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ANNOUNCEMENT OF FORMAL CONTROL AS A PHASESHIFTING PERCEPTION AND ITS MODERATING ROLE IN THE CONTEXT OF MOBILE-LOAFING

Research in Progress

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Abstract

Organizations attempt to mitigate nonwork-related behaviors of employees to maintain productivity and employee engagement. As a manifestation of nonwork-related mobile computing, mobile loafing is considered subject to control by organizations. According to Akers' social learning theory, deviant behaviors are usually learned through imitating others or through experience. In addition, new information on deviant behaviors can influence the mechanisms of conducting those behaviors. This study investigates how perceptions of mobile-loafing are moderated by phase-shifting perception after organizations' announcements of formal control. In particular, we hypothesize that phase-shifting perception has moderating effects on employees' perceptions of mobile-loafing, such as neutralization and peer loafing, from time 1 to time 2. The results of this study will contribute to information systems (IS) research by suggesting the moderating role of phase-shifting perception in the context of mobile-loafing.

Keywords: Phase Shifting Perception, Social Learning Theory, Workplace Deviant Behavior, Mobile-Loafing

1 Introduction

Widespread diffusion of personal mobile devices (e.g., smartphones, tablets, e-readers) has enabled individuals to access the Internet anytime and anyplace. As of November 2018, mobile Internet traffic excluding tablets accounted for 48.2 percent of total web traffic in the world (Statista, 2019). Since the use of mobile devices for work-related reasons at the workplace is pervasive, employees have been given the opportunity to commit mobile-loafing (Jamaluddin et al., 2015). Mobile-loafing (or non-work-related mobile-computing) refers to employee's use of mobile Internet during business hours for personal purposes (Bock et al., 2010). Mobile-loafing is a problematic noncompliant behavior because it not only reduces employee's engagement and productivity, but also makes organizations more vulnerable to security threats (Khansa et al., 2017). Furthermore, personal mobile devices make it easier for mobile-loafers to commit deviant behaviors such as cyberbullying and online sexual harassment (Choi et al., 2019), which can expose organizations to more potential ethical and legal liabilities (Vitak et al., 2011).

To mitigate problems of noncompliant behaviors, organizations have implemented formal controls with announcements about the behaviors. Formal controls are external sanctions officially imposed by organizations and generally include "rules and policies, monitoring, and penalties in the event of policy violations" (Khansa et al., 2017, p. 143). Prior research has found that formal controls can increase accountability, which can in turn reduce employees' intention to commit access policy violations (Vance et al., 2013). Similarly, Chen et al. (2013) argued that formal controls can enhance people's security behaviors that benefit organizations. However, prior research has also concluded that strict policies and penalties can make employees feel stress, anger, and injustice (D'Arcy et al., 2014). Accordingly, formal controls have potential to strengthen employees' intention to commit noncompliant behaviors as a form of rebellion against the new regulations (Lim, 2002).

Despite the importance of understanding organizational formal controls, existing IS literature has not paid much attention to formal controls as phase-shifting. This study defines phase-shifting as "an individual perception that trigger a shift from time 1 to time 2 cognitive processes resulting in the reevaluation" of a company's regulation policy about noncompliant behaviors (Soenen et al., 2017, p. 798). For example, announcement of formal controls can be a phase-shifting event that triggers employees to revise their judgment of noncompliant behaviors. Noncompliant behaviors are driven by employees' perceptions and intentions (D'Arcy et al., 2014) which can change and evolve as they experience new formal controls (Bhattacharjee & Premkumar, 2004). Individuals may vary in their perceptions of formal control as phase-shifting; thus, it is the perception of an event as phase-shifting that could influence subsequent perceptions and intentions (Soenen et al., 2017). Therefore, to accurately predict noncompliant behaviors such as mobile-loafing, it is important to understand how phase-shifting affects and changes employees' perceptions and intentions after the announcement of formal controls. Accordingly, formal controls as phase-shifting help understand how announcement of formal controls can reduce employees' mobile-loafing and other noncompliant behaviors.

The objective of this study is to examine the moderating effect of phase-shifting perception on the relationship between time 1 perceptions and time 2 perceptions. To achieve the objective, we propose a research model based on Akers' social learning theory (SLT) (Akers et al. 1979). Drawing upon Akers' SLT, we relate neutralization and peer mobile-loafing to mobile-loafing intention before and after the announcement of formal controls. This study hypothesizes the moderating effects of phase-shifting such that the relationships between time 1 and time 2 perceptions and intentions are stronger when employees perceive less of an announcement of formal controls as a phase-shifting event.

2 Social Learning Theory

Akers' SLT argues that social behaviors are learned by interacting with others, formed by imitating others' behavior, and strengthened through positive reinforcement. The main concepts of Akers' SLT are imitation, definitions, differential associations, and differential reinforcements. Specifically, "imitation" occurs when a person observes and follows others' behavior; this can be influenced by social

groups or the media. People who value the perceived effects of their behaviors will attempt to change if they believe that their current behavior threatens their status. They can reduce threats and obtain rewards by changing their current behavior to an expected behavior (Rosenstock et al., 1988). “Definition” refers to how individuals determine the meaning of behaviors. If people are able to neutralize deviant behaviors, they may be able to engage in deviant behaviors. “Differential association” indicates a person’s degree of direct or indirect interactions with others who have positive attitudes, values, and norms regarding deviant behaviors. If one person interacts with many others who have positive attitudes towards the deviant behavior, this person is highly likely to engage in the behavior. “Differential reinforcement” is defined as the balance of anticipated or actual rewards and punishments regarding the behavior. On the one hand, behaviors can be reinforced by rewards or discomfort reduction through repetition; on the other hand, behaviors that trigger punishment may be less repeated. Therefore, in this study, we examine the effects, on the intention of mobile loafing, of neutralization in the definitions of peer mobile loafing behaviors and behaviors that correspond to imitation.

Drawing on SLT, Khansa et al. (2017) proposed neutralization, perceived risk, past cyberloafing, and peer cyberloafing as predictors of cyberloafing. They showed that in preannouncement, employees’ cyberloafing intention is affected mostly by automatic variables (e.g., past tendencies to cyberloaf and others’ cyberloafing), but their neutralization and perceived risk had insignificant effects. However, the effects of employees’ neutralization and perceived risk on their cyberloafing intention suddenly became significant after the announcement. In spite of their findings, Khansa et al. (2017) did not examine the possible role of announcements of formal controls as a phase-shifting perception.

3 Research Model and Hypotheses

The research model (see Figure 1) describes the moderating effects of phase-shifting perception on the relationships between perceptions at T1 and T2. Overall, announcement of formal controls as a phase-shifting perception will reduce the impact of perceptions of neutralization and peer loafing at T1 on these perceptions at T2.

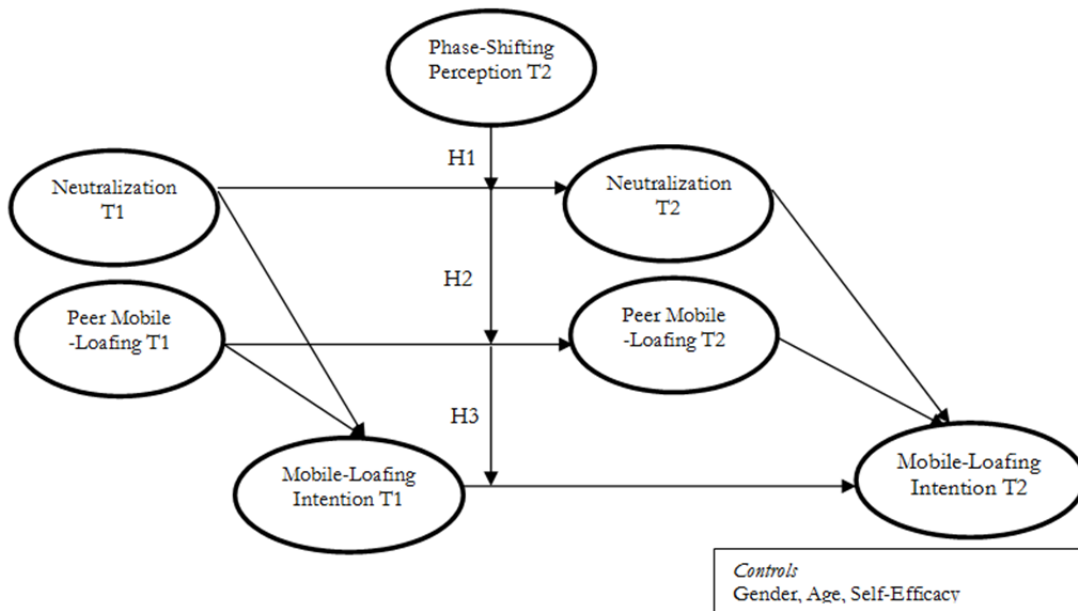


Figure 1. Research Model

3.1 Neutralization

Neutralization, one of the main elements of SLT, is the process by which an individual attempts to define the acceptability of behaviors through rationalization, justification, and execution. The extent to which deviant behaviors are neutralized depends on the individual's characteristics (Lim, 2002). Having accepted the deviant behavior, a person who neutralizes it such that he or she is able to perform it will later repeat the same behavior. In this vein, the previous neutralization can affect the subsequent one. Lind (2001) noted that once individuals construct perceptions of certain events based on information they initially encounter, these initial perceptions may heavily influence subsequent ones. Neutralization is closely related to behavioral boundaries and specific guidelines for behaviors that allow a denial of injury. However, if a behavioral warning occurs before the next instance of the behavior and a phase shift occurs, a new perception forms for the deviant behavior and a new mental model forms about the deviant behavior's result. If such a belief-update occurs, the effects of past neutralization is lessened if people are affected by the announcement. The above discussion leads to the following hypothesis:

H1: The relationship between time 1 neutralization and time 2 neutralization is moderated by phase shifting perception, such that the relationship between time 1 neutralization and time 2 neutralization is stronger when employees perceive less of an announcement as a phase-shifting event.

3.2 Peer Mobile-Loafing

Peer mobile-loafing concerns individuals' perceptions of co-workers' mobile-loafing behaviors (Khansa et al., 2017). In SLT, deviant behaviors of co-workers are related to differential association which influences individuals' intention to commit deviant behaviors. Previous research has noted a strong relationship between peer cyber-loafing and cyber-loafing behavior (Galletta & Polak, 2003; Liberman et al., 2011; Lim & Teo, 2005; Pee et al., 2008). The widespread practice of mobile loafing can lead to an absence of norms and controls for reducing this behavior. When people form a perception, the social environment serves to interpret the event and determines what a person's attitude or opinion about a particular behavior should be (Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978). In this case, the perception of peer mobile-loafing at time 2 is mainly affected by the existing perception observed at time 1. However, when formal controls by the organization occur, the influence of the perceptions of peer mobile-loafing formed at time 1 is weakened by the phase-shifting event, and a new perception of peer mobile loafing will form. Thus, we propose the following hypothesis:

H2: The relationship between time 1 peer mobile-loafing and time 2 peer mobile-loafing is moderated by phase-shifting perception, such that the relationship between time 1 peer mobile-loafing and time 2 peer mobile loafing is stronger when employees perceive less of an announcement as a phase-shifting event.

3.3 Mobile-Loafing Intention

According to the theory of planned behavior, "intention" is defined as instructions that people give to themselves to behave in certain ways (Triandis, 1980). Because the intention to perform behaviors is based on individuals' rational decision making and construction of specific mental models, during the repeated behaviors, the time 1 intention influences the time 2 intention. Previous research on intention and habitual behaviors explains the role of intention in repeated behaviors: After individuals repeat certain behaviors several times, their conscious intention in certain environmental events and contexts will gradually fade (Ouellette & Wood, 1998). Before reaching the stage of automatic behavior, the previously conformed intention will impact later intentions of behavior. However, if individuals encounter new information resulting in a phase shift, they may reevaluate these behaviors, including their triggers. The creation of new triggers for automatic behaviors requires new mechanisms to achieve the goal of the behaviors. Because intentions are formed from beliefs about the results of behaviors (Ouellette & Wood, 1998), an announcement about formal controls that attributes negative results to these behaviors can bring about a new phase of perceptions. As such, the intention to perform deviant behaviors will be less influenced by the preexisting intention if the impact of the an-

nouncement is strong enough to cause individuals to reconsider their behaviors. Thus, we propose the following moderating hypothesis:

H3: The relationship between time 1 mobile-loafing intention and time 2 mobile-loafing intention is moderated by phase-shifting perception, such that the relationship between time 1 mobile-loafing intention and time 2 mobile-loafing intention is stronger when employees perceive less of an announcement as a phase-shifting event.

4 Planned Research Method and Data Analyses

We will conduct a two-wave longitudinal study to monitor individuals' phase-shifting perception and other perceptions toward mobile-loafing after the announcement of formal organizational controls. At the beginning of the survey, we will provide a definition of mobile-loafing: *mobile-loafing, or "non-work-related mobile computing," refers to employees' using mobile Internet during business hours for personal reasons (e.g., gaming, browsing websites, sending messages, etc.).* In the Time 1 survey, we will examine the current state of mobile-loafing among respondents. About a month following the completion of Time 1 survey, we will distribute the Time 2 survey where respondents will be asked to assume that their firm have announced formal controls to mitigate mobile-loafing.

4.1 Measures

To ensure construct validity, all measures will be adapted from existing, validated scales as presented in Table 1. Neutralization, peer mobile-loafing, and mobile-loafing intention will be measured in both the Time 1 and Time 2 surveys. Phase-shifting perception will be measured at Time 2 after respondents are exposed to announcement of formal controls.

Neutralization (Khansa et al., 2017)	
NEU1	It is acceptable to engage in mobile-loafing if no harm is done to the company.
NEU2	If I get the job done, it is all right to occasionally engage in mobile-loafing.
NEU3	My hard work in the company can compensate for occasionally engaging in mobile-loafing.
Peer mobile-loafing (Anderson & Agarwal, 2010)	
PML1	I believe most people occasionally engage in mobile-loafing.
PML2	I am convinced my coworkers occasionally engage in mobile-loafing.
Mobile-loafing intention (Venkatesh & Davis, 2000)	
MLI1	I predict that I would use mobile Internet at work for nonwork-related purposes in the next month.
MLI2	I intend to use mobile Internet at work for nonwork-related purposes in the next month.
MLI3	I plan to use mobile Internet at work for nonwork-related purposes in the next month.
Phase-shifting perception (Soenen et al., 2017)	
PSP1	This announcement of formal controls makes me reconsider the company's regulation policy.
PSP2	This announcement of formal controls is very different from what I have come to expect from the company's regulation policy.

Table 1. Measurement Items

4.2 Data Collection

To collect data, we will recruit respondents from Amazon's Mechanical Turk, an online crowdsourcing marketplace platform where workers complete certain Internet-based jobs in exchange for a monetary payment. In particular, we consider the population of interest to be people who are currently employed and use mobile Internet in the United States.

4.3 Measurement Model

To assess the measurement model, we will perform a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) using AMOS 22.0. We will use several fit indices such as the nonnormed fit index (NNFI), the comparative fit index (CFI), the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), the standardized root mean square residual (SRMR), the goodness-of-fit index (GFI), and the adjusted goodness of fit (AGFI). After assessing the overall fit of the model, we will examine the psychometric properties of the scales in terms of reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

4.4 Social Desirability Bias

It has been known that people have tendency to underreport socially negative behaviors (e.g., software piracy) or overreport socially positive behaviors (e.g., knowledge contribution) are underreported because of social desirability (SD) bias (Paulhus, 1991). Because mobile-loafing is a socially sensitive issue, SD bias may affect the measurement of related constructs. To assess the existence of SD bias, we will use an 8-item short form of the impression management (IM) scale (Hart et al., 2015) and examine correlations between study constructs and the IM scale (Kwak et al., 2019). A lack of correlations may be seen as evidence that suggests that SD bias has no association with the sensitive constructs (Paulhus, 1991). If significant correlations are found, covariance technique will be used to control the amount of SD bias (Kwak et al., 2019).

4.5 Hypothesis Testing

To test the moderating effect of phase-shifting perception on the relationships between Time 1 perceptions and Time 2 perceptions, the structural equation model (SEM) multi-group moderation will be performed using critical ratio difference test (Byrne, 2010) by splitting the data set using the median value of phase-shifting perception (Soenen et al., 2017). SEM multi-group analysis uses unstandardized estimates because standardized estimates may differ across groups due to the different variances (Byrne, 2010).

5 Potential Contributions

This research has two potential theoretical contributions. First, this study examines announcement of formal organizational controls as a phase-shifting perception. While prior research has examined the role of announcement of formal organizational controls in the cyberloafing context, it has not paid much attention on how such an event can be considered as a phase-shifting perception. This study conceptualizes and applies the phase-shifting perception in the context of mobile-loafing. Second, this study is expected to find a moderating effect of phase-shifting perception between Time 1 perceptions and Time 2 perceptions. Much prior research has confirmed that prior perceptions positively influence posterior perceptions (e.g., Kim & Malhotra, 2006). However, prior research has not examined factors that could moderate the relationships between them. Our study will make an important contribution by showing the moderating role of phase-shifting perception in workplace deviant behavior. For practical contribution, this research shows the importance of phase shifting in the form of an announcement of formal controls. Due to technological advances, various problems related to these devices now occur constantly. When an organization recognizes a new behavior as deviant and attempts to devise an announcement of formal controls, it may articulate the harmfulness of the deviant behavior as well as the punishments. Overall, our results can be used for understanding how individuals change their perceptions of noncompliant behaviors with emerging technologies. Specifically, in developing formal controls over noncompliant behaviors, companies can identify the different roles of phase-shifting reflected in each individual and provide appropriate governance strategies for preventing noncompliant behaviors.

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