The antecedents of cyberloafing: A case study in an Iranian copper industry

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ABSTRACT

Cyberloafing has reported to increasingly become a serious threat to organizational performance and efficiency. It is expected that cyberloafing remain at the locus of management concern since organizational reliance upon internet use at work is evermore increasing and will continue to increase for the foreseeable future. Motivations of cyberloafing have hitherto been explored from a diversity of perspectives of which deviant behavior has remained to be one of the most cited terrains. This paper builds upon earlier studies and models explicating the motivations of cyberloafing – the cyberloafing antecedents – and verifies one of the most developed, recent and renowned theoretical frameworks of cyberloafing in an Iranian copper refinery firm. The findings of this research adds further theoretical credibility by identifying that *behavioral attitudes upon cyberloafing*, *subjective norms* and *ability to hide cyberloafing* are among the main antecedents of cyberlaofing. This paper adds further theoretical support to the theory of planned behavior and adds additional understanding from an under-researched setting to this nascent management realm.

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1. Introduction

The internet has become an ever more embracing aspect of today's working life and has similarly changed the way organizations conduct their activities on a daily basis. Internet is used as a means as well as a basis for all business affairs for employees, in particular, to stay updated with everyday organizational activities, conduct research, collaborate upon projects, develop new products or ideas, and communicate with clients and other employees, to name some of the most obvious instances (Yellowlees & Marks, 2007).

In the same way that every new method, tool or technology, can have multifarious implications in the workplaces, internet use is accompanied by both opportunities and threats as far as work efficiency is concerned. Although Internet use has known to enhance personal productivity, communication and advancement (Anandarajan, Igbaria, & Anakwe, 2002; Seymour & Nadasen, 2007), it also facilitates employees with non-work alternatives and, to that effect, has often been described as a 'double-edged sword' in the workplace (Lim, 2002; Seymour & Nadasen, 2007). Internet misuses, has reported to be one of the most common sources of employee deficiency and deviant organizational behavior. In the same way, surveillance systems and internet monitoring methods has only said to exacerbate the dilemma when employees tend to seek methods for hiding their daily web surfing (Chou, Condron, & Belland, 2005).

As one of the most acknowledged internet misuses, Cyberloafing (also known and referred to as cyberslacking) is defined as employees' non-work related use of company provided email and Internet in the workplace (Blanchard & Henle, 2008; Lim, 2002). Cyberloafing has also been reported to increasingly become the most common mode of employees' waste at work (Martin, Brock, Buckley, & Ketchen, 2010). Human resource specialists have estimated that employees waste approximately one hour per working day, on average, engaging in non-work-related activities while surfing the Internet (Blanchard & Henle, 2008). To counter this issue of Internet abuse, companies are increasingly using Internet surveillance programs and put in place explicit policies and penalty systems tailored to control Internet usage (Bequai, 1998).

Additionally, cyberloafing results in lost wages, directly and indirectly, through decreased productivity particularly in cases where the compensation and reward system is based on self-reports and completed tasks (König & Caner de la Guardia, 2014; Liberman, Seidman, McKenna, & Buffardi, 2011; Ugrin & Michael Pearson, 2013). These and other similarly negative implications of cyberloafing have led to an increased research focus on the topic particularly in recent years.

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For instance, Zoghbi Manrique de Lara, Verano Tacoronte, and Ting Ding (2006) found that formal control and punishment structures for cyberloafing only exacerbated employees' reactions and increased their cyberloafing activities. In another research, Blau, Yang, and Ward-Cook (2006) found that employees cyberloaf as a reaction against perceived organizational injustice. They further noticed that employees, consciously and unconsciously, deploy cyberloafing as a means and mode of counter-behavior upon organizational policies. Weatherbee (2010) showed that cyberloafing can increase employee dissatisfaction and turnover. In another survey, Bock, Park, and Zhang (2010) referred to other negative implications of cyberloafing such as network and database security threats as well as bandwidth overload.

Scholars have even signified that cyberloafing is increasingly becoming the constant threat to today's digital workplaces and lives more generally. Cyberloafing can also provide a ground of cyberlife for employees in parallel with the work life where organizational resources and efficiency are sacrificed. Organizational researchers are, hence, trying to unearth the roots, antecedents, implications, and complexities of cyber-slacking at work (Zoghbi-Manrique-de-Lara, 2009).

The root causes of cyberloafing which are often referred to as 'cyberloafing antecedents' have been studied from different perspectives. Among others (Askew et al., 2014; Blanchard & Henle, 2008; Henle & Blanchard, 2008; Ugrin & Michael Pearson, 2013; Vitak, Crouse, & LaRose, 2011; Zoghbi-Manrique-de-Lara, 2009), the theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 1991) have been adopted in some of these researches recently to explicate the ways in which cyberloafing is motivated and initiated. The theory of planned behavior well explains that intentions for cyberloafing are influenced by people's own cyberloafing *attitudes*, their *perceived behavioral control* and *social norms* supporting or otherwise limiting cyberloafing (Ajzen, 1991).

Recently, some studies have aimed to examine the theory of planned behavior more closely in new settings and have added theoretical and contextual insights to the extant theory of deviant behavior. Pelling and White (2009), for instance, verified the model among university students and studied their behavioral intentions for cyberloafing in social networking websites. It was found that while teenagers' attitude and subjective norms were significant predictors of cyberloafing, perceived behavioral control does not appear to be a predictive factor in the teenagers' cyberloafing behavior. This can be explained, in part, by that teenager's everyday lives are enmeshed with online social networking communication and therefore such engagements are not considered as deviant behavior *per se*. Pelling and White (2009) also found that self-identity and sense of belongingness to online communities are among the indicators of teenager's high-level of social networking engagement.

Askew et al. (2014) contributed to the cyberloafing theory by further clarifying the third antecedent in the theory of planned behavior. They demonstrated that the ability to hide cyberloafing is more potent and prominent than perceived behavioral control. Whereas the typical third antecedent in a Theory of Planned Behavior model measures the degree to which one believes the behavior is under his or her control, the third antecedent in Askew's model measures how well one believes he or she can do the behavior without being discovered by his or her supervisor or coworkers.

This paper builds upon and contributes to the cyberloafing model developed by Askew et al. (2014) and aims to verify its reliability, add further empirical light to and unearth its nuances in a new setting. This paper also examines, on a practical basis, whether the theory of planned behavior can explain cyberloafing antecedents in a leading copper company in Tehran-Iran. In

doing so, we studied the impacts of behavioral control, subjective norms, and the ability to hide cyberloafing on employees' intentions upon cyberloafing. Employees at a cross-section of organizational levels participated in this study. Hypotheses have been developed to measure and study the aforementioned mentioned attributes and their relationships with employees' intentions of cyberloafing.

2. Literature review

Cyberloafing is increasingly becoming a significant threat to organizational performance particularly since notions of private office, physical presence, strict surveillance systems, and organizationally sponsored socialization activities are ever more replaced, respectively, by home offices, dispersed employee locations, self-managed reporting systems and digital employee communities (García-Morales, Jiménez-Barrionuevo, & Gutiérrez-Gutiérrez, 2012; Liberman et al., 2011). Much of employee communication and coordination is administered through web-based and smart networks of platforms and systems (Atzori, Iera, & Morabito, 2010).

Many scholars have noted in recent years that the physical self is progressively giving place to extended digital selves (Belk, 2014; Elwell, 2014) and that organizational activities need to acknowledge and adapt to the new digital employee base. Employees' digital selves and cyber activities have redefined organizational standards, criteria and obligations (Zoghbi-Manrique-de-Lara, 2011). At the same time, today's organizations are leaner while mobilizing the digital facilities and building on employees' digital proficiencies in enhancing overall organizational performance (Elwell, 2014). Holding instant web meetings, sharing knowledge and enhancing organizational culture through social media networks, decreasing costs by paperless digital frameworks and accelerated communication methods internally and externally as well are but a few digital shifts in organizational activities.

Strict surveillance, particularly over the web, has proven to become ever more ineffectual (Zoghbi Manrique de Lara et al., 2006). This has led to a shift in how organizational efficiency is measured and reformulated much of the reward systems. Instead, self-management and reporting are increasingly forming the basis for driving organizations. Thus, cyberloafing as well appears to be 'manageable' through self-management and not external control systems and limitations. Given that easy and constant access to the information over the web and being 'online' are the prerequisites of knowledge sharing, bounding internet use for limiting cyberloafing is increasingly ineffective.

Different types of cyberloafing have been identified in the literature. For instance, checking non-work-related emails, browsing news websites, visiting online stock markets and investment-related websites, following sport news, online shopping, auction sites, mobile and social media messaging, online games and gambling, travel booking and planning, virtual communities, online extended realities and virtual identities, listening to radio online, downloading music and movies, and last but not least, viewing adult-oriented websites have all been named and researched as various types of cyberloafing (Henle, Kohut, & Booth, 2009; Liberman et al., 2011; Zoghbi-Manrique-de-Lara, 2011).

Different types of cyberlofing behaviors have been classified into two main categories of *minor* and *major* cyberloafing. While the former can be more frequent, somewhat tolerable and less considered as an apparent deviant behavior, the latter is typically less frequent, acceptable and more strictly breaches organizational culture and norms. For example, checking one's personal email or texting at work are minor cyberloafing while online gambling or surfing adult oriented sites at work are classified as major types of deviant behavior.