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Exploring cyberloafing behavior in South-central Ethiopia: A close look at Madda Walabu University

Shafaat Hussain^{1*} and Truptimayee Parida

Madda Walabu University, Ethiopia.

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The Internet has made a significant impact on work and the personal lives of people working around the world. While access to the Internet has changed the ways work can be carried out, it has also increased the opportunities for people to cyberloaf, while under the guise of doing work. Cyberloafing is employees' non-work related use of internet while working hours in any organization. Of late, it is a burning issue owing to its concern with employees' work culture, productivity, safety and security. This study explores cyberloafing in Madda Walabu University, situated in South-central Ethiopia aiming at employees' attitudes, opportunities and addictions to cyberloafing; and how far it has brought change in their lives. The objectives of this research are: to determine the attitude towards cyberloafing; to identify the opportunities through cyberloafing; to underline developments through cyberloafing; and to specify the addiction of cyberloafing. The participants of this research are those females who are working as secretaries of 11 different departments of Madda Walabu University having internet connection on their office computer. The study is qualitative with interview (n=20) as a tool and snow-ball sampling as a sampling technique. The data is transcribed, sorted, edited, coded and analyzed manually; and the results and discussion is presented through underlining themes. Findings suggest that most of the cyberloafers showed positive attitude, acknowledged opportunities; confirmed development and addiction into their lives due to cyber engagements. Further research is needed to investigate the other stakeholders like students, teachers, managers and other stakeholders in order to obtain the holistic picture of cyberloafing behavior in the Ethiopian universities.

Key words: Cyberloafing, cyberslacking, internet at workplace, employee's productivity.

INTRODUCTION

Internet is the world's largest recreational area for the employees at work having two cutting edges of a sword for the organizations (Hussain, 2014). While it has brought about many benefits for the organizations (Teo and Too,

2000; Teo and Choo, 2001), its negative effects have also been discussed at large in the literature (Mills et al., 2001; Mirchandani and Motwani, 2003). The use of internet for non-work purposes is theorized as a form of

*Corresponding author. E-mail: shafaat.hussain6@gmail.com. Tel: +251-921796055.

organizational misbehavior and referred to as cyberloafing (Lim, 2002; Aghaz and Sheikh, 2016). Cyberloafing is an 'opaque' deviant work behavior through cyber-engagement (Lim and Chen, 2012; Aghaz and Sheikh, 2016). Of late, cyberloafing is a burning issue for many organizations of developing countries where internet is sprawling. Garrett and Danziger (2008a, 2008b) provided a definition of cyberloafing: "using a computer for personal email and text messaging" and "to look up information of personal interest, such as news, sports scores, or stock reports."

Cyberloafing results in lost wages through decreased productivity (Stewart, 2000; Malachowski, 2005). It can also put the organization at risk if the employee engages in illegal activities online (for example, downloading music/film) or creates a harassing environment through viewing or sending offensive material (Mills et al., 2001; Panko and Beh, 2002; Lichtash, 2004). It is estimated through various studies that between 20 and 30% of American companies have fired employees for cyberloafing including accessing pornographic sites, online gambling, and online shopping (Case and Young, 2002; Greenfield and Davis, 2002; AOM, 2003). It has been established that cyberloafing is a type of production deviance, that is, a counterproductive behavior which detracts from an employee's level of performance at work (Lim, 2002).

By examining the different forms of cyberloafing, it is more likely to understand what leads to the different types of cyberloafing and also to develop appropriate policies or interventions to decrease or manage their prevalence. For example, some researchers have argued that zero tolerance or overly aggressive cyberloafing policies may alienate employees, decrease job satisfaction or stifle creativity (Block, 2001; Greengard, 2002).

However, too lax policies can leave the organization open to lawsuits or simply decrease productivity at work (Siau et al., 2002; Sipior and Ward, 2002; Mirchandani and Motwani, 2003). It goes without saying that to understand the different types of cyberloafing, and the frequency with which they occur is one of the relevant and important areas to be studied in the academic organization like Madda Walabu University (MWU hereafter). The phenomenon of cyberloafing is an unexplored research terrain in Ethiopia.

The aim of this study is to help understand the patterns, opportunities and threats of cyberloafing in Ethiopian universities. The specific objectives of this research are:

1. To determine the attitude towards cyberloafing among female secretaries of MWU;
2. To identify the opportunities through cyberloafing among female secretaries of MWU;
3. To underline developments through cyberloafing among female secretaries of MWU; and
4. To specify the addiction of cyberloafing among female

secretaries of MWU.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Cyberloafing is the act of employees using their organizations' Internet access for personal purposes during working hours (Lim and Teo, 2005). Also known as cyberslacking, it is employees' non-work related use of internet facility while working in an organization (Lim, 2002). Apart from computer, it also includes the use of cell phone during working hours for personal purposes (Johnson and Indvik, 2004; Mastrangelo et al., 2006; Bock and Ho, 2009).

In addition to financial losses from reduced worker productivity, cyberloafing threatens network security, strains organizational bandwidth, and makes employers vulnerable to lawsuits on a variety of issues ranging from securities fraud to sexual harassment (Oswalt et al., 2003). Cyberloafing is a growing concern for organizations due to the potential in lost revenue (Vitak et al., 2011). Some of this cyberloafing can be considered rather organization friendly, especially if limited in duration (for example, sending and receiving a personal email or checking headlines at CNN.com). Other types of cyberloafing, however, are considered more of a problem either because they are more time consuming and thus reduce productivity (for example, online shopping), they are inappropriate behavior at work (for example, online gambling), or because they expose organizations to legal liabilities, for instance, downloading music (Blanchard and Henle, 2008).

There is a tension in the literature that comes from combining all forms of cyberloafing into one type of work behavior. To avoid this superimposition and confusion, variants of cyberloafing may be summarized as:

1. Checking one's personal email at work (Lim, 2002; Lim et al., 2002; Lim and Teo, 2005).
2. Surfing adult oriented sites at work (Lim, 2002; Teo and Loo, 2002; Lim and Teo, 2005).
3. Disruptive cyberloafing, for example, adult websites and online games.
4. Recreational cyberloafing, for example, shopping and purposeless surfing.
5. Personal learning cyberloafing for example, visiting professional groups and searching for news of the organization (Anandarajan et al., 2004).
6. Minor cyberloafing for example, visiting mainstream news, financial and sports related sites. In this way, minor cyberloafing is similar to other commonly tolerated although not entirely appropriate behaviors at work: taking personal phone calls, reading the newspaper or magazine at one's desk, and chatting by the water cooler (Case and Young, 2002); and
7. Serious cyberloafing, that is, those behaviors which researchers have previously warned are abusive and

Table 1. Respondent profile.

Secretaries profile		
Variable	Numbers	Percentage (%)
Age		
22-27 years	9	45
28-33 years	9	45
34-39 years	2	10
Professional experience		
1-4 years	7	35
5-8 years	12	60
9-12 years	1	5

and addictions related to cyberloafing is presented:

Respondent profile

The age and experience of the respondents (secretaries) is presented in Table 1. The table of respondent profile depicts that out of all, 45% respondents were in the age group 22 to 27 years; equally in the age group of 28 to 33 years and 10% were in the age group of 34 to 39 years. Most of the respondents were having 5 to 8 years of experience (60%), followed by 1 to 4 years (35%) and 9 to 12 years (5%).

Rationalizing cyberloafing

Some researchers (Anandarajan et al., 2004; Anandarajan and Simmers, 2004; Belanger and Van Slyke, 2002; Block, 2001; Greenfield and Davis, 2002; Oravec, 2002; Stanton, 2002) argue that cyberloafing harms employers while others (Blanchard and Henle 2008; Case and Young, 2002; Coker, 2011; Coker, 2013; Greenfield and Davis, 2002; Lim, 2002; Malachowski, 2005; Mills et al., 2001) view that it enhances employee productivity. In this study, out of 20, 14 respondents rationalized that cyberloafing is beneficial for the secretaries of MWU whereas 6 respondents denied it. The arguments cited for justifying cyberloafing are:

1. Advance and suitable medium of communication at work.
2. Officials' lenience and permission.
3. Assisting officials in accessing information.
4. Official communication.
5. Less workload (free time).
6. Diversion for creativity and technical know-how.
7. Refreshing break for fun and entertainment; and
8. Overall professional competence.

In a similar study, Menzel (1998) noted that activities such as surfing the Web for entertainment, downloading

or viewing obscene materials, and transmitting electronic messages using pen names or pseudonyms are commonly encountered by managers of public organizations in the United States and are considered undesirable and unproductive. Much of management's concern stems from the idea that cyberloafing depletes employees' energy and time. A survey conducted at the University of Maryland (2002) suggested that while American employees did use the Internet at work for personal business, they also spent more time at home on work-related tasks. These results suggest that the Internet has been shifting work to home more than personal activities to work. Another survey of 150 executives in the United States showed that the majority reported that employee productivity is impaired because of workplace Internet use for non-work purposes (Roman, 1996). Another study reported that 30%-40% of employees' productivity can be lost due to their surfing the Internet for personal purposes (Verton, 2000).

Opportunities of cyberloafing

The data reveals that majority of respondents (17 out of 20) reported that they improved their personality and profession due to cyberloafing; and it was important for their efficacy, professionalism, healthy mood, congenial atmosphere and technical enhancement. On the other hand, very less proportion (3) respondents believe that its matter of losing time and energy for unofficial activities. The important opportunities reflected by respondents are:

1. Official communication (sending and receiving data/documents);
2. Access to information (downloading files, documents, books etc);
3. Medium of entertainment and fun (watching drama, film, song);
4. Means of informal communication (texting, voice calling and video calling);
5. Sharing of ideas and information;

6. Source of knowledge; and
7. Staying updated (through news and search engines).

The advocates of cyberloafing at working place argue that the Internet provides a much needed positive diversion at work which can lead to creativity, flexibility, camaraderie, and foster a learning environment (Block, 2001; Belanger and Van Slyke, 2002; Greenfield and Davis, 2002; Oravec, 2002; Stanton, 2002; Anandarajan et al., 2004; Anandarajan and Simmers, 2004). Employees who engage in experimentation while cyberloafing may help develop important skills and knowledge which could make them more valuable to the organization (Sunoo, 1996; Belanger and Van Slyke, 2002; Anandarajan et al., 2004; Anandarajan and Simmers, 2004).

Development due to cyberloafing

When asked about the changes made by the cyberloafing in the lives of respondents, one-fourth (5) reported that no significant changes took place in their lives; whereas, three-fourth of them (15) reported that significant developments came into their lives due to cyberloafing. The prominent arguments cited by them were:

1. Lingua franca (English language) development;
2. Knowledge base enrichment;
3. Competence and efficacy at work;
4. Creativity-innovation orientation; and
5. Modernity and trendiness.

Addiction to cyberloafing

As access to the Internet has become more common for employees, so has their propensity to use the Internet for entertainment and other non-work purposes on the job. To assess the level of addiction among the respondents, it was asked as how they feel if there is no connection. About half of the respondents reported that they felt boring/depressed during office hours, about one fourth (6) of them managed working hours through offline works and again about one fourth (4) of them claimed that they didn't care whether the network was there or not. One respondent surprisingly quoted that she was happy if there was no network.

In United States, 56% of employees were using the Internet for personal reasons (Greengard, 2002). By 2003, 59% of Internet use at work was non-work related (Griffiths, 2003). And by 2005, cyberloafing had become the most common way that employees waste time at work (Malachowski, 2005). In one of the few national studies conducted on cyberloafing behaviors, 80% of information workers reported using a computer for personal email or messaging while on the job (Garrett

and Danziger, 2008a, 2008b).

Meanwhile, estimates of US productivity losses due to cyberloafing range as high as \$178 billion annually. In a recent study, employees reported spending at least 1 h on work-related activities during a regular work day, and the largest proportion of non-work-related time was spent on the Internet (Salary.com. 2009).

CONCLUSION

The research findings of this study are very important for policy decisions. The study has concluded the following important aspects regarding cyberloafing:

1. Pertaining to rationalization of cyberloafing, the data reveals that most of the respondents are in favor of cyberloafing practices as they forwarded sound justifications for the same. Most importantly, the reasons cited by the respondents were overwhelmingly personal and entertainment oriented. This may hamper the working environment and lower the expectations of the organization in which they are working.
2. Relating to opportunities of cyberloafing, the data depicts that four-fifth of the respondents found cyberloafing very much useful as they cited important opportunities through cyberloafing activities. However, most of the opportunities belonged to their personal gains rather than organizational benefits.
3. Concerning development due to cyberloafing, most of the respondents believed and justified that it had changed and developed their lives to the significant level.
4. Regarding addiction to cyberloafing, the data displayed that almost half of the respondents were not in their good moods when they were unable to cyberloaf. This behavior is the threat on efficacy of the workers; and further it may reduce the productivity of the concerned organization. However, almost half of the respondents managed to work with the absence of cyberloafing. This shows that the act of cyberloafing has not completely polluted the working environment; therefore, intervention programs and policies could be developed and implemented before the situation become worst.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Organizational control mechanisms, policies, and procedures play an important role in regulating employees' behaviors. Some managers are cyber-bureaucrats who feel that employees should never engage in personal use of the web at work while others are cyber-humanists who believe personal use of the web can help balance employees' lives. Like other forms of inappropriate workplace behavior, there are likely to be different causes for the different forms of cyberloafing. Policies and sanctions should therefore be appropriately

designed. The key recommendations arising from this study are as follows:

1. The concerned school directors/team leaders should rethink over internet connection being facilitated to their secretaries for all the time. The decision will depend on the working load analysis and efficiency of the concerned secretaries, their performance achieving the targets and deadlines. If a particular secretary is efficient enough to make a balance between cyberloafing and her professional work productivity, there is no reason to stop her cyberloafing for a fixed time.
2. Since the sampled data reflects that the only official activity in cyberloafing is mailing and data transfer which may instantly be done on the school director's/ team leader's computer, hence there is no reason to give internet connection for cyberloafing to secretaries for the sake of watching drama, film, skypeing, chatting, texting and other personal uses of entertainment.
3. The minimum eligibility criteria for a job of secretary needed is already fulfilled at the time of appointment and the University is already providing trainings/workshops for them; therefore, it is irrational to provide them cyberloafing benefits and losing office hours. They can do it based on their own conveniences, time and resource available at their personal ends.
4. Cyberloafing is a source of motivation for around one half of the respondents which is prone to be an addiction. It is not a good sign and trend for the secretaries working in the University. However, it is a real time to make a policy decisions and regulate secretaries time for cyberloafing at work. Majority of secretaries justify that they improve their work efficiency through cyberloafing as they use internet in free hours but the arguments given by them is debatable because they also revealed that they had less workload or they want proper entertainment and fun at working time and space. For secretaries, it is important to understand the difference between working with fun and enjoying fun with work.

LIMITATIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH

Cyberloafing is a recent phenomenon in Ethiopia and despite its rapid spread; it is hitherto an unexplored research terrain. Therefore, further researches are needed to evaluate different impacts of cyberloafing behavior on employees' productivity and efficacy. Also, homogeneity of the participating sample should be ensured, taking some important variables into consideration. More researches may be conducted in future taking into account the other non-teaching staffs, teachers, and the officials of the university. The further study may certainly pave the way to assess the issue deeply, make policy decisions, and arrive upon the regulation as to what extent and how much cyberloafing is allowed for its employees. This must be informed from the organizations so that universities may operate

smoothly with the rest of the digital affairs.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The author has not declared any conflict of interests.

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