The *interpretive* and *ideal-type* approach: Rethinking digital non-use(s) in a Weberian perspective

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Despite attempts to conceptualize the digital divide through a critical lens that includes different ontologies of non-Internet use, research still tends to dichotomize users and non-users and to depict non-users as a homogeneous group. This tendency masks multifaceted social and agentic processes that involve status, class, literacy, identity, actions, and practices. In response, we urge researchers to employ a substantive theoretical and analytical framework to critically explore non-use(s) and its different meanings and outcomes. Max Weber's interpretive perspective and his concept of the ideal type can provide such a framework.

The Weberian perspective offers both a holistic and situational analysis of the digital divide and of what non-use signifies for social agents. Herein, we discuss this perspective and how it can be used to theorize non-use(s) by applying the ideal type approach as an analytical construct to address involuntary and voluntary digital exclusion. Although non-Internet users are often portrayed as involuntarily excluded (e.g., older adults or marginalized communities), there is also voluntary exclusion, even among social groups associated with

Internet use (e.g., young people). Hence, we bring together research on different types of non-users: older adults that do not adopt the Internet and young adults that reject social networking sites. Through the Weberian interpretive lens, we show that this non-usage cannot be seen as a monolithic concept/activity or an undifferentiated cluster – there is an array of non-users and sociotechnical contexts along a continuum. Non-Internet use(s) is embedded in dynamic social and digital processes where context is not only a cause but also an outcome. On one hand, Max Weber's theoretical legacy helps theorize the nuanced and complex layers of digital exclusion (be it voluntary, involuntary or mixed). On the other hand, it also proposes methodological strategies to examine meanings and implications of digital exclusion(s).

Keywords: Weber, ideal type, interpretive sociology, digital technologies, non-use

Dividers in digital divide studies?

We wish to understand on the one hand the relationships and the cultural significance of individual events in their contemporary manifestations and on the other the cause of their being historically so and not otherwise.

Weber, 1949 [1904], p.72

The literature on digital divides has shifted from a technical focus on technology access in the early 90s to include different levels of literacy and skills (Blank & Groselj, 2015; Castells, 2001; Hargittai, 2007). These different skills comprise the ability to effectively use digital technologies, reap benefits, and avoid potential risks. Access, use, and impact of digital

technologies are deeply intertwined with social dimensions, such as social class, status, education, gender, and age roles (Halford & Savage, 2010; Neves, 2015; Ragnedda & Muschert, 2013, 2015; Robinson et al., 2015; Warschauer, 2004). Despite this "recurring cycle between social and digital inequalities" (Ragnedda & Muschert, 2015, p. 2759), the jury is still out on which inequalities will be augmented by digital technologies, which new ones will emerge, and if any will be alleviated (Robinson et al., 2015).

Although the digital divides field has been exploring these various social dynamics, theoretical approaches to frame them are still lacking in the literature (Ragnedda & Muschert, 2015). In particular, despite some notable efforts (Baumer et al., 2013; Portwood-Stacer, 2012; Wyatt et al., 2002; Wyatt 2003, 2014), research still tends to conceptualize users and non-users as a binary and depict non-users as a homogeneous group. For instance, non-Internet users are often described as involuntarily excluded (e.g., older adults, unskilled, or marginalized communities). However, there is also voluntary exclusion amongst social groups associated with Internet use, such as young people (Eynon & Geniets, 2012; Neves et al., 2015). To help researchers critically explore non-use and its different meanings and effects, we propose drawing on seminal sociologist Max Weber, namely his interpretive perspective and his concept of the ideal type.

A small body of literature has employed Weber's concepts in the digital divides field, mostly on social stratification (Blagoev, 2015; Blank & Groselj, 2015; Ragnedda & Muschert, 2013, 2015; Schroeder, 2015; Wessels, 2015; Witte & Mannon, 2010). However, Weber's interpretive sociology is largely underexplored in this field and can be invaluable in the study of digital technologies. Firstly, it connects micro, meso, and macro dimensions by bringing

together meanings attributed to technology use and non-use with actions, structures, and resulting social changes or continuities. For example, by understanding how users see and place themselves as digital agents and how non-users make sense of users and usage, we can uncover types of use and non-use, barriers to technology use and appropriation, social identities, status, practices, structured and unstructured contexts, and a better understanding of the societal impact of technology in the daily lives of different users and non-users. Secondly, it sheds light on the complex relation between the role of new technology in everyday life and its wider social implications. For instance, the pervasiveness of digital technologies in industrialized societies enhances the sociotechnical functions of these technologies as frequent mediators of social dynamics, enabling or constraining actions and interactions. Additionally, routinization and ritualization of technology, as increasingly embedded in our professional and personal lives, justifies a growing rationalization, instrumentality, and marketization of automation and mechanization (Schroeder & Ling, 2013). Thus, Weber provides a multi-level approach to study digital technologies by including meanings, actions, and outcomes. Furthermore, the Weberian ideal type connects subjective understanding and structure – a useful strategy for analyzing any sociotechnical reality (Hekman, 1983; Rosenberg, 2016). To date and to our knowledge, the ideal type is absent in the analysis of digital technologies. Therefore, our contribution is twofold: i) to present and contextualize the Weberian interpretive lens and the ideal type approach, showing their value for studying digital divides; and ii) to sketch how this approach can help uncover and frame non-use. For the latter, we bring together research with different types of non-users: older adults that do not adopt the Internet and young adults that reject social networking sites.

Weber's interpretive framework and the ideal type

Weberian sociology aims to understand the meaning that people attribute to actions, values, and circumstances, in order to explain social behaviors and outcomes (Weber, 1981 [1913]). This perspective offers an important framework to study digital divides, because it integrates and contextualizes the meanings that people ascribe to use or non-use of technology and its outcomes in our measurement and interpretation of digital inequalities – it positions social agents at the forefront of our understandings of sociotechnical systems and its societal impacts. It allows us to explore identities, performances, embedded social distinctions and inequalities. We know, for example, that social class and status affect technology choices and values around use (Ames et al., 2011). To study meanings and actions of social agents, Weber (1981 [1913]) follows a hermeneutic approach that rejects both methodological unity and the opposition between interpretation ("*Verstehen*") and explanation *("Erklären")*. Unlike the German tradition that introduced *Verstehen* as a romantic reaction to Enlightenment rationalism (Eliaeson, 2000), Weber's interpretive perspective followed a rational and scientific approach (Weber, 1981 [1913]). His approach should be taken as "the ability to get not inside the skin of other people, but rather [understand] the concepts they use to organize their experience of the world" (David, 2010, p. xxiii). Additionally, Weber did not focus on the meaning of experiences *per se* (i.e., phenomenology*)*; he was rather interested in when and how ideas affect both people's lives and wider social interactions (Rosenberg, 2016).

Adapted to digital divide studies, his interpretive sociology helps reveal the connection between patterns of intended meaning and broader social relationships. The general meaning

a given action typically has for members of a specific stratum or class, such as daily use of social networking sites for highly-educated Internet users, influences the ability to manage audiences and resources – for instance, by selecting a social networking site for interaction with close friends, such as Facebook, and another for professional dynamics, such as LinkedIn. These are captured empirically in social actions (Rosenberg, 2013) and illustrate how skills and technologies can shape social relations and be used to accrue resources. Those with knowledge and capital are able to more efficiently gather and accumulate resources (Halford and Savage, 2010).

Although Weber deployed causal as well as interpretive explanations in his comprehensive sociological analysis of society, 'interpretive sociology' was later taken to be opposed to causal and macro explanations. This is perhaps the result of having his work translated and read in light of theoretical preoccupations of different theorists, from Talcott Parsons and Alfred Schütz to Frankfurt School thinkers (David, 2010). Yet Weber tried to reconcile approaches and disputes, particularly during the German quarrel over methods ('*Methodenstreit*') that opposed positivist causal analysis and the hermeneutics of understanding (Aron, 1961). It was in this context that Weber's ideal type emerged, based on ideas of economic theory adapted to historical phenomena (Swedberg & Agevall, 2005). In his 1904 (1949, p. 90) essay on the "Objectivity of Social Science and Social Policy", Weber explains:

> An ideal type is formed by the one-sided *accentuation* of one or more points of view and by the synthesis of a great many diffuse, discrete, more or less present and occasionally absent *concrete individual* phenomena, which are arranged according to

those one-sidedly emphasized viewpoints into a unified *analytical* construct (*Gedankenbild*). In its conceptual purity, this mental construct (*Gedankenbild*) cannot be found empirically anywhere in reality. It is a *utopia*. Historical research faces the task of determining in each individual case, the extent to which this ideal-construct approximates to or diverges from reality to what extent for example, the economic structure of a certain city is to be classified as a "city-economy" (Weber's emphasis).

By *accentuation*, Weber intends the process of identifying and heightening the meaningful elements that differentiate phenomena; by *synthesis*, he means the formation of a mental idea into an integrated and logical construct, such as "rational capitalism" (Rosenberg, 2016). To exemplify his ideal type, Weber (1949 [1904], pp. 90-1) invokes "handicraft". He writes, one can "work the 'idea' of 'handicraft' into a utopia by arranging certain traits, actually found in an unclear, confused state in the...enterprises of the most diverse epochs and countries, into a consistent ideal-construct by an accentuation of their basic tendencies". This ideal type can then be used to compare or outline principles of different branches of economic and intellectual activity of a given company. Or it can be used as the antithesis of another ideal type that sets out the features of modern industry. Thus, ideal types are reference points and artificial constructions built on the isolation of typical traits. They are not hypotheses, but help with their development; they are not descriptions of reality but give clear expression to those descriptions (Weber, 1949 [1904]). Finally, they are a 'utopia' because we cannot find them perfectly in any empirical reality.

Ideal types are deliberately highlighted to help portray reality, by making its central elements visible and intelligible (Eliaeson, 2000). As we cannot grasp any social reality in its entirety, we can use ideal types to understand it more fully. Since the social sciences are concerned with the meaning of reality, this meaning can be explored with the relationship between empirical data and ideal types (Weber, 1949 [1904]). So, the ideal type is a conceptual tool to compare and measure reality (a means to knowledge rather than an end), allowing researchers to analyze differences and similarities between constructs and concrete cases and thus to illuminate meanings and relationships. The analysis of social reality must be done with several ideal types; however, ideal types are not statistical averages, perfect models, or axiological representations. The 'ideal' refers to the logical sense of the term and not to a moral sense: "There are ideal types of brothels as well as of religions" (Weber, 1949 [1904], p. 130).

For Weber, ideal types are developed in reference to research and have to be valuable and heuristic, even if just partially verifiable in different contexts (Weber, 1949 [1904]) – because "they serve the purpose of making concrete cultural, or historical, situations accessible to human 'understanding'" (Cahnman, 1965, p. 270). Furthermore, ideal types allow for building hypotheses connected with the conditions that led or contributed to a particular phenomenon or the consequences arising therefrom. For example, even when we cannot establish relationships between phenomena ('adequate causation'), Weber still encourages the use of ideal types: "to grasp the real causal interconnections, we construct unreal ones" (Weber, 2012 [1906], p. 182). This strategy is used by Weber (2012 [1906]) to discuss "objective possibility", i.e., the importance of using historical knowledge and rational logic to think about different outcomes. To completely understand what happened in a certain social

event or phenomenon, we also need to think about what could have happened (Aron, 1961). The ideal type is also utilized to resolve the tension between generalizing and individualizing. For example, when Weber tries to explain capitalism under the aegis of the general 'economy' concept, it misses specific traits of capitalism; but, when a traditional conceptualization of capitalism is used, it leaves no room for comparisons with other related phenomena.

Unlike his interpretative sociology, Weber's ideal type attracted criticism grounded on assumptions that ideal types were atheoretical, formulated arbitrarily, and classificatory rather than explicatory (Bruun & Whimster, 2012; Rosenberg, 2016). Authors such as Talcott Parsons (1964) deployed the ideal type concept in relation to typologies of human behavior or the study of modern capitalism and bureaucracy. However, most modifications led to loss of flexibility, reification, images instead of ideal-types, and approaches that contradicted Weber's efforts (Cahnman, 1965). The ideal types preceded Weber's essays on interpretive sociology, but there is a close connection between his ideal types and his theory, visible in "The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism" (Weber, 1904/1905), developed around the same time as the ideal types (Rosenberg, 2016). It was in "The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism" that Weber found phenomena that could not be captured through historical analysis (e.g., relationship between the ideal and material interests of different social layers), which led him to seek interpretive sociological types to address such phenomena (Rosenberg, 2016). Weber also states that theory "creates ideal types, and this contribution is, precisely in my eyes, the most indispensable" (Bruun & Whimster, 2012, p. xxv). He also conceptualized the ideal type as an essential part of his theoretical development, reinforcing that its use "seeks to establish how far certain theoretically

presentable rational consequences have followed. And possibly, why they did not follow" (Weber, 2004c [1921], p. 216).

Regarding criticism of the arbitrary nature of ideal types, we must differentiate between Weber's various types (Aron, 1961; Kalberg, 1994; Kuckartz, 1991; Rogers, 1969; Rosenberg, 2016). For this chapter, it is useful to distinguish between his original historical types and his sociological types (Rosenberg, 2016). Although these are complementary, they differ in that sociological types are not only developed as a comparison to reality, but are also developed for explanatory and theoretical purposes. For Weber, the value of sociology was to bring a deeper theoretical and comparative perspective into historical analysis (Rosenberg, 2016). Weber states in "Basic Sociological Concepts" (2004 [1922], p. 333), when talking about social action and regularities, that sociology and history are different since: "sociology is concerned with *typologies* of such modes of action unlike history, which concerns itself with causal imputation in respect of important fateful singular events." Specifically social actions exhibit "actual regularities" insofar as the "intended meaning" is attributed similarly to repeated actions by one or several individuals. The meaning that the sociologist attributes to these regularities, typical across social agents, remains contingent on a research goal and theoretical approach.

Finally, Weber's work shows how ideal types are part of a theoretical scheme to explain – and not merely classify – social processes. For example, in the implications of the relationship between the Protestant "calling" and the rational "capitalist spirit" (the "elective affinity") for the lifestyle of some Western middle-classes (Weber, 2002 [1904-1905]) or in his theory of types of "religious rejections of the world" to explain differences of rational

capitalism in China and India (Weber, 2004b, 2004c [1921]; Rosenberg, 2016). Thus, for Weber, explanation was embedded in classification and his sociological ideal types were not formulated erratically, but to provide clear concepts and link theory, methods, and empirical work in order to explain social phenomena (Rosenberg, 2013).

Therefore, the ideal type strategy is useful to conceptualize digital divide(s) because it helps explain what motivates, shapes, and characterizes uses and non-uses (whether voluntary, involuntary, or mixed) without rigid classifications that i) do not represent the complexity of social and digital contexts and ii) neglect the contextual understandings of different social agents. Additionally, Weber's ideal type is both structural and agentic (Hekman, 1983), allowing us to frame meanings and actions as interconnected, and to establish a continuum between subjective understanding and social structure. This continuum is crucial for scholars studying the links between social and digital stratification, as both forms are based on structural and agentic dynamics alike. To demonstrate its value for digital divide studies, the next section presents an exercise to illustrate the application of Weber's interpretive framework and ideal type.

Putting Weber to the test: Internet non-use, use, and the in-between

To put Weber's interpretive ideal types to the test, we draw on two studies:

i) *Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in later life* (2008-2010),

ii) *Non-use of social networking sites among young people* (2013-2014).

The first study examined use and perceptions towards computers, the Internet, and mobile phones amongst a representative sample of 500 older adults (65+) living in Lisbon, Portugal (Neves & Amaro, 2012; Neves, Amaro, & Fonseca, 2013). It was based on a mixed-methods approach that included questionnaires (n=500, 60% F, Mage = 74.34, S.D. = 6.453) and semi-structured interviews (n=10, 5 F, age range: 68-88). Results showed that 77 percent of older adults used a mobile phone, although only 13 percent used a computer and 10 percent used the Internet (Neves, Amaro, & Fonseca, 2013). Age and education predicted mobile phone and computer usage, whereas only education predicted Internet usage. Additionally, findings demonstrated that main factors for non-use were functional (no access and digital illiteracy) and attitudinal (lack of interest), rather than physical (age-related impairments). There were different levels of digital inclusion/exclusion, if we consider more than one technology and skill as well as a mix of voluntary and involuntary exclusion. Results also indicated mostly positive perceptions of these technologies amongst non-users, although the qualitative data showed nuanced visions of Internet and age-related norms (i.e., non-users felt that for their community they were too old for new technology) and broad Internet usage (online fraud, pornography, cheating, etc.).

In particular, the qualitative interviews captured three profiles: users, non-users, and the "faux users" (Neves & Amaro, 2012). During the interviews, two of the non-users explained that they had family living abroad and communicated with them via Skype (a video and audio online communication app): Clara had a granddaughter in Milan and Ana had a daughter and newborn granddaughter in Paris (whom she had never seen in person at the time of the interview). They both used the Internet indirectly, taking advantage of the social affordances

of the medium for social interaction; still, they considered themselves non-users since they required continuous help to set up the computer and Skype. For instance, Ana explains:

> In these moments, there is always someone with me at the computer, because I'm afraid of touching something and ruin it. I can't read. But I can see them and talk to them. And they can see me and talk back to me…it's amazing.

We named these 'faux-users', i.e., 'a person that considers himself or herself a non-user but intermittently uses a technology with assistance of others' (Neves & Amaro, 2012, para 63).

The second study is based on semi-structured interviews with 30 Portuguese young people (aged 18-26, 14 F.) who did not use social networking sites, such as Facebook or Instagram (Neves et al., 2015). We found three main factors for their rejection, namely perceived usefulness (not seeing these social media as useful for their daily lives), negative social practices on SNSs (practices that they perceived as negative, such as gossip, online grooming, social exposure, etc.) and identity and self-presentation (e.g., political, lifestyle, cultural). We found five resisters (never used) and 15 rejecters (drop-outs), but also other types of non-users. Although most saw themselves as 'non-aligned' with SNSs, we then questioned their non-alliance when uncovering surrogate users (n=6) and potential converts (n=4). The surrogate users saw themselves as non-users but used other people's accounts to access information on SNSs (mother's or friends' accounts). In the words of one surrogate user: "This way I can protect my privacy, but at the same time I can access the good things Facebook can give". The potential converts were considering or reconsidering using SNSs,

and their narratives throughout the interviews resembled an internal conversation as in the following case:

> I have a negative attitude towards it...maybe cause of what I see in the media, rapes, encounters gone bad (…) I don't like personal exposure either…and people finding my address. Maybe Facebook is not that dangerous? If I could control my privacy there, the…the settings? I don't know…

These categories were not exclusive: surrogate users and potential converts could also be resisters or rejecters. Reasons for non-use were similar across the four groups, although narratives of self-presentation and identity were not as visible amongst the resisters. All participants had personal digital technologies and were Internet users, so they did not lack access or skills to use social media nor were they asocial or socially isolated. Yet, as with the older adults, it was not easy to distinguish completely between voluntary and involuntary exclusion: some of these young non-users combined self-presentation discourses with events that led to their rejection, such as romantic problems with partners due to context collapse on Facebook or even having to stop using SNSs because of formal career impositions (e.g., one participant joined the priesthood).

Taken together, these results show that the divide between use and non-use is not clear-cut and that non-use is not static. Despite homogeneous notions of the divide between "users" and "non-users", we find a variety of non-users amongst different age groups and contexts. Using the Weberian lens, we can see how non-use of digital technologies is embedded in a dynamic social process, where context shapes and is an outcome: we have a set of non-users

and sociotechnical contexts along a continuum. By linking meanings and actions, the interpretive perspective offers a situational analysis of the digital divide, of what non-use represents for individuals, and how it connects with broader societal dimensions. These two studies show that to understand meanings and motivations, we have to frame narratives in a specific context that combines technology, structural (social class, status, age, norms, etc.), and agentic processes. For example, the relational and symbolic nature of concepts of usage and users defined perceptions and influenced practices and actions. For the older 'faux-users', the idea of use was so specific that they considered themselves non-users; for the young adults, practices and meanings of use gave them a legitimate claim to justify their positions of rejection (also visible in their description of SNSs users, as narcissistic, shallow, insecure, etc.).

Weber's ideal type is also useful to conceptualize these non-use(s), because it avoids simplistic, rigid, and mutually exclusive categories to explain the agentic and structural sociotechnical reality of uses and non-uses. Our formulation of ideal types follows a set of procedures developed by Weber in different works (1949 [1904]; 1981 [1913]; 2004a [1922]). Specifically, we mobilize his sociological types, as opposed to his historical types, to invoke the distinction drawn above. We rely on Uta Gerhardt's (1994) work that rearranged Weber's procedures in three steps. First, it is central to convert the '"heterogeneous infinity of social life" into focused concepts for scientific understanding" (Gerhardt, 1994:86) – for this, one has to collect material in a wide and open manner to uncover patterns and categories. Weber's example of the ideal type of 'handicraft', referred to earlier, accomplishes this. Secondly, converting concepts into ideal types must satisfy three validity criteria: 1) no knowledge can contradict the theoretical assumption of a phenomenon in its

conceptual representation as an ideal type; 2) its formulation must contain only essential elements; and 3) it has to be found in the socio-historical reality. Third, the ideal type has to be confronted with observed events. For Gerhardt (1994, p. 90), it is also important to: highlight the "case material" (without over-individualizing or over-generalizing), to investigate a comprehensive set of cases from a comparative perspective, and to value biographical processes that enable a deeper understanding of paths/trajectories. This "case material" must be sorted into groups that represent empirical types so we can then proceed with the necessary abstraction to construct ideal types (Gerhardt, 1994).

To complete this exercise, we use the results of our studies with older and young adults to provide an example of how ideal types could be formulated as tools to expand our understanding of digital divides. Table 1 shows the empirical types uncovered in the two studies, namely profiles (of use, non-use, and in-between) and factors (i.e., meanings and reasons) associated with those profiles.

Table 1. 'Case Material' for developing ideal types

'Case Material'	Profiles	Factors
Study 1: Older adults and ICTs	- Users	- Communication, Family Proximity, Convenience.
	- Non-users	- Functional (no access or no skills) and Attitudinal (no interest, perceptions about Internet use).
	- Faux-users (use indirectly with assistance of others)	- Functional (no skills) and attitudinal (strict notion of use).
Study 2: Young adults and	- Resisters (never used)	- Low perceived usefulness, 'negative' social practices on

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rejection of SNSs		SNSs.
	- Rejecters (drop-outs)	- Low perceived usefulness, 'negative' social practices on SNSs, self-presentation and identity.
	- Surrogate Users (use indirectly with no assistance)	- Low perceived usefulness, 'negative' social practices on SNSs, self-presentation and identity.
	- Potential Converts (considering or reconsidering use)	- Low perceived usefulness, 'negative' social practices on SNSs, self-presentation and identity.

Considering the types of non-users uncovered empirically, we sketched three ideal types of non-use that connect meanings and actions: intentional, instrumental, and imposed. Intentional and imposed are opposed versions of non-use, represented in its pure form. The intentional type includes non-users who deliberately opted for being excluded from a digital medium and who justify it in a rational and planned mode including attitudinal reasons and social practices (older non-users, younger resisters and rejecters). The imposed type includes non-users that experience functional barriers (no access or no skills) and/or are subject to subtle or strong social pressures to be excluded (age-norms, romantic constraints, context collapse, career options). Finally, the instrumental type sits between the other two and denotes a type of non-use that is flexible and caters to specific situations: indirect use, partial use, covert use, etc. (faux users, surrogate users, and potential converts are subsumed under this type). As with Weber's examples, the significance of one type requires reference to the entire scheme.

Conclusion

The three ideal types we have constructed in this chapter follow Weber's example by accentuating typical and unique aspects of various forms of non-use, representing pure or optimized relations, and refining existing categories (in this case, those of use and non-use). In particular, these ideal types enable us to understand the continuous character of the distinction between use and non-use and the relational nature of this distinction as a sociotechnical process. Non-use cannot be considered to exist on its own, outside of its relation to use and the continuum between them. Furthermore, we must consider the relation that people have to the categories that explain their action. Here, the significance of Weber's interpretive approach is apparent: categories are not merely imposed by the analyst but are actively employed by people to organize their own experiences. So, the idea of being either a user or non-user orients the "intentional" rejecters we found, whose awareness of these categories and attempts to negotiate them imposes the analytical need for refinement and nuance, as provided by the suggested ideal type. By combining meanings and actions (agentic and structural elements), non-use(s) can be seen as both a multidimensional practice and structure that operates in complex networks.

Since the world people face is suffused with meaning and meaningful categories, it is incumbent on the researcher to take account of their actions as if they were responding to and expressing such meaning. This implies, as Weber outlined, that people's actions cannot be merely "explained" without also being interpreted. Such a duty increases the complexity of the task, so that what would otherwise be described as "use" or "non-use" has to undergo a revision because these categories have meaning for the users and non-users themselves. Actors are not merely interacting with technologies in isolation; rather, such interaction

passes through a web of meaningful relations that transforms the technological experience into social action. This is seen in the case of surrogate users, who opt for the "non-user" label, but who make use of social relations to access technologies or the particular affordances of social networking sites (Neves et al., 2015). Thus, they exist on the continuum, irreducible to either non-users (as they might wish to be categorized) or users (as they doubtlessly are).

These examples drawn from our findings demonstrate the important gains that the Weberian interpretive approach and the ideal type provide – by employing both we have attempted to capture the complexity of defining and examining non-use. Without these preliminary efforts, the study of the implications of non-use can be simplistic. As shown here, non-use is not a homogenous or static activity; it is frequently part of a sociotechnical continuum between use and non-use. Non-Internet use(s) is/are embedded in social and digital processes where context shapes and is shaped. The ideal types we have proposed to capture 'non-use' – intentional, instrumental, and imposed – aim to articulate a social reality that is experienced and routinized by people in their perceptions and practices of that continuum.

In a short chapter, we can only sketch arguments and offer a limited exercise. Although this is an innovative attempt at using Weber's tools within the digital divides field, it is not without limitations. Particularly, attaining the balance between classifying and explaining meanings and actions in a holistic but flexible scheme is not an easy task. The peril of reification is real and Weber left no guidelines to avoid it. Nevertheless, we believe this attempt sets the stage for further reflection on non-use(s) and shows the relevance of Weber's work in the study of digital technologies.

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