# Strategies of Receptive Social Media Use: How Users Combine Elements of Styles, Arrangements, Attitudes, and Focus

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The theoretical framework of media use strategies analyzes media use as a strategic practice, focusing on styles of acting, spatiotemporal arrangements, user attitudes, the focus of attention during reception, and the interplay between media practices and social structure. This approach is applied to receptive social media use by investigating the typical combinations of strategic elements and their overall structure. In an online survey, a quota sample of users of Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram in Germany characterized their most recent use of one of those platforms. Although individual strategies in specific situations were structured rather loosely—in terms of both the combination of strategy elements and their relation to social structure—certain patterns could still be identified.

*Keywords: strategies of media use, social media, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, practice theory, survey*

We know a great deal about (social) media use, not only in terms of content and duration but also about its motives and consequences and how it varies across different social groups and according to different types of predispositions. But do we actually know *how* we use the media, as opposed to the *what, how long, with what effect*, etc.? What do we know about the mental attitudes during reception or the different ways individuals select and process media content? Of course, numerous concepts have been introduced mostly describing media use either in terms of single dichotomies or continua (e.g., heuristic vs. systematic processing or hedonic vs. eudaimonic entertainment; e.g., Bartsch & Schneider, 2014) or in terms of specific practices or experiences such as multiscreening (Segijn, Voorveld, Vandeberg, & Smit, 2017) or parasocial interaction (Horton & Wohl, 1956). As useful as those conceptions may be, they do not provide a framework for a holistic, multidimensional analysis of how we use the media, one that conceives media use as an overall practice that can be performed very differently because of the wide range of choices involved.

The study presented here follows such a holistic approach—namely, the framework of strategies of media use—in examining *receptive* social media use (i.e., the use of platforms such as Facebook, Twitter/X,[1] and Instagram that focus on navigating, reading, looking at pictures, and watching videos, rather than

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[1] The present study was conducted before the rebranding and the platform will subsequently be referred to by its name at the time of the study, Twitter.

posting, commenting, sharing, liking, or similar activities). This study aims to holistically describe an important everyday social practice, focusing on how it is performed as a mental and bodily activity and how it is adapted to the situation and shaped by the user's social background.

The following section introduces the framework of media use strategies and outlines how its proposed dimensions of media-related practices can be applied to social media use. These dimensions composed of the potential elements of strategies that, taken together, form people's overall strategies. The elements employed in a specific recent episode were surveyed in an online questionnaire. Through principal component and cluster analysis, typical strategies are identified, and these strategy types are then linked to the user's characteristics and the context of use. This study reduces the many ways of enacting and describing social media use to a small number of basic strategy types, each with its underlying practical approach and sense. The order that is thus brought into the diversity of practices of social media use can then inform further discussions on their reasons and consequences—discussions in which the aspect of *how* is often neglected in favor of the *what* and *how long*.

## The Framework of Strategies of Media Use

The framework of strategies of media use (Krämer, 2013b) is an approach that aims to comprehensively describe how people use media and that has two primary components:

1. A conception of media use as a strategic practice based on Bourdieu's (1980) theory of practice (i.e., as spatiotemporal, embodied, and mental activity related to the immediate situation and to the users' social-structural position); and
2. A number of dimensions that describe the specific practices: ways of initiating an episode of media use, the material and social arrangements entailed in media use, the different types of selectivity involved, and mental dispositions during reception.

### *Media Use as a Strategic Practice*

Analyzing media use as a strategic practice means viewing it as part of ongoing everyday activities that can only be analytically separated into acts or episodes. For example, users of mobile devices may be in a constant state of vigilance, quickly shifting their attention between various activities happening on their devices (Reinecke et al., 2018). The sense of practice is mostly implicit, which Bourdieu (1980) has described as a "practical sense" for what is worthwhile, useful, good, or beautiful, according to adaptable perceptive and evaluative schemata shaped by one's social position. Together with corresponding generative schemata, they ensure that practices are adapted to the situation and directed toward certain aims, usually without much conscious reflection (of course, strategies can also fail if the situation does not fit the existing schemata). This justifies characterizing practices as strategic in a broad sense.

In turn, strategies of media use can be analyzed concerning not only their overall sense, even if it is often rather vaguely felt and difficult to verbalize, but also their preconditions and outcomes in terms of resources (Krämer, 2013b). Strategies of media use draw on resources that are invested into strategies without necessarily reflecting such investment in concrete situations (e.g., certain equipment and cultural

competences). Beyond that, they are associated with subjective costs in terms of, for example, time, money, or lost opportunities. However, in addition to perceived uses and gratifications, strategies of media use can also contribute to the accumulation of new resources, including knowledge and competences considered to be valuable according to social standards of educatedness, cultivated-ness, and/or professionalism. Other strategies primarily serve recreational purposes and do not contribute much to the accumulation of cultural and other capital.

### *Dimensions and Structures of Strategies of Media Use*

The framework of strategies of media use introduces a number of dimensions that describe formal patterns of media use and inner attitudes during reception. The dimensions are based on conceptualizations in the literature concerning the styles, modes, modalities, and repertoires of media use (e.g., Frey, 2018; Hasebrink & Popp, 2006; Michelle, 2007; Schweiger, 2005; Suckfüll & Scharkow, 2009; Weiß, 2020; Woelke & Paus-Hasebrink, 2005) that the framework reorganizes and complements with new aspects. Those dimensions include (Krämer & Lauber, 2024, for the subsequent definitions that have been adapted from Krämer, 2013b):

- *Repertoire*, defined as the "category structure the selection process is based on, including alternative options that are considered";
- *Arrangement*, defined as the way users arrange objects and bodies during media use, particularly in relation to other people's bodies and the surrounding space;
- *Style*, defined as "forms of acting or thinking that form recurring patterns in the interaction with the environment and in the processing of experiences." This includes how an episode is initiated, how the media content is selected and processed, and how the episode is terminated (e.g., habitual use or the exhaustive consideration of a range of alternative activities, the piecemeal or holistic processing of some content, and terminating the episode as planned at a predetermined time or because of external cues);
- *Focus*, defined as the "elements of the medially represented or extramedial worlds the user's attention is allocated to" (e.g., person-centered reception, a focus on the message's form, or a focus on the presumed intention of the communicator);
- *Modality*, defined as the "ontological status (real, fictional, etc.) the user confers to the worlds as represented in media content"; and
- *Attitude*, defined as "the user's relationship to the world(s) as represented in media content and the degree and form of control over this relationship" (e.g., belief or disbelief, an ironic attitude, natural emotionality vs. deliberate emotional distance).

In each dimension, users choose elements of strategies that they combine into their overall strategies to accommodate their aims and adapt to the situation and content.

The study presented here follows an inductive approach that is nevertheless not strictly reductionist (Krämer & Frey, 2019). The specific strategies investigated are not theoretically postulated, but it is assumed that the strategies are not completely arbitrary but have a specific sense for users. The conceptualization is thus holistic without assuming that the whole is strictly superior to its parts or that the

combination of elements is entirely fixed; the elements can be substituted to adapt the strategy or vary across users, even as the practical sense remains more or less the same.

The term "strategy" is used here to refer to concrete practices in specific situations based on a set of elements adapted to the context and content and following a practical sense. However, strategies exist on a second level—as relatively stable and transferable yet adaptable schemata of practice that enable the relatively quick and easy choice of specific strategies for a situation to which they seem applicable. An analysis of the structure of specific strategies can then offer certain insights into such schemata.

### Strategies of Online Use

To date, the framework of media use strategies has only been applied to traditional media (Krämer, 2013a, 2020). However, according to a qualitative study, its application to receptive social media use seems fruitful (Krämer & Lauber, 2024), and earlier ethnographic research on online use has investigated *how* media use unfolds the content, predictors, motives of use, or its effects (e.g., Bakardjieva, 2005).

Consequently, the study presented here was designed to answer the following research question:

RQ1:    What are the typical structures of strategies of receptive social media use?

This article does not claim to review the large body of literature on social media communication, its preconditions and contexts, its content or the users' thematic interests and communities, or its consequences. Nor can the approach of strategies of media use be contextualized with regard to other perspectives on media use and reception (but see Krämer & Frey, 2020; Krämer & Lauber, 2024). This section only provides hints as to whether and how the dimensions of strategies of media use may apply to receptive social media use—even if some of the literature refers to other earlier forms of online use.

Although social media platforms offer numerous and sometimes complex possibilities for navigation and selection, these processes can generally be described in terms of *styles* in the above-defined sense. Thus far, styles of online use have primarily been investigated about other applications in using search engines (Wirth, Böcking, Karnowski, & von Pape, 2007) or about ways of browsing the Web (e.g., Doedens, 2010; Graff, 2010). However, several key features (e.g., more or less systematic, exhaustive, or directed navigation) also apply to social media use and can be complemented by patterns specific to them (e.g., the use of algorithmically generated feeds vs. the active search for specific profiles or information).

Beyond the formal management of an episode of media use as such, the dimension of style also covers the way it is initialized and terminated. Previous literature also indicates that this dimension can be fruitfully applied to social media, even if the perspective is usually limited to specific aspects. Instead of addressing a wide range of styles, they are mostly investigated insofar as they can be considered problematic (or beneficial). This perspective usually emphasizes habits (e.g., Bayer, Anderson, & Tokunaga, 2022) instead of differentiating between various styles that consist of varying degrees and ways of reflection, planning, or negotiation.

In terms of *focus*, the visual focus of attention toward specific online tasks has been analyzed (e.g., Vergara, Siles, Castro, & Chaves, 2021), and what occupies a user's mind during social media use can be inferred from studies using think-aloud methods (e.g., Freiling, 2019). However, the focus of attention is not limited to visible elements; for example, users can reflect on the style of a post or on their relationship with the communicator, which can only be inferred indirectly from eye-tracking data. Nevertheless, previous studies have not systematically applied such a detailed categorization of focus as suggested by the framework of strategies of media use.

Concerning aspects of reception covered by the dimensions of *attitude* and *modality*, most research has focused on specific outcomes, such as judgments of truth, and factors intervening in such assessments (e.g., Pennycook & Rand, 2021), or on perceptions of authenticity during social media use (e.g., Maares, Banjac, & Hanusch, 2021). Even so, such judgments and dispositions have not been conceptualized as adaptable parts of an overall practice but as their end points or as intervening variables that are not clearly positioned at a certain point of the process.

Much of the scholarly or popular discussion of social media use is concerned with specific practices and experiences, such as doomscrolling, social comparison, or fear of missing out (e.g., Fioravanti et al., 2021; Satici, Gocet Tekin, Deniz, & Satici, 2023; Verduyn, Gugushvili, Massar, Täht, & Kross, 2020). Without being able to demonstrate this for an extensive list of such conceptions, it should be possible to reconstruct them as specific combinations of a specific practical sense, elements on the above dimensions, and potential consequences of the practice. At the same time, it becomes clear that such conceptions cover only a small section of the overall universe of elements of strategies and their possible combinations.

However, research that systematically explores a broad range of elements in the dimensions of style, focus, attitude, and modality, in particular as combined in overall strategies, is lacking. As one exception, a recent qualitative study analyzing strategies of Instagram use has identified different practical orientations, styles, modalities, attitudes, and focus (Krämer & Lauber, 2024). Although some aspects found in the study are familiar to researchers of social media use, they are mostly analyzed in isolation rather than conceptualized as elements of overall strategies.

**Focus of the Study**

In the subsequent sections, a quantitative study on the structure of strategies of social media use, partly based on elements identified in the above-cited qualitative study, will be presented.

Two important pragmatic choices were made concerning the focus of the study. First, the analysis of social media use is limited to receptive media use as opposed to reactive or productive use (such as liking, commenting on, or posting content). The distinction between the two modes is certainly analytical, as both can alternate quickly and interact. Still, elements of social media use practices can be categorized relatively easily into one category (one either comments on something or scrolls through the feed).

Second, the study focuses on one specific episode per user, with its limits defined by the users themselves. Typical strategies could also be investigated by asking participants how they typically use the

media or by collecting data on many episodes (Krämer & Frey, 2019). However, self-reports about recurrent and typical past behavior can be biased (Schwarz, 2007), and a repeated measurement should be based on a more selective set of elements.

In contrast, the present study aims to include as many receptive elements of strategies as possible to gain a clearer understanding of the overall structure of strategies. This prevents the analysis of productive or reactive aspects and of multiple episodes. In future studies, data collection can be limited to elements of strategies that represent larger complexes of elements of strategies and that have been selected based on the results of the present study. This allows for multiple measurements, the analysis of productive and reactive use, and/or various antecedents and consequences of strategies.

Even focusing on receptive use and a single episode, the analysis of social media use strategies is complex for at least three reasons. First, some users are permanently connected and quickly alternate between different activities and apps or social media websites. Second, several dimensions of strategies include inner states during reception and thus require users' self-reports. Third, social media platforms combine highly heterogeneous messages that require the constant adaptation of strategies in relation to certain dimensions.

For these reasons, it is difficult to both investigate complex formal patterns of use and simultaneously analyze inner dispositions in terms of the framework's dimensions in a single study. To simplify matters, this study focuses on activities that continue to be perceived as more or less coherent episodes of social media use, even if they involve brief interruptions.

The study also focuses only on certain dimensions of strategies. Modality, for instance, is excluded. Although users can entertain certain expectations concerning the typical modality of posts or comments on a social media platform, they can ascribe a different modality to each message. Therefore, an analysis at the level of the overall episode, as performed in the study, would be of limited value. Future studies, however, could investigate modality in the reception of single posts. At the same time, to contextualize the episodes under analysis, a few selected aspects of situations and the arrangement of media use were examined. Repertoires are also neglected because analyzing functional alternatives both within and outside the category of social media from the users' perspective would have overstretched the study. By analyzing only certain aspects of arrangement and excluding modality and repertoire, this study emphasizes the dimensions most directly related to the episode of reception: style, attitude, and focus. Even so, this study provides insights into the overall structure of strategies.

Finally, various sociodemographic variables will be used to contextualize the patterns of elements about social structure.

## Method

The structures of strategies of receptive social media use were analyzed in a survey of German residents who regularly use Facebook, Twitter, and/or Instagram. Participants were recruited via a commercial access panel in October 2021 based on quotas that approximately matched the German

population in terms of age, gender, level of education, and region (i.e., eastern vs. western Germany). Ultimately, 973 participants completed the questionnaire, 531 of whom were users of the mentioned platforms who provided sufficient information about their use and took a sufficient amount of time to process the corresponding questions. These respondents, who will be included in the subsequent analyses, are 53% female, their median age is 51 years, and 37% have a higher education degree (i.e., at least equivalent to a high school diploma—in Germany, "Abitur").

### *Measurements*

Strategies of social media use were measured at the level of the individual episode of use, the delimitations of which were left to the respondents to determine.[2] Respondents who used at least one of the three social media platforms had to indicate which of them they had opened most recently and were asked to remember the situation of their most recent use as vividly as possible. Overall, 72% of the episodes had happened on the same day and more than half occurred in the previous three hours.

Next, respondents rated 61 items based on three dimensions of media use strategies (i.e., style, attitude, and focus) to indicate either whether the statement described the situation accurately or how often something had happened during the episode. Items were based on qualitative interviews with Instagram users who participated in the above-cited study (Krämer & Lauber, 2024), deduced from previous theoretical literature on the strategies of media use approach, or adapted from past studies on strategies, modalities, styles, and habits of media and Internet use (see Table 1 for an overview of the items). Respondents rated all statements on a 7-point scale. Afterward, they answered additional questions concerning the episode and situation (including a few elements that point to an active arrangement of the situation and could be classified into the corresponding dimension of strategies). These aspects were measured based on categorical options: the type of device used, where the episode took place, whether other people were present, and whether other media were used simultaneously.

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[2] The instruction in the questionnaire read: "Please remember the last time you used social media—no matter whether you looked at them only very briefly, whether you used the app or website for a longer period of time, or with short interruptions after which you immediately continued looking. In the follow, we are interested in the last such occurrence."

***Table 1. Dimensions of Social Media Use Included in the Analysis, Items for Elements of Strategies, Descriptive Statistics for the Items, and Factor Loadings From the Principal Component Analysis.***

| Dimensions and items | *M* | *SE* | Factors 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Style* | | | | | | |
| I could have easily used another social media platform, app, or website in the situation. | 4.22 | 0.10 | −.12 | .17 | .12 | -.01 |
| In such a situation, I basically always use [platform].[a] | 4.30 | 0.09 | .09 | −.11 | .13 | **.50** |
| I happened to automatically start using [platform]. | 4.38 | 0.08 | −.02 | −.18 | .33 | .48 |
| I followed a routine when looking at the different areas of [platform] (e.g., starting with the notifications first, followed by the feed, and so on). | 3.86 | 0.10 | .13 | −.06 | .08 | .44 |
| Using [platform] is almost a ritual that has a particular meaning and fixed rules. | 3.32 | 0.09 | .15 | −.08 | .28 | **.50** |
| I only wanted to have a quick look at [platform] but ended up using it for a longer time. | 3.72 | 0.09 | .13 | −.04 | .47 | .40 |
| I scrolled until I was no longer in the mood. | 3.43 | 0.10 | −.10 | .00 | **.60** | .27 |
| I scrolled until I felt that I had no longer missed anything. | 3.11 | 0.09 | .05 | −.07 | .41 | .45 |
| I scrolled until I got bored with the content or no longer encountered any interesting content. | 3.66 | 0.10 | −.14 | .06 | **.58** | .23 |
| I thought about closing [platform] but I continued looking nevertheless. | 2.65 | 0.09 | .11 | .06 | **.64** | .18 |
| I stopped because it put me in a bad mood or stressed me out. | **1.77** | 0.06 | .22 | .08 | **.53** | −.24 |
| I stopped because my posture became uncomfortable. | **1.81** | 0.07 | .20 | .05 | **.53** | −.21 |
| I stopped because I thought that I needed to do something else. | 4.27 | 0.10 | .04 | .20 | .28 | .06 |
| I was interrupted by something or someone and therefore stopped. | 2.39 | 0.09 | .16 | .12 | .43 | .04 |
| I planned to stop at a certain time. | 1.91 | 0.08 | .18 | .11 | .39 | .00 |
| I planned to stop after a certain amount of time. | 2.03 | 0.08 | .19 | .09 | .37 | −.02 |
| I stopped because I had set my device to allow me to use [platform] for a certain amount of time. | **1.33** | 0.05 | .22 | .08 | .48 | .02 |
| I had planned not to use [platform] for too long, but that did not work. | 2.06 | 0.07 | .12 | .08 | **.57** | .20 |
| I stopped because my battery ran low or because I had technical difficulties (e.g., lost connection). | **1.46** | 0.05 | .25 | .03 | .43 | .08 |
| When looking at posts, I looked at all of their parts or until they ended. | 3.87 | 0.08 | .23 | −.03 | −.02 | **.51** |
| I immediately scrolled past certain posts, almost without looking at them. | **4.58** | 0.08 | −.10 | .35 | .20 | -.11 |
| I sometimes also scrolled back. | 3.81 | 0.07 | .30 | .17 | .05 | .39 |

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| I did not simply scroll through, but also went into the comments, individual profiles or the like. | 3.81 | 0.08 | .30 | .25 | .00 | .45 |
| When I looked at particular comments, profiles, etc., I always returned to the feed and continued looking. | 3.71 | 0.08 | .27 | .19 | .02 | .47 |
| I continued following different links without returning to the feed and "clicked my way through like this." | 2.46 | 0.07 | .31 | .25 | .34 | .22 |
| | | | | | | |
| *Attitude* | | | | | | |
| I remained quite detached when it comes to certain posts. | **4.87** | 0.08 | −.15 | .48 | .02 | .08 |
| I was relaxed while looking at some posts. | **5.43** | 0.07 | −.16 | .28 | −.16 | .49 |
| I took care to remain critical with some posts. | 4.24 | 0.09 | .24 | **.68** | −.03 | −.02 |
| I looked at certain posts with deliberate skepticism. | 4.33 | 0.09 | .28 | **.74** | −.02 | −.01 |
| With some posts, certain contradictions imposed themselves. | 4.34 | 0.09 | .27 | **.77** | .11 | −.05 |
| With some posts, I noticed ambiguities. | 4.16 | 0.08 | .28 | **.77** | .09 | −.09 |
| I was surprised by certain posts because I did not expect such posts. | 3.65 | 0.09 | .29 | **.63** | .22 | −.06 |
| I relished certain posts because the pictures were very beautiful or because the text was written well or straightforward. | **4.59** | 0.08 | .27 | .26 | −.11 | .44 |
| I reveled in the pleasant feelings that certain points aroused in me. | 3.65 | 0.08 | .46 | .10 | .04 | .41 |
| I worked myself into a certain anger or rage over certain posts. | 2.80 | 0.08 | **.53** | .24 | .31 | −.16 |
| I worked myself into certain anxieties over certain posts. | 1.98 | 0.07 | **.51** | .08 | .42 | −.13 |
| With certain posts, I imagined all kinds of things that were not described or pictured in the posts. | 2.39 | 0.07 | **.59** | .36 | .11 | .17 |
| With certain posts, I thought about why I see things different or why I would do things differently from what was presented in the post. | 3.34 | 0.08 | **.60** | .19 | .33 | .09 |
| I sometimes tried to find a middle ground between the content of a post and my own view. | 3.19 | 0.08 | **.56** | .47 | .19 | .13 |
| Some posts caused me to have an ironic or sarcastic attitude. | 3.97 | 0.09 | **.55** | .41 | .14 | .14 |
| I enjoyed certain posts because they "were so bad that they were good." | 3.33 | 0.09 | .28 | **.52** | .24 | .03 |
| I occasionally worked myself into a certain moral outrage. | 2.66 | 0.08 | .19 | **.50** | .29 | .15 |
| I tried not to judge morally but to simply look at things from a neutral standpoint. | 4.26 | 0.08 | .50 | .30 | .26 | −.02 |
| I did not become upset about things that I found morally wrong but remained relaxed. | 4.29 | 0.08 | .08 | .41 | .03 | .31 |
| I rejoiced at certain things that I would usually judge as being immoral. | 2.66 | 0.08 | −.02 | .40 | −.03 | .33 |

| Focus | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| I focused entirely on the content. | **4.46** | 0.07 | .28 | .35 | .30 | .27 |
| I got to thinking about some of the posts. | 3.65 | 0.08 | .24 | .09 | −.13 | .38 |
| With some of the posts, I felt as if I were in the middle of what was being described or depicted. | 3.37 | 0.08 | **.57** | .06 | .14 | .34 |
| I was distracted by what was happening around me. | 2.80 | 0.08 | .23 | .11 | .42 | −.17 |
| I was absorbed but jolted ay my immersion by inconsistencies in the content. | 2.45 | 0.07 | **.52** | .23 | .38 | −.01 |
| I was distracted by technical problems or difficulties with using the platform. | **1.73** | 0.06 | .41 | .04 | .37 | −.06 |
| I took a close look at the technology or functionality of [platform]. | 2.20 | 0.07 | .45 | .03 | .16 | .11 |
| With certain posts, I looked closely at how they were made, their style, or their aesthetic. | 2.61 | 0.08 | **.57** | .16 | .14 | .24 |
| I identified with the authors of some posts. | 2.58 | 0.07 | **.64** | −.20 | .13 | .27 |
| I tried to take the perspective of the authors of posts. | 2.73 | 0.07 | **.73** | −.11 | .15 | .24 |
| With certain posts, I considered what they mean for my relationship with the authors or others mentioned or depicted. | 2.73 | 0.07 | **.74** | .07 | .05 | .13 |
| I asked myself whether posts contained a particular symbolism or message. | 2.75 | 0.08 | **.75** | .09 | .09 | .16 |
| I thought about whether some posts had a deeper meaning that the authors are not aware of. | 2.73 | 0.08 | **.70** | .18 | .12 | .12 |
| My attention was focused on how I felt or reacted to the posts. | 2.71 | 0.07 | **.71** | .08 | .21 | .15 |
| I thought about whether certain posts could serve as guidance, whether as a model or as a negative example. | 2.83 | 0.08 | **.69** | .13 | .16 | .16 |
| I considered how good my life is compared with the lives of people making posts or appearing in posts. | 3.02 | 0.08 | **.61** | .20 | .11 | .25 |

*Note. n* = 531. Depending on the statement, the question was: "Please indicate whether the following statements apply to that situation" (i.e., when Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram was last used), with responses ranging from 1 (*not true at all*) to 7 (*completely true*), or "How often did the following happen in that situation?" with responses ranging from 1 (*never*) to 7 (*very often*). The extraction method was principal component analysis with a Varimax rotation.
Means for the five items with the highest and lowest agreement and factor loadings above .50 are in bold.
[a] For each user, "[platform]" was replaced with the platform that had been used last.

### *Modeling and Analysis*

It is important to consider how the structure of strategies could be modeled statistically, as the patterns identified in the data differ somewhat from those found in many published studies on media use or effects. After all, the dimensions of the framework of the strategies of media use are not dimensions in a statistical sense but are understood as sets of elements that users can choose from to form their overall strategy in a given situation. Statistical analysis can then determine which elements from different theoretical dimensions are typically combined in a given population, forming the dimensions of a statistical model (e.g., as factors extracted or tested by methods of dimensionality reduction).

The structure of the data explored in this study differs somewhat from what psychometric studies analyze, in which items are supposed to be reliable indicators of underlying latent variables. In the present study, the items represent conceptually distinct elements of practices that can be combined more or less freely, although the meaning of some items varies in nuances.

In that light, the analysis aims to determine whether there are typical combinations that would result in common variance among the items, and how typical they are, as indicated by how easy it is to capture the variance of the items in a less complex model of the data. This is equivalent to the logic of principal component analysis (PCA) instead of exploratory or confirmatory factor analysis. PCA does not necessarily assume the items to be indicators of underlying constructs but seeks to reduce complexity by identifying several axes that describe the relationships between the items without sacrificing too much information. Thus, in the present case, the factors are merely a more or less parsimonious representation of the typical structure of strategies, not of some objective dimensionality in the data.

A hierarchical cluster analysis will then be conducted based on the similarities between the episodes the respondents reported. This similarity is calculated based on the individual items concerning the elements of strategies, not the factors previously identified. Even if the individual items were correlated, they would still represent distinct aspects of strategies. Users' practices could thus resemble each other to varying degrees in terms of each element.

As in the case of dimensional analysis, the clusters constitute a less complex representation of the data than a way of identifying a fixed number of distinct strategies. Similar to the factors in the PCA, determining how many clusters are retained is an analytical choice.

The results of the cluster analysis can be interpreted, albeit with caution, as indicating types of concrete situational strategies because they refer not only to users' overall preference for elements of strategies but also to choices during a single episode. Of course, individual practices vary nonetheless and match the most prototypical practices in each cluster to varying degrees. Users could also have modified their specific strategies during an episode. Therefore, agreement with the two statements does not mean that the corresponding elements were used simultaneously.

Linear and multinomial logistic regression analyses will be performed to determine whether the choice of typical strategies (i.e., represented in a simplified form according to the factors from the PCA and

the clusters) can be predicted by the respondents' social status and thus be related to the dimensions of strategies related to resources.

Finally, the results of a correspondence analysis can be interpreted as a simplified representation of the relationship between strategies, situations, or arrangements, and social status by projecting them in a space with fewer dimensions.

## Results

Most respondents reported most recently using Facebook (67%), followed by Instagram (30%) and Twitter (3%). Although most did not comment on or share anything during the episode, 60% liked one or more posts or comments. A majority of 84% reported using social media at home—among them, 10% in bed—followed by 7% at work, school, or university; 26% used them in the presence of others whom they would have usually had a conservation with in such a situation (e.g., family members or colleagues); and 50% used them while at once using other media (e.g., television or music).

According to the mean agreement with the items concerning styles, attitudes, and focus (see Table 1), social media use was initiated habitually. Users mostly focused on the content itself rather than on particular feelings and thoughts; their attitudes were mostly relaxed and distanced, and they enjoyed certain posts but scrolled past most of them. Most of them did not stop because using the platform made them uncomfortable but because they lost interest or had other things to do.

To explore the structure of the strategies, four factors explaining 39% of the overall variance were retained in a PCA of the 61 items concerning the strategy elements. While 14 factors with an eigenvalue exceeding 1 could be extracted, four somewhat stood out. This smaller number of factors also seems reasonable for future theory building about the antecedents and consequences of strategies or about relationships with productive use and other dimensions neglected in the present study. It can also serve as a basis for the development of manageable scales if each factor is represented by a few selected items.

That considerable reduction in dimensionality while preserving a significant share of the original variance may suggest one of two things. Either elements of strategies were not combined at random but certain combinations were considered more fitting by the users, or respondents failed to appreciate the conceptual differences between superficially similar items and rated them consistently as if their meaning were identical. However, if two similar items load on the same factor, this can still mean that respondents perceived them as distinct but included both of the corresponding elements in their episodes. Furthermore, while similarly worded items are often grouped together (e.g., on factor 2), the factors also include diverse elements from different dimensions, particularly in factor 4.

If we accept that the factors are not purely artifacts of linguistic similarities, each factor contains several elements that were combined relatively often. However, to each such group of elements, one or more groups of elements loading on other factors could be added to form an overall strategy. Because the factors represent statistically independent axes, the elements loading on different factors are not mutually

exclusive but may or may not be combined. The four factors (see Table 1) represent groups of elements emphasizing the following:

1. A focus on emotion, an empathic attitude, and a focus on the meaning of posts for oneself and the authors;
2. An attitude of critical or neutral distance, attention to inconsistencies, and sometimes an ironic or moralizing attitude;
3. A style of use that involves scrolling until losing interest or becoming uncomfortable; and
4. A style of habitual use and, in terms of focus and attitude, emotionally relaxed or enjoyable and absorbed, thorough use.

When more factors are extracted, several additional differentiated groups of elements can be identified, including a morally distanced or detached attitude, active time management, and indulging specifically in emotions or the aesthetic qualities of posts.

To a certain extent, the factors are each dominated by items located at different levels of control over episodes of social media use: first, the basic management of the initiation and termination of the episode, then the type and degree of control over emotional and cognitive attitudes, and finally, a level at which the experience can become more meaningful at a personal or symbolical level by focusing on more than the immediate subject of the content.

According to linear regression analyses using individual scores for the factors, the elements associated with the first and fourth factors did not seem to be employed more frequently by any sociodemographic group (see Table 2). It seems that "meaningful" focuses are not limited to certain privileged groups and that habitualization is relevant across social categories. The elements of the second factor seemed to be chosen more often by men and older users, the elements of the third factor by younger users and ones with a low level of formal education.

*Table 2. Linear Regression of the Factor Scores.*

| | Factor 1 | | | | | Factor 2 | | | | | Factor 3 | | | | | Factor 4 | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *b* | *SE* | 95% CI | | *p* | *b* | *SE* | 95% CI | | *p* | *b* | *SE* | 95% CI | | *p* | *b* | *SE* | 95% CI | | *p* |
| | | | *LL* | *UL* | | | | *LL* | *UL* | | | | *LL* | *UL* | | | | *LL* | *UL* | |
| Gender: Male [a] | 0.14 | 0.11 | −0.07 | 0.35 | .190 | 0.23 | 0.10 | 0.03 | 0.44 | .026 | 0.07 | 0.10 | −0.13 | 0.26 | .511 | −0.02 | 0.11 | −0.23 | 0.19 | .839 |
| Age, in years [b] | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 30−39 | 0.06 | 0.20 | −0.33 | 0.45 | .762 | −0.09 | 0.19 | −0.47 | 0.29 | .644 | −0.22 | 0.19 | −0.58 | 0.15 | .240 | 0.26 | 0.20 | −0.12 | 0.64 | .184 |
| 40−49 | 0.09 | 0.20 | −0.29 | 0.48 | .632 | 0.24 | 0.19 | −0.13 | 0.62 | .202 | −0.48 | 0.18 | −0.84 | −0.12 | .009 | −0.24 | 0.19 | −0.62 | 0.14 | .221 |
| 50−59 | 0.21 | 0.18 | −0.13 | 0.56 | .230 | 0.25 | 0.17 | −0.09 | 0.59 | .148 | −0.76 | 0.17 | −1.09 | −0.43 | <.001 | −0.06 | 0.17 | −0.40 | 0.28 | .734 |
| >59 | 0.16 | 0.18 | −0.20 | 0.52 | .397 | 0.71 | 0.18 | 0.36 | 1.06 | <.001 | −0.91 | 0.17 | −1.25 | −0.57 | <.001 | 0.09 | 0.18 | −0.27 | 0.44 | .630 |
| Level of formal education [c] | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Middle | 0.08 | 0.14 | −0.19 | 0.35 | .578 | 0.15 | 0.13 | −0.11 | 0.42 | .264 | −0.25 | 0.13 | −0.51 | 0.00 | .054 | 0.31 | 0.14 | 0.05 | 0.58 | .022 |
| Higher | 0.15 | 0.14 | −0.13 | 0.43 | .302 | 0.16 | 0.14 | −0.12 | 0.43 | .260 | −0.40 | 0.13 | −0.67 | −0.14 | .003 | 0.15 | 0.14 | −0.13 | 0.42 | .304 |
| $R^2$ | .01 | | | | | .09 | | | | | .09 | | | | | .03 | | | | |

*Note. n* = 371. CI = confidence interval; *LL* = lower limit; *UL* = upper limit.

[a] Reference: Female (no respondents included in this analysis identified as nonbinary).

[b] Reference: 18−29 years.

[c] Reference: Lower.

The sociodemographic variables explain a fair amount of variance in the scores of those factors (approx. 9%), which is not negligible given that they represent strategies in single situations instead of general preferences. However, these effects should be interpreted with caution because only the factors—not individual choices—were explained, and the scores may not entirely reflect actual practices because of social desirability bias (e.g., more educated respondents reported a more "critical" attitude) and systematically biased memories that can cause spurious correlations.

Although the number of clusters retained in any cluster analysis is rather subjective, an inspection of the dendrogram suggested a solution with four clusters of episodes. Figure 1 describes those clusters (based on Ward's method with Euclidian distances) in relation to the four mentioned factors, and the following characterization is also consistent with the means for the individual items:

1. Cluster 1 comprises elements of the first and particularly of the second factor: paying attention to meaning but also remaining critical, enjoying and reflecting on certain emotional and aesthetic posts while ignoring others, which represents *a strategy of selective symbolic engagement with the content*;
2. Cluster 2 includes users who scrolled until losing interest and who tended to score lower on the first factor and thus represents *a strategy of less-controlled use* that is not particularly concerned with the emotional and other significance of posts;
3. Cluster 3 primarily combines an average degree of habitual and relaxed use with low scores for the other factors, which represents *a strategy of absorbed, yet less engaged, somewhat habitualized use*; and
4. Cluster 4 contains episodes who seem to have used social media in a moderately critical way, with partial focus on meaningfulness and without a clear endpoint set by the users themselves—that is, *a strategy of rather emotional but not extremely absorbed use*. Cluster 4 may partly be an artifact; on average, users in the cluster score highest across the items, possibly because of a central tendency bias because the average agreement across all items was somewhat below the midpoint of the scale, which may lead to a cluster of users with a tendency toward the center.
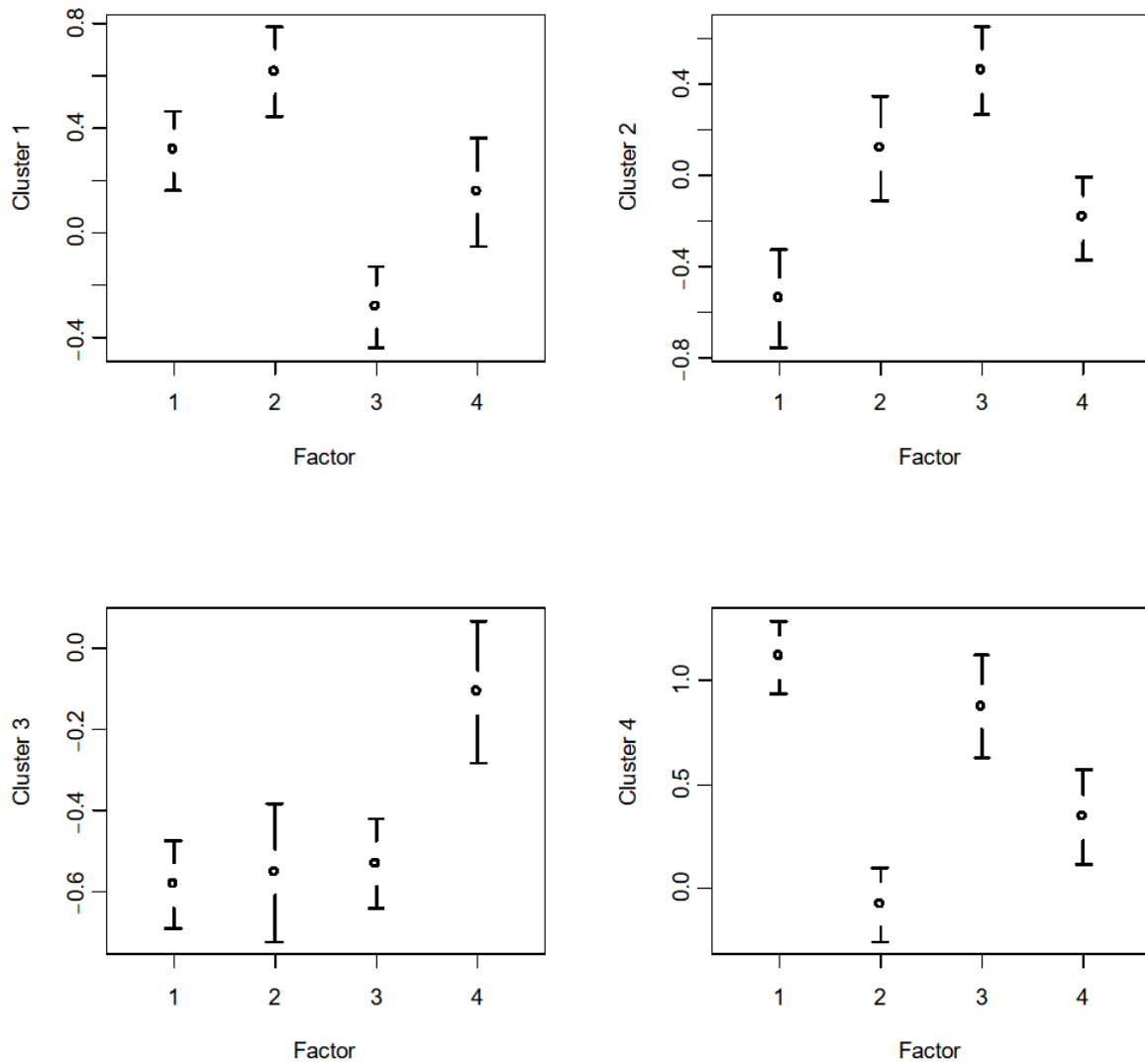
**Figure 1. Means of the factor scores by cluster.**
*Note.* Bars indicate 95% confidence intervals.

A multinomial logistic regression of the clusters according to sociodemographic variables correctly predicts the cluster 36% of the time. However, despite a significant but rather modest explanation of the probabilities by the dependent variables (Nagelkerke's pseudo-$R^2$ = .05[3]; see Table

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[3] Although this conventional measure, which is reported for the sake of comparativity, generally tends to suggest a poor model fit, the present model actually does not seem to perform very well.

3 for details), the model is not successful compared with an a priori probability set at 36% (i.e., the size of the largest cluster) instead of 25% (i.e., an equal probability for each of the four clusters).

**Table 3. Multinomial Logistic Regression of the Clusters.**

| | Cluster 2 | | | | | Cluster 3 | | | | | Cluster 4 | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | $e^{\beta}$ | SE | 95% CI | | p | $e^{\beta}$ | SE | 95% CI | | p | $e^{\beta}$ | SE | 95% CI | | p |
| | | | LL | UL | | | | LL | UL | | | | LL | UL | |
| Gender: Male [a] | 1.09 | 0.29 | 0.53 | 1.64 | <.001 | 0.88 | 0.23 | 0.42 | 1.33 | <.001 | 1.45 | 0.27 | 0.93 | 1.97 | <.001 |
| Age, in years [b] | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 30–39 | 0.75 | 0.50 | −0.23 | 1.73 | <.001 | 1.28 | 0.44 | 0.42 | 2.14 | <.001 | 0.67 | 0.48 | −0.27 | 1.62 | <.001 |
| 40–49 | 0.41 | 0.53 | −0.62 | 1.45 | .040 | 1.22 | 0.43 | 0.38 | 2.06 | .010 | 0.52 | 0.48 | −0.42 | 1.46 | .024 |
| 50–59 | 0.47 | 0.46 | −0.43 | 1.37 | .060 | 1.29 | 0.39 | 0.53 | 2.06 | .030 | 0.53 | 0.43 | −0.32 | 1.37 | .042 |
| >59 | 0.38 | 0.46 | −0.53 | 1.28 | .002 | 0.73 | 0.39 | −0.04 | 1.50 | <.001 | 0.27 | 0.44 | −0.60 | 1.13 | .002 |
| Level of formal education[c] | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Middle | 1.40 | 0.36 | 0.70 | 2.12 | .002 | 0.70 | 0.30 | 0.11 | 1.28 | <.001 | 0.59 | 0.34 | −0.08 | 1.27 | <.001 |
| Higher | 0.67 | 0.40 | −0.11 | 1.45 | .013 | 0.79 | 0.30 | 0.20 | 1.38 | .003 | 0.50 | 0.35 | −0.19 | 1.19 | .007 |

*Note. n* = 531. Reference category: Cluster 1. CI = confidence interval; *LL* = lower limit; *UL* = upper limit.
[a] Reference: Female (no respondents included in the analysis identified as nonbinary).
[b] Reference: 18–29 years.
[c] Reference: Lower.

The clusters share a rather similar sociodemographic profile of the users reporting the episodes. In terms of level of education, Cluster 2 stands out owing to its somewhat higher rate of respondents with an intermediate level of formal education (40% vs. 26–30% for other clusters), as does Cluster 4 given its larger proportion of men (53% vs. 44%–48%). The average age for each cluster does not vary significantly (ranging from 51 years in Cluster 4 to 47 years in Cluster 1 but $R^2$ = .01 for age differences by cluster).

In the correspondence analysis of the clusters, types of situations and arrangements, and sociodemographic variables, three dimensions explain 24% of the inertia. In terms of the situational and sociodemographic variables, the first three dimensions differentiate between:

1. Mobile use in public space, mostly of Instagram, by younger, more highly educated respondents versus more stationary use at home on computers and tablets, more often on Facebook, and by older respondents with a low level of formal education;
2. The presence of others whom one usually talks to and the parallel use of other media versus the exclusive use of social media alone and at work, in school or in university; and
3. Using social media while waiting or walking, and using Twitter versus social media use in bed and on public transport (see Figures 2 and 3 for plots of the first three dimensions).
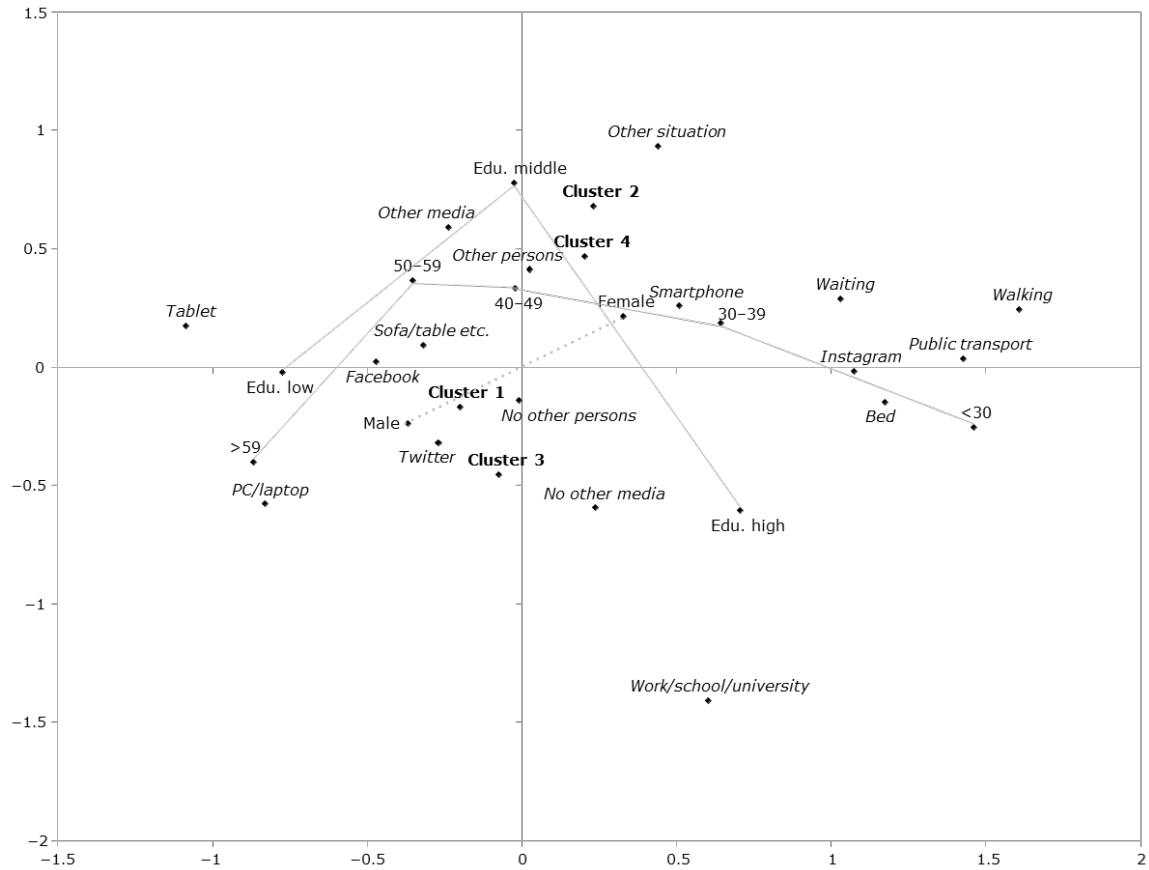
***Figure 2. Coordinates for the first two dimensions from the correspondence analysis of clusters, types of situations and arrangements, and sociodemographic variables.***

***Figure 3. Coordinates for the second and third dimension from the correspondence analysis of clusters, types of situations and arrangements, and sociodemographic variables.***

The first dimension thus captures a relatively clear pattern of social positions, devices, platforms, and aspects of situations or arrangements, but the clusters are relatively independent of that axis. Indeed, the profile of Cluster 1 is not described particularly well by either of the first three dimensions of the correspondence analysis (*cos*² = approx. .01 for each dimension), whereas Clusters 2 and 3 mostly relate to the second dimension (*cos*² = .09 and .12, respectively), and Cluster 4 is somewhat connected to the second dimension and closely connected to the third (*cos*² = .06 and .18, respectively).

The strategies of less-controlled scrolling that is not overly concerned with the meaning (i.e., represented by Cluster 2) and of more absorbed use (i.e., represented by Cluster 4) are related somewhat strongly to the presence of others and the use of other media, although social media were still mostly used alone, and in all but Cluster 3, other media were used in parallel by most respondents.

The starkly different situations in bed and on public transport at one pole of the third dimension seem to allow for the more absorbed type of media use that is typical of Cluster 4, which may have also

been the case for younger and older respondents versus middle-aged ones whose days may be more tightly organized.

Based on the results of the logistic regression and correspondence analysis, it seems that to strategically manage an episode of social media use is to manage a specific situation, instead of strategies mainly being a function of social status. Apart from more elaborate designs that allow us to better differentiate between the influence of contexts, future studies should also seek to analyze situations in more detail without neglecting the search for other potentially relevant dimensions of social status.

**Conclusion**

The study presented here marked a first step toward a more holistic and, at the same time, standardized analysis of how people use social media, although the study had to focus on certain dimensions closer to the episode and the process of reception. Individual strategies in specific situations were structured rather loosely according to the combination of elements and the relationship with social structure. Although users probably relied on schemata of practice, those schemata may have differed because of the circumstances of their acquisition and may have been adapted to fit the specific situation and content. Even so, certain patterns were identified—for instance, opposing engaged to more relaxed, distanced, or more habitualized and less-controlled use.

Other than the specific schemata of practice suggesting a combination of elements for such practices, more general evaluative schemata may have guided the choice of strategies and relate to their overall sense, such as the idea that media use can, at times, be a low-effort pastime that is not emotionally or cognitively exhausting (probably in the case of relaxed, emotionally distanced or comfortably absorbed, or habitual use), something that requires critical distance, or something that should be symbolically, aesthetically, and/or personally meaningful.

A single analysis of media strategies cannot simply result in one consistent scale for measuring them across all media and situations. Because of the structure of strategies as adaptable combinations of elements, the study could only provide a methodological blueprint for one of the different methodological approaches, items that can be adjusted to other types of media use, and hints to patterns that need to be replicated and should be compared with findings in other contexts. The strength of such patterns is an empirical question, not simply a matter of optimized scales. Nevertheless, overall strategies may be represented by selected items that reflect only selected empirical patterns more or less reliably. In this sense, a preliminary (sub)scale for main features of receptive social media use consisting of 3 to 5 items per factor could be used in future studies and be complemented by productive aspects and dimensions neglected in this study.

Although reliability as the internal consistency of scales cannot be a major concern in measuring strategies of media use, the reliability of recall and verbalization (i.e., validity about the practice as it happened) can be suboptimal and should always be maximized. Because of such issues, strategies may appear less structured than they are, or systematic biases may introduce spurious patterns. Although I am not aware of specific biases other than the abovementioned tendency to perceive linguistically similar, yet

conceptually different, items as redundant, one may speculate about or, if feasible, estimate such biases empirically based on comparisons of different methodologies.

The *how* of media use, as an important aspect of everyday media practices, should be further investigated using other methods of data collection and including more information about situational contexts and users' social backgrounds. The holistic framework should also be applied to other forms of media use, including active communication on social media. Strategies can then also be connected to different antecedents and outcomes of media use—for example, in the context of entertainment, political information and discussion, health and well-being, and the formation and maintenance of social relationships.

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