Cyberloafing and social desirability bias among students and employees

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ABSTRACT

This study addressed the prevalence of cyberloafing and social desirability bias among 1339 students and 996 jobholders. An online survey was administered which included a five-factor cyberloafing scale and a two-factor social desirability scale. Each measure revealed acceptable fit values in confirmatory factor analyses. Findings showed that different types of cyberloafing had different prevalence rates. Students surpassed employees and males surpassed females with regard to overall cyberloafing scores. However, different types of cyberloafing revealed different patterns in individual comparisons. Employees surpassed students in terms of the impression management component of social desirability. Cyberloafing and social desirability were positively related, which implied the need for including social desirability as a covariate in further research.

1. Introduction

Intentional and redundant use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) during work hours has been among the problematic trends in contemporary technology-rich environments. Referred to as cyberslacking (Block, 2001; Greengard, 2000) or cyberloafing (Lim, 2002) in different resources, such unregulated and counterproductive use is usually studied in work-based settings (Andreassen, Torsheim, & Pallesen, 2014; Garrett & Danziger, 2008; Sheikh, Atashgah, & Adibzadegan, 2015; Vitak, Crouse, & LaRose, 2011). While some researchers underlined the negative consequences of the behavior such as economic loss (Greengard, 2000) or weaker system performance due to redundant bandwidth use (Sipior & Ward, 2002), others have addressed the restorative and entertaining aspects of recreational technology use by employees (Lim & Chen, 2009; Page, 2015).

Due to constant advances in online communication opportunities and mobile technologies, the extent of cyberloafing may trend upward and emerge as a prevalent way of wasting time at work. Scholars have also begun to investigate the topic in educational settings with university instructors (Zoghbi-Manrique-de-Lara, 2012), classroom teachers (McBride, Milligan, & Nichols, 2013), university students (Taneja, Fiore, & Fischer, 2015) and high school students (Baturay & Toker, 2015). Although the topic has been investigated in employee and student populations in different fields, a comparison of the two groups with regard to the extent and types of cyberloafing is missing in the literature.

An examination of the contemporary literature reveals that the majority of cyberloafing studies have resorted to survey research. Despite its practicality and potential for revealing phenomena within massive populations, survey research is threatened by the participant's behavior. It is well known that respondents weigh potential risks and benefits related to their responses, and provide the most rational or beneficial responses within a given social context. Therefore, participants tend to respond rationally rather than sincerely in self-report surveys. Such biased respondent behaviors may trend upward in stigmatizing phenomena like social taboos (e.g. sexual preference, income), illegal behaviors (e.g. shoplifting, drug use), immoral activities (e.g. cheating on one's partner) and extreme opinions (e.g. anti-Semitism). Besides, knowledge of such phenomena by unauthorized others (e.g., family, friends, law enforcement) can render material damage, loss of reputation or even law enforcement to the respondents (Singer, 2004). Since the collection, holding and/or dissemination of data pose threats for the researcher and the researched, these topics are considered *sensitive* for all stakeholders (Lee & Renzetti, 1990).

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Research into sensitive topics are further challenged by participants' personality traits and biases (Miller, 2012; Tourangeau & Yan, 2007). One of the most common and pervasive sources of threats jeopardizing the validity and reliability of research findings is *Social Desirability Bias (SDB)* (DeVellis, 2003; Fisher & Katz, 2000; Krumpal, 2013). Several scholars from different fields such as assessment (Merydith, Prout, & Blaha, 2003), marketing (King & Bruner, 2000), psychology (Paulhus, 1986, pp. 143—165), social studies (Krumpal, 2013) and management (Arnold & Feldman, 1981) considered SDB as a threatening factor for the integrity of research.

To our knowledge, the relationship between cyberloafing behaviors and social desirability bias has rarely been investigated. Such an inquiry may help scholars to see whether cyberloafing is a sensitive topic which triggers socially desirable responses in surveys. In addition, while the issue has been studied in work-based and educational settings separately; a comparison between employees and students with standard instruments is not available yet. In this regard, the current study aims to compare students and jobholders in different companies with regard to cyberloafing and social desirability constructs in addition to the investigation of the relationship between the two. The following section justifies the current research through empirical works on the topic.

2. Theoretical background

2.1. Antecedents of cyberloafing

One of the pioneering cyberloafing studies in the literature was conducted by Lim (2002), who considered cyberloafing as a deviant and organizationally harmful behavior. Cyberloafing was defined operationally as employees' misuse of internet during office hours for either personal browsing or e-mailing. The primary source of the behavior was regarded as perceived justice among employees, who tend to engage in cyberloafing as a neutralization method to restore justice. That is, there is an ongoing exchange between employers and employees, where time and effort from employees in doing work is exchanged with financial compensation, material goods, respect and appreciation from employers. If employees question the fairness of this process and perceive their employers to be unjust in their treatment or in the allocation of outcomes, they are more likely to engage in such misconduct. This assertion was further supported by empirical studies (Blau, Yang, & Ward-Cook, 2006; Lim, 2002; de Lara, 2007). For instance, Blau et al. (2006) reported that employees cyberloafed as a reaction to perceived organizational injustice and used cyberloafing to mitigate organizational policies.

Lim's cyberloafing classification as e-mailing versus browsing was based on available web technologies. In this regard, Blanchard and Henle (2008) revisited the construct, administered a survey to employed graduate business students, and classified cyberloafing as either minor or serious. While the former involved actions like personal e-mailing, browsing news or sports sites, and online shopping; the latter referred to behaviors like online gambling, surfing adult sites, using chat rooms and reading blogs. The study revealed that employees' perceptions of their coworkers' norms were related to minor cyberloafing, but not related to serious cyberloafing. The researchers' classification of cyberloafing as minor and major is plausible in many instances. On the other hand, the prevalence of each cyberloafing behavior during work hours should be investigated to find out which behavior is more counterproductive for a specific organization. In addition, constant advances in emerging online communication opportunities require updating the contents of the cyberloafing behaviors.

In this regard, Akbulut, Dursun, Dönmez, and Şahin (2016)

maintained that current cyberloafing scales should be updated and extended beyond browsing and e-mailing. Upon unsuccessful validation of a popular cyberloafing scale with different samples, researchers proposed a new five-dimensional cyberloafing construct as sharing (e.g., posting content, chatting), shopping (e.g., online shopping, auctioning), real-time updating (e.g., tweeting), accessing online content (e.g., downloading music and videos) and gaming/gambling (e.g., betting, gaming online). The structure was piloted with 471 undergraduate students, explained 70.44 percent of the total variance and confirmed with both undergraduates and social networkers. Similar to the previous works by Lim (2002) and Blanchard and Henle (2008), the authors suggested that there were different types of cyberloafing which occurred at different rates. In addition, males and females differed with regard to individual types of cyberloafing.

Wagner, Barnes, Lim, and Ferris (2012) used the ego depletion model of self-regulation to explain the behavior. The idea is that sustaining self-control and restraining impulses depend on a limited but renewable resource, which is just like a muscle (Baumeister, Muraven, & Tice, 2000). While this resource gets tired when used, it recovers with rest (Askew et al., 2014). Cyberloafing is just a way of recovering this muscle-like self-control mechanism. On the other hand, the model cannot explain situations where individuals conduct cyberloafing even when they are fully rested (Askew et al., 2014).

Thus, additional theoretical frameworks were tested such as the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1985). Scholars who adopt this theoretical framework needed to address the role of subjective social norms, attitudes and perceived behavior control (Ajzen, 1985). In addition, the influence of these antecedents is mediated by the intention to engage in cyberloafing. That is, it is posited that the influence of subjective social norms (e.g., perceptions regarding others' cyberloafing behaviors), attitudes towards personal computer use at work and perceived behavioral control is mediated by the formation of intentions to engage in cyberloafing. Accordingly, formation of intentions to cyberloaf lead directly to actual cyberloafing. Such a framework has been validated through recent cyberloafing studies (e.g., Askew et al., 2014; Sheikh et al., 2015).

The Theory of Interpersonal Behavior (Triandis, 1977) was also tested in a recent study in order to account for the emotions involved in the cyberloafing behavior (Moody & Siponen, 2013). Such an approach required new variables to consider such as emotional factors (i.e., feelings), habits (i.e., previous occurrences of the same behavior) and social influence (Moody & Siponen, 2013). The particular rationale is that unregulated Internet use at work is a social behavior that is learned in a context through observation of such behaviors among other employees.

Further studies underlined the importance of additional antecedents such as job attitudes and organizational environment (Liberman, Seidman, McKenna, & Buffardi, 2011), personality traits (O'Neill, Hambley, & Bercovich, 2014; O'Neill, Hambley, & Chatellier, 2014); job burnout (Aghaz & Sheikh, 2016), self-control and organizational justice (Restubog et al., 2011). Most of these studies have been conducted in work-based settings. Since educational institutions and work-based environments are likely to have different organizational characteristics, a comparison of student and employee cyberloafing may be contributive to our understanding of the construct.

Regardless of the selected theoretical framework or instruments used, gender has been a significant predictor of cyberloafing. Since work status benefits do differ with regard to gender (Blau & Kahn, 2000), since men tend to spend more time on personal-interest activities than women (Bianchi, Milkie, Sayer, & Robinson, 2000), and since women face more pressure to sustain the balance