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Bright Frimpong

Fatima Mohammed

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Bright Frimpong

The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley, bright.frimpong01@utrgv.edu

Fatima Mohammed

University of North Carolina at Greensboro, f_mohammed@uncg.edu

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Unraveling Cyberloafing Paradox: Towards A Targeted Approach for Managing Cyberloafing

Emergent Research Forum (ERF)

Bright Frimpong

University of Texas Rio Grande Valley
Robert Vackar College of Business and
Entrepreneurship
Department of Information Systems
bright.frimpong01@utrgv.edu

Fatima Mohammed

University of North Carolina at
Greensboro
Bryan School of Business and
Economics
f_mohammed@uncg.edu

Abstract

Cyberloafing remains an important issue for organizations due to the ambivalent nature of its consequences. There is a need to extend the scope of motives that influence different kinds of cyberloafing to develop a broader understanding of cyberloafing and manage its consequences. Therefore, this study focuses on the triggers of specific cyberloafing behaviors towards developing targeted cyberloafing policies to address their prevalence.

Keywords

Cyberloafing, conservation of resource theory, personal resource, social resource

Introduction

Cyberloafing remains a complicated and somewhat controversial workplace phenomenon: it has both positive and negative effects (Tandon et al. 2021). Researchers and practitioners remain split over the occurrence of cyberloafing at the workplace. On one hand, cyberloafing is viewed as a workplace deviance with adverse effects on productivity, which depletes employees' finite resources (Farivar and Richardson 2020). While cyberloafing has its documented adverse effects on work productivity, there are those who argue that it is a necessary evil as it allows workers to relieve stress (Gügerçin 2020). Arguably, cyberloafing helps employees recover and supplement lost resources through temporary detachment from work in the form of micro-breaks. Extant literature has found that cyberloafing allows employees to cope with work stress, job burnout, workplace ostracism, workplace boredom, work aggression, enhance work engagement and improve mental health (Koay 2018; Tandon et al. 2021). Cyberloafing remains an important issue as there is still a lack of clear consensus on whether it should be encouraged or discouraged at the workplace.

The concept of cyberloafing has been studied through multiple theoretical lenses, such as the social learning theory, general theory of crime, theory of interpersonal behavior and conservation of resources theory (Tandon et al. 2021). These prior theoretical lenses from varied research domains lends credence to the multi-faceted nature of cyberloafing. Cyberloafing has been defined as a multi-dimensional construct consisting of four behaviors: development, recovery, deviance, and addiction. This study focuses on development and recovery behaviors of cyberloafing and explore the phenomenon where the lack of personal and organizational resources pushes employees to cyberloaf for developmental and recovery reasons. Unlike deviance and addiction behaviors, we argue that the development and recovery behaviors can be effectively managed if their trigger factors are untangled. A multi-dimensional approach to cyberloafing allow us to understand the different behaviors behind the phenomenon. We believe that these behaviors can be managed if the motivations behind their occurrence can be specifically linked to

their trigger factors. Thus, this study explores the possibility of a targeted approach to managing the development and recovery behavior of cyberloafing through a resource perspective.

The COR theory asserts that resources are considered valuable because they are needed to complete daily activities such as academic and work-related tasks (Hobfoll 1989). We explore how employees are likely to cyberloaf to either develop their work-related skills or recover from stress due to the lack or depletion of personal and organization resources including social and organizational support, self-efficacy, and organizational based self-esteem. This study contributes to our understanding of the role of resource-loss in cyberloafing behavior. Practically, we expect our findings to provide insights to the different forms of cyberloafing and their specific causes so that organizations can develop targeted cyberloafing policies to decrease or manage their prevalence. The remainder of this article is organized as follows: the next section highlights relevant literature informing this study. We develop hypotheses and present the proposed theoretical model for this study. We then conclude the article with a brief discussion and future research plan, implications, and conclusion.

Theoretical Background

Cyberloafing

Cyberloafing has been defined as employees' use of the internet or computer for non-work-related activities (Lim 2002). Literature on cyberloafing has gradually emerged to take a dual perspective. On the popular side of the scholarly conversation, cyberloafing is considered counterproductive and deviant behavior with immense consequences to organizations and, hence, a punishable behavior (e.g., Hensel and Kacprzak 2021). Yet, recent studies have begun to bring to light the positive consequences of cyberloafing to the employee and subsequently the organization. Proponents of this premises have provided empirical evidence to the importance of cyberloafing as a coping mechanism for stress, increasing innovations of employees (Andel et al. 2019; Zhong et al. 2022). Extant literature has largely studied cyberloafing as a unidimensional construct. Yet, understanding and efficiently managing cyberloafing to harness its potential benefits while minimizing any harm, calls for looking at different kinds of cyberloafing behaviors and preceding events towards providing more tailored recommendations (Mercado et al. 2017).

Given the increment of internet usage, the changing fabric of organizational activities (such as working from home), and the increase in concern for employee wellbeing, it is essential to develop a broader understanding of cyberloafing. Researchers can achieve this by extending the scope of motives that influence different kinds of cyberloafing behaviors (Tandon et al. 2021). This calls for investigating the nature and forms of cyberloafing behavior and providing a more comprehensive view on the concept towards better managing behaviors, delineating and minimizing negative consequences while harnessing beneficial consequences of cyberloafing. This study focuses on Van Doorn's (2011) categorization of cyberloafing behaviors: development, recovery, deviant, and addiction behaviors. Developmental behaviors view cyberloafing as an avenue for learning (e.g., learning new skills and acquiring abilities) while recovery behaviors are related to using cyberloafing to reduce discomfort and improve health (e.g., recovering from work or relaxing). Deviant behaviors connote cyberloafing behaviors aimed against the organizations (e.g., avoiding tasks or postponing work) while addiction behaviors represent engaging in cyberloafing as a habit (e.g., visiting sites multiple times due to habits). We focus on the development and recovery cyberloafing behaviors by studying the conditions leading to and motives behind these cyberloafing behaviors.

We focus on the development and recovery cyberloafing behaviors by studying the conditions leading to and motives behind these cyberloafing behaviors. Current intervention studies towards curbing and controlling cyberloafing have been based on cyberloafing as a counterproductive behavior (e.g., Hensel and Kacprzak 2021). Yet, unlike deviant and addiction cyberloafing behaviors, development and recovery behaviors are minor and have legitimate reasons behind them (Mercado et al. 2017; Sheikh et al. 2019).

With the aim of preserving employee wellbeing and the positive side of cyberloafing, it is important to look at development and recovery behaviors separately so as to develop appropriate policies or interventions to manage their prevalence.

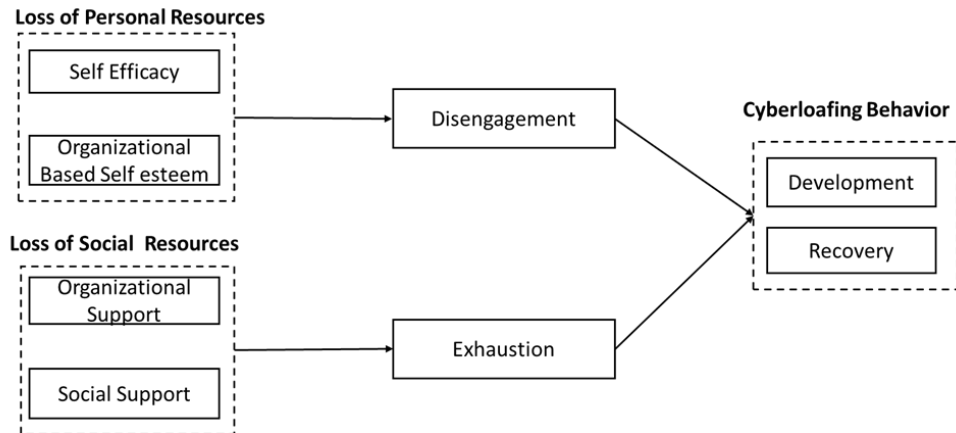


Figure 1: Proposed Research Model

Conservation of Resource (COR) Theory

The COR theory was proposed by Hobfoll (1989) to expand understanding on how individuals cope with stress and most importantly their incentive to cope with stress. The central tenet of the COR theory is the premise that, when an individual lacks resources in one area, they are motivated to procure and utilize other resources. According to Hobfoll, people strive to gain and retain resources because resources are important for wellbeing. Hence the loss of resources motivates individuals to utilize other resources in order to succeed or offset resource loss. The COR theory further proposes that resources depletion leads to the inability to cope with future-loss threats, thus potentially leading to further loss (loss spirals).

The present study focuses on the two main assumptions of COR theory. The first is that resources are valuable to wellbeing. Secondly, people employ resources they possess or call on those available to them to offset resources loss or gain resources. Resources in this context are anything that is perceived by an individual as helpful in the attainment of their goals (Halbesleben et al. 2014). Hobfoll (1989) recognizes four types of resources, namely objects (e.g., cars, devices, tools), conditions (position, employment), personal characteristics (self-efficacy, skills), and energies (recovery experience, knowledge, money). The COR theory is very instrumental in providing important interpretations for organizational behavior such as cyberloafing (Hobfoll et al. 2018).

Research Model and Hypotheses

The availability and development of personal and social resources are important elements of a positive work experience (Kerksieck et al. 2019). Personal resources are positive self-evaluations that are linked to resilience and refer to an individual's sense of their ability to successfully control and impact upon their environment successfully (Airila et al. 2014; Hobfoll et al. 2003). Organizational Social Resources on the other hand reflects the extent to which the organization values employee contributions and cares about their wellbeing (Eisenberger et al. 1986).

Personal Resources and Cyberloafing

We include two typical personal resources that have been used in organizational studies; self-efficacy and organizational-based self-esteem (OBSE). Unlike personality traits that are fixed, personal resources are malleable and can be influenced (Youssef and Luthans 2007), hence making these factors suitable for the present study. Self-efficacy refers to an employees' perceptions of their ability to meet demands in a broad array of contexts (Chen et al. 2001), while OBSE relates to the extent to which an employee believes they are capable, important and worthy as members of the organization (Pierce and Gardner 2004). From the COR theory, depletion in personal resources may cause further loss of other resources, leading to loss in intrinsic energetic resources, resulting in employees distancing themselves from work. Motivated to offset resources depletion and escape from the consequential state of disengagement, individuals are likely to resort to external resources that offset either their personal resource or loss in work engagement

(energies), hence engaging in development and recovery cyberloafing behaviors. As such we hypothesize that,

H1a: Disengagement mediates the relationship between loss of personal resources and development cyberloafing behavior.

H1b: Disengagement mediates the relationship between loss of personal resources and recovery cyberloafing behavior.

Social Resource and Cyberloafing

Social resources, including organizational and peer support, are relevant work resources due to human's need for relatedness (Ryan and Deci 2000). The perception of social support in an organization provides access to help when faced with a demanding task (Marchand and Vandenberghe 2016) and serves as a source of intrinsic motivation for employees (Bakker 2008). As such, depletion of social resources may result in exhaustion, which itself is a loss of resource—as exhaustion reflects the feeling of drained or depleted emotional and physical resources (Halbesleben 2006). Evidently, burnout literature has provided evidence that suggests a relationship between social resources and exhaustion (Park et al. 2014). In line with COR theory, we, therefore, argue that loss in organizational social resources may trigger spiral loss of energies leading to exhaustion, motivating the individual to look for external resources to offset, lack of social support on a task and the resulting exhaustive state.

As such, we hypothesize that,

H2a: Exhaustion mediates the relationship between loss of social resources and development cyberloafing behavior.

H2b: Exhaustion mediates the relationship between loss of social resources and recovery cyberloafing behavior.

Control variables will include situational factors such as time spent on the cyberloafing, and demographic variables that may affect hypothesized relationships.

Future research Plan and Directions

This study will adopt a quantitative survey with a positivist approach to answering the research question. A measurement instrument guided by theory and extant literature will be developed and tested for reliability and validity. Where available, the study will adapt existing measurement items from validated instruments. The instrument will be refined following a pre-test and pilot, and data will be collected from full-time employees through a third-party data collection platform. For data analysis, the study will adopt the partial least squares (PLS) structural equation modeling (SEM) approach due to its minimal restrictions. The reliability and validity statistics of the measurement and structural model will be assessed and compared to appropriate thresholds. We expect to find support for the research model; however, unexpected results may lead to new insights.

Conclusion

This study seeks to explore the triggers of development and recovery cyberloafing behaviors towards a targeted approach to managing cyberloafing behaviors. The results of this study will have profound implications for IS researchers and practitioners as it broadens knowledge on the nature and scope of cyberloafing and provides important insights on managing specific cyberloafing behaviors.

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