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Examining Control Balance & Information Security Policy Violations

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Control Balance Theory (CBT) (Tittle, 1995; 2004) is a theory of deviant behavior, predicated on the idea of control. When imbalances in the ratio of control between an individual and their environment exist, deviant behavior occurs. The key assertion of CBT is that control imbalances are associated with deviance as they lead to an imbalance between motivation toward deviance and constraints on such deviant behavior. At present, little research has been done to explore CBT in the context of Information Systems Security Policy (ISSP) violations as academics have not fully explored this topic from a deviance-oriented theoretical perspective, specifically the factors that can influence an individual's deviant behavior in an organization (Moody et al., 2018). Further, Tittle's (1995; 2004) work has yet to be fully explored in the behavioral context, leaving noted potential moderating effects such as fear, unexplored and lacking in empirical evidence within the academic Information Systems literature. Previous studies in the criminology literature, such as those by Piquero and Hickman (1999) as well as Curry (2005), examine how the degree of imbalance within the control ratio can predict a user's deviant behavior. Likewise in the IS literature, Lowry et al. 2017 examines the use of control ratio imbalances to predict cyberbullying behaviors. Yet, as Tittle (2004) specifically notes, an imbalance in control ratios alone does not cause deviance. Thus, these prior studies fall short of examining deviant intentions and behavior in light of the full set of proposed constructs, with the focus of most research being focused on whether a control surplus or deficit can incite specific deviant behaviors (Curry 2005; Piquero and Hickman 1999, 2003). Therefore, this study explores the effects of control (im)balances in the context of ISSP violations, incorporating Tittle's (1995; 2004) full set of proposed constructs, including testing the mediating effects of Fear.

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