



Surveillance 2.0: How personality qualifies reactions to social media monitoring policies



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ABSTRACT

Recently, employers in the U.S. have started to implement and justify social media monitoring policies as a means of safeguarding their organization's reputation. What individual differences explain how people respond to these policies? In this study, we examine how the Big Five personality traits moderate the effects of presenting a justification for social media monitoring on feelings of invasiveness and unfairness. Findings from an experiment conducted with 195 participants suggest that the presence of a justification for monitoring lowered perceptions of invasiveness, and invasiveness fully mediated the effect of presenting a justification on fairness perceptions. However, these findings were dependent on agreeableness and openness; people with high agreeableness and low openness were easily placated with justifications for social media monitoring, whereas people with low agreeableness and high openness were not moved by justifications. These results demonstrate the importance of individual differences to understanding when people will resist or accept organizational efforts to pry into their online activities.

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1. Introduction

The use of social media (SM) sites, such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, has increased exponentially in recent years. These sites allow users to post personal content—including pictures, videos, and text—and make such content accessible to other users (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). This effortless sharing of information has also increased the potential that employees may divulge privileged or unflattering information that harms the reputation of employers (Umphress, Tihanyi, Bierman, & Gogus, 2013). Consequently, some employers have started to monitor their employees' SM activity in the U.S., despite the majority of workers expressing discomfort with this practice (Black, Stone, & Johnson, 2014). Although SM monitoring is on the rise, we know little about how employees react to the introduction of such monitoring, and what personality differences might shape these reactions. In this study, we extend recent research on SM monitoring and individual differences (Schneider, Goffin, & Daljeet, 2015) to explore this issue.

1.1. Reactions to social media monitoring

Much research indicates that employees react poorly to surveillance and monitoring by their employers. For example, electronic monitoring

of workplace activities (e.g., Internet activity, e-mails, video surveillance) is positively associated with withdrawal intentions from the organization (Butler, 2012). People find monitoring invasive and unfair, and they retaliate with counterproductive behaviors like computer abuse and anti-social behavior (Posey, Bennett, Roberts, & Lowry, 2011). However, research suggests that providing a detailed justification for the monitoring can mitigate these negative reactions (e.g. Hovorka-Mead, Ross, Whipple, & Renchin, 2002). Justifications provide an explanation for monitoring that can help employees understand why the policy was adopted. However, no research has explored how existing employees might react to the electronic monitoring of their personal activities *outside* of the workplace, a new capability with the advent of SM monitoring. Further, we know little about how individual differences may shape the way that people react to SM monitoring, and especially whether or not justifications for this monitoring are equally persuasive to all employees.

This is an important topic to investigate because perceptions of unfairness at work have critical downstream consequences, including lower job performance (Kumar, Bakhshi, & Rani, 2009), organizational commitment (Loi, Hang-Yue, & Foley, 2006), trust (Colquitt, Conlon, Wesson, Porter, & Ng, 2001), and organizational citizenship behaviors (Nadiri & Tanova, 2010). Although justifications may improve fairness reactions, not all employees may be moved by such explanations for invasive practices. This is an important research question because some employees may consequently exhibit poor attitudes and detrimental behaviors despite efforts to justify SM monitoring. We focus specifically on the Big Five because past research has shown that several Big Five traits moderate job applicants' reactions to SM monitoring (Schneider

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et al., 2015). We extend this work to explore the role of the Big Five in reactions of *current* employees to justifications presented for changes in an organization's SM monitoring policy.

Consistent with previous research, we first hypothesize that employees will feel that SM monitoring is unfair because it invades their privacy. Privacy was defined by Margulis (1977) as representing control over the transaction one has with others, which aims to enhance autonomy and reduce vulnerability. In other words, privacy represents our ability to control our own image, and determine who has access to what part of our lives. SM monitoring greatly restricts this ability to control our interactions with others by granting employers involuntary access to employees' non-work lives.

Invasions of privacy as a consequence of SM monitoring should subsequently trigger feelings of unfairness (e.g., Posey et al., 2011). In particular, we expect that SM monitoring will lower feelings of procedural fairness, which concerns the fairness of the means used to arrive at a given outcome (Cropanzano, Bowen, & Gilliland, 2007). SM monitoring is typically enacted to protect the reputation of the organization, which is a reasonable outcome for organizations to pursue. However, SM monitoring is likely to feel like an unreasonably invasive means to accomplish this outcome, particularly when the monitoring is enacted without a justification and explanation.

Thus, we expect that presenting a justification for SM monitoring will improve procedural fairness perceptions. Additionally, we expect that perceptions of privacy invasiveness are the root psychological phenomena that cause employees to view monitoring policies as procedurally unfair, and that privacy invasiveness perceptions will mediate the effect of justifications on procedural fairness perceptions.

Hypothesis 1. Justifications for SM monitoring will have a positive effect on procedural fairness perceptions, and this effect will be mediated by perceptions of privacy invasiveness.

1.2. Personality and reactions to social media monitoring

We expect that not all people respond the same way to justifications for SM monitoring. Consequently, we examined in this study whether or not the Big Five traits of agreeableness, openness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, and extraversion moderate the effects of justifications for SM monitoring (see Fig. 1). We focused on the Big Five because of its long history in personality psychology (Cattell, 1945), generalizability across nearly all cultures (McCrae & Costa, 1997), and relative stability over the lifespan of adults (Costa & McCrae, 1992). Further, we focused on the Big Five to facilitate comparisons with a recent study conducted by Schneider et al. (2015) that explored the moderating effects of each Big Five trait on job applicants' reactions to hypothetical requests for their SM passwords from potential employers. Results indicated that applicants who willingly divulged their passwords had significantly higher mean levels of agreeableness and conscientiousness, compared to those who refused the request. Our study complements this work by examining how the Big Five qualifies the way that existing employees might react to the advent of SM monitoring policies by their employers.

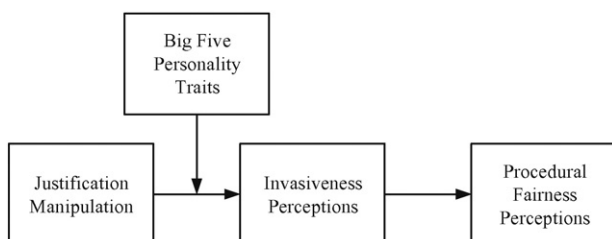


Fig. 1. Conceptual model of reactions to justifications for social media monitoring.

Within the Big Five, agreeableness is concerned with how individuals interact with others—agreeable individuals tend to seek harmony and avoid conflict with others (McCrae & Costa, 1991). Consistent with this expectation, Junglas, Johnson, and Spitzmuller (2008) found that agreeableness was negatively correlated with concern for privacy.

Hypothesis 2. Agreeableness will moderate the negative relationship between justifications for SM monitoring and perceptions of privacy invasiveness, such that the relationship is stronger for people with high agreeableness.

Individuals high in openness tend to be imaginative, empathetic, curious, and unconventional (McCrae & Costa, 1991). Junglas et al. (2008) described individuals high in openness as being more aware, and subsequently more sensitive to potential threats. Accordingly, they found that openness was positively related to concern for privacy. This relationship may occur because invasions of privacy force one to self-monitor and limit free exploration. We similarly expect that individuals high in openness will perceive SM monitoring to be highly invasive regardless of whether or not a justification for the policy is provided.

Hypothesis 3. Openness will moderate the negative relationship between justifications for SM monitoring and perceptions of privacy invasiveness, such that the relationship is stronger for people with low openness.

Conscientious individuals tend to be competent, logical, and foresighted (Costa, McCrae, & Dye, 1991). Junglas et al. (2008) found that conscientiousness was positively related to privacy concerns. In contrast, Schneider et al. (2015) argued that conscientious people are more careful and deliberate in the content they allow on SM, and should therefore be less concerned about SM monitoring in general. Their findings support this reasoning, with conscientious individuals being more likely to divulge their SM passwords. To remedy these conflicting results, we propose that conscientious individuals may be more concerned with privacy in a general sense, but are also more likely to comply with rules and procedures set by authorities, such as their employers. As such, we expect that justifications for SM monitoring policies will be less important for highly-conscientious employees.

Hypothesis 4. Conscientiousness will moderate the negative relationship between justifications for SM monitoring and perceptions of privacy invasiveness, such that the relationship is weaker for people with high conscientiousness.

Extraverted individuals tend to be optimistic and outgoing, and to draw energy from social interaction (Junglas et al., 2008). Stone (1986) found that extraversion was negatively related to values regarding control over personal information and perceptions of invasiveness. Given this finding, we expect that extraverts will generally be insensitive to SM monitoring and that justifications will matter little to them; extraverts should indicate lower levels of invasiveness, regardless of the justification condition.

Hypothesis 5. Extraversion will moderate the negative relationship between justifications for SM monitoring and perceptions of privacy invasiveness, such that the relationship is weaker for people with high extraversion.

Neuroticism describes trait emotional instability, and accordingly neuroticism is positively related to perceptions of threats and anxieties (Goldberg, 1990). Neurotic individuals are likely to be highly sensitive to the threat posed by SM monitoring, and this perceived threat is unlikely to be mitigated by justifications or explanations (Schneider et al., 2015). Thus, neuroticism should weaken the effects of justifications for SM monitoring.

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