurity, but the effect of Internet use on the dependent variable decreased over this period. Internet use was found to be more effective for decreasing job insecurity among weaker social groups: Arabs and people from low socio-economic strata. In other words, Internet use promotes weaker social groups and can serve as a channel for decreasing job insecurity. However, our findings also show that seeking information and social media use were positively correlated with perceived job insecurity, attributable to the negative-positive asymmetry forming the individual's sense of economic pessimism.

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1. Introduction

Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) continue to exert a growing impact on the economic future of organizations, workers, and families. Technological advances have forced companies to become more globally competitive and afforded them resources to do so (Kalleberg, 2009). The diffusion of modern technologies in borderless trade markets makes the economies of Western countries more productive, and has translated into absolute increases in living standards and real disposable incomes. However, while the Western economy as a whole tends to benefit from globalization and ICT diffusion, it is not always a win-win situation for employees (Hacker, 2006; Michel, Bernstein, & Allegretto, 2007; Scheve & Slaughter, 2004). International migration and rising trade with low-wage developing countries increase concerns of job loss. Native workers from developed countries now fear that employers will lower their wages and benefits in order to compete. The globalization economy, facilitated by the information technology revolution, has increased the process of outsourcing and international competition (Kalleberg, 2009). Processes of globalization and ICT diffusion may create new vulnerabilities for workers, and so damage some groups more than others in terms of

job insecurity or even job loss (Walter, 2015).

Many studies have found that situations of uncertainty with anticipation of sudden job loss can be stress-inducing, traumatic, and life-disrupting (De Witte, 1999; Greenhalgh & Rosenblatt, 2010), and may lead to negative personal and organizational consequences (Cheng & Chan, 2008; Sverke, Hellgren, & Näswall, 2002). Specifically, in two meta-analyses (Cheng & Chan, 2008; Sverke et al., 2002), job insecurity was negatively related to well-being, in general, and to outcomes such as employee psychological health and physical health, job satisfaction, job performance, trust, job involvement, and organizational commitment, in particular. Creating insecurity for many people, may have demographic (timing of marriage and children, number of children), social (e.g., family, community), and political (e.g., stability, democratization) outcomes (Kalleberg, 2009).

Scholars mention important socio-economic, psychological, organizational and labor market variables correlated with job insecurity (De Bustillo & De Pedraza, 2010; Keim, Landis, Pierce, & Earnest, 2014; Krause, Obschonka, & Silbereisen, 2015; Näswall & De Witte, 2003). However the effect of Internet use on job insecurity has not yet received proper attention.

The current research will examine the correlation between Internet use and perceived job insecurity during the past decade in the unique Israeli context. Israeli society offers an ideal social context for research on the consequences of technology adoption on labor market processes. First, during the past decade, Israeli society

* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: sabinal@bezeqint.net (S. Lissitsa), svetachb@gmail.com (S. Chachashvili-Bolotin).

has experienced a dramatic ICT diffusion (Lissitsa & Chachashvili-Bolotin, 2014, 2015; Lissitsa & Lev-On, 2014). Second, Israeli society is characterized by wide economic and educational gaps along national (between Jews and Arabs) and ethnic (between Jewish immigrants and non-immigrant population) lines (Ben-Rafael, 2001; Peres & Ben-Rafael, 2006; Lissitsa & Peres, 2011).

The article begins with a description of Internet adoption and use. Then the literature regarding job insecurity will be discussed. Afterwards, the theoretical background integrating Internet use and job insecurity will be presented and summarized into research questions and hypotheses. Research data and method of analysis will be followed by a discussion of the findings and conclusions, as well as study limitations and future directions of research.

2. Literature review

2.1. Internet access and digital uses

In the 1990s the traditional focus of Internet literature was mainly on infrastructural access. This access-oriented thinking centered on questions pertaining to ownership, availability, affordability and other issues of infrastructure. Furthermore, researchers argued that the division between information “haves” and “have-nots” is not binary, but rather gradated and based on different degrees of access to information technology (DiMaggio & Hargittai, 2001; Hargittai, 2003; Jin & Cheng, 2008). Recent research has favored a progressive marginalization of the access element (the so-called first level digital divide), with the focus shifting to how individuals interact with the Internet (Guerrieri & Bentivegna, 2011; Warschauer, 2003); i.e., the second level digital divide.

The research literature differentiates between digital uses on the basis of potential benefits. **Human capital-enhancing** uses (visiting web sites for national and international news, presidential election issues, health and financial information, government services, and product information) (Hargittai & Hinnant, 2008) may assist individual mobility and career advancement (Lissitsa, 2015a; Bakker & de Vreese, 2011; DiMaggio & Hargittai, 2001; Lissitsa & Peres, 2011; Rahim, Pawanteh & Salman, 2011).

Social capital-enhancing digital uses refer to the ability to communicate with other people by e-mail and social media (Lissitsa & Chachashvili-Bolotin, 2014, 2015). Social media create a platform for communication among a dynamic consortium of people utilizing social network sites, forums, discussion groups and blogs in a manner that enables individuals with common interests to interact continually and to promote different types of benefits (Boyd & Ellison, 2007; Haenlein & Kaplan, 2010).

2.2. Job insecurity

‘Job insecurity’ is the perception of being threatened by job loss (Mohr, 2000) and may be defined as “jeopardy to the job generally and to its features specifically, as well as powerlessness to resist the threat” (Greenhalgh & Rosenblatt, 2010). Job insecurity implies *uncertainty about the future* because the employee does not know whether he will retain or lose his current job and whether another job should be sought. This is in contrast with a dismissed employee who knows for certain that the job is lost and therefore can prepare for the future. Scholars also mention the *involuntary nature of job insecurity*, which implies the gap between what people wish (certainty about future employment and desired continuity) and what they actually get (the threat of losing the job) (Flint, Bartley, Shelton, & Sacker, 2013).

Job insecurity is a *subjective experience*, the result of a person’s perception and interpretation of the actual job environment. However, scholars agree that job insecurity in general is a

subjective threat deriving from an objective threat (De Bustillo & De Pedraza, 2010).

Job insecurity decreases with schooling (Hellgren & Sverke, 2003; Keim et al., 2014), is negatively correlated with occupational prestige (Fullerton & Wallace, 2007), and varies very little according to gender (women worry more than men) (Emberland & Rundmo, 2010; Mauno & Kinnunen, 2002). However, the findings about the impact of age on job insecurity are ambiguous. Researchers have reported both negative effects (Roskies & Louis-Guerin, 1990), positive impact (Cheng & Chan, 2008), insignificant correlations (Kinnunen & Nätti, 1994), or a curvilinear relation (Fullerton & Wallace, 2007). In very high wage positions the impact of age could be insecurity-enhancing (De Bustillo & De Pedraza, 2010). However, socio-demographic variables collectively explain only a small part of sample variation in job insecurity (Debus, König, & Kleinmann, 2014; De Bustillo & De Pedraza, 2010; Elman & O’Rand, 2002).

2.3. Theoretical background and hypotheses

2.3.1. Human capital theory

Human capital theory suggests that an individual’s human capital, reflected in their qualifications, knowledge, skills, and experience are likely to increase earnings or productivity (Becker, 1993) and reduce the perceived job insecurity (Elman & O’Rand, 2002). Until recently, a good initial education and occupational achievement were market advantages that protected workers from job insecurity and potential downward occupational mobility. This may no longer be the case today: scholars found that Internet adoption and use are a necessary attribute that gives job seekers a foothold in the labour market.

Hypothesis 1. Internet use will be negatively associated with perceived job insecurity.

The digital environment providing people with easier means for obtaining information may facilitate self-learning and supply new tools for optimizing the formal education (Lin, 2001). Therefore, based on human capital theory, the following hypothesis may be formulated.

Hypothesis 2. Internet use for study will be negatively associated with perceived job insecurity.

2.3.2. Diffusion of innovation theory and Maximally maintained inequality hypothesis

Generally, during the diffusion of new technologies, opportunities are allegedly created for at all economic levels, but, in fact, not all workers are exposed to opportunity to enrich their human capital; such opportunities usually exclude low-skilled, minority, and older workers (Brown, 1990; Constantine & Neumark, 1996; Osterman, 1995). However, according to the diffusion of innovation theory, over time new technologies adopted by the early and late majority (see Rogers, 1995) and its distinguishing ability is declining. Accordingly we can formulate our third research hypothesis:

Hypothesis 3. The effect of Internet use on job insecurity will decline over the time.

In order to formulate a hypothesis regarding the effect of Internet use among different social groups we apply the Maximally Maintained Inequality (MMI) hypothesis. Although the MMI hypothesis was developed in order to explain class-based inequality in education, its logic can also be applied to other dimensions of inequality, such as job insecurity. The classical MMI hypothesis (Raftery and Hout’s, 1993) is a compelling theoretical statement regarding the effects of educational expansion on inequality in educational

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