I Want It My Way: An Integrated Model of Habits, Consumerism, And Neutralization To Understand Students' Cyberslacking Behavior

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Abstract

This study examines the role of habits, consumerism, and neutralization on cyberslacking behavior of students in a classroom environment. An online survey of 303 students was conducted. The study finds that the relationship between the condemnation of the condemners and intention to cyberslacking was not significant and the impact of the consumerism on three of the neutralization techniques couldn't be confirmed. However, the rest of our hypotheses were positively significant as expected. This study would extend the existing research by expanding the concepts and theory of habits, consumerism, and neutralization to cyberslacking behavior in the classroom and also help educators and parents understand the antecedents of such behaviors.

Keywords

Cyberslacking, neutralization, habits, consumerism, classroom issues, technology.

Introduction

The approach of using the Internet and technology during class time for the non-class related purpose is known as cyber-slacking (Gerow et al. 2010). The use of technological devices may improve students' attentiveness and engagement in class if the devices are related to the course learning outcome (Samson 2010). However, students may use technology to engage in activities that have no relation to the class. As students often carry an individual laptop, tablets, and cell phone in the class, it's easier for students to access online materials ranging from supplement learning to playing online games. As technology usage in the classroom has become pervasive, such cyber-slacking/cyberloafing activities have raised several concerns in the education field. Several educators have considered banning the use of laptops in the classroom (Maxwell 2007) or separating lecture halls as laptop-approved and laptop-free zones (Aguilar-Roca et al. 2012).

The overall pressure on the school and university to improve academic performance requires significant changes such as financial aids, performance-based scholarship and constant counseling (Patterson and Patterson 2017). However, these expensive techniques don't significantly improve student learning (Angrist et al. 2009). However, the policy to limit cyberslacking may significantly improve student academic performance (Patterson and Patterson 2017). While student distraction is not a new phenomenon, cyber-slacking provides more opportunity for distraction as it is often difficult to detect use of technology in a class for non-class use. Given the importance of this issue, it is important to investigate how students justify the use of technological devices for non-class related activities in a classroom.

The primary objective of this study is to examine the effect of consumerism, habit, and neutralization on cyberslacking behavior. While previous research has used the theory of planned behavior (TPB) and the theory of interpersonal behavior (TIB) to explain cyberslacking behavior (Soh et al. 2018), there has been limited research on the impact of habit and consumerism and neutralization techniques on cyberslacking

behavior of the students in the classroom. Based on the theory of habit, consumerism, and neutralization, we expand the reasonings why students are engaged in cyberslacking behavior.

Literature Review

A significant number of cyberslacking studies have focused on exploratory and descriptive research analyzing the factors that may impact cyberslacking behavior of the students through qualitative research methodology (Aagaard 2015; Flanigan and Kiewra 2018). Some studies have focused on understanding how demographic factors such as age gender, income, and experience with technology, may predict a student's cyberslacking behavior (Baturay and Toker 2015; Yılmaz et al. 2015). Other studies have advanced beyond exploring demographic variables and analyzed other antecedents to cyberslacking behavior (Gerow et al. 2010; Sana et al. 2013). Some studies focused on the different types of the cyberloafing behavior and how those types of behavior may impact cyberslacking differently (Akbulut et al. 2017; Blanchard and Henle 2008). Previous studies have also explored how individuals use neutralization techniques to engage in cyberloafing (Cheng et al. 2014; Li and Cheng 2013; Lim 2002).

The theory of planned behavior (TPB) and the theory of interpersonal behavior (TIB) are both commonly used in explaining employees' cyberloafing behavior of employees and students. While TPB and TIB have allowed expanding our knowledge regarding cyberslacking behavior and its antecedents, this study changes the focus to studying habits and consumerism and its impact on neutralization technique while engaging in cyberslacking behavior. A routinized behavior such as habit would unconsciously and automatically force students to use technology for off-task activities. Similarly, a student with a consumerism orientation may take education as a given and take an event where students who are the consumers pay fees for a grade. As such, habits and consumerism would lead users to justify behavior that violates classroom's norms through the use of neutralization technique. This paper expands the existing literature by using habits theory, consumerism and neutralization technique theory to understand cyberslacking behavior.

Conceptual Framework and Hypotheses Development

Neutralization Technique

People psychologically rationalize that anti-social actions or deviant behavior are justifiable or excusable (Sykes and Matza 1957). Individuals like to feel good about themselves and would like to portray an image that is consistent with the image society forces on them. They possess an innate desire to present themselves favorably to the society and to themselves as well (Robinson and Kraatz 1998).Students in the class rationalize and justify their use of technology for non-class related activities. Some of them even use it as a defense mechanism through which they can downplay the repercussions of their behavior.

Sykes and Matza (1957) proposed five techniques that people use for neutralizing their shame or guilt which was further extended and expanded. These primary neutralization techniques are a condemnation of condemners, denial of responsibility, appeal to higher loyalties, the metaphor of ledger, and denial of injury. Condemnation of the condemners involves when a person committing a deviant act counterattack the accuser in an attempt to shift the blame (Siponen and Vance 2010). Students partaking in cyberloafing would blame the cyberloafing related policy of the course being too restrictive of confusing. Previous research shows that the use of the condemnation of the condemner's technique will positively impact an individual's intention to continue cyberloafing (Li and Cheng 2013). Thus, the following is hypothesized:

H1: Condemnation of the condemners will positively affect a student's intention to use technology in class for non-class related activities.

Denial of responsibility is another neutralization technique where individuals deny their responsibility and believe that the environment predisposed them to act in the deviant way (Silic et al. 2017). The students who are using technology for the non-class activities in the class may believe that the external circumstance force or even coerced them to perform the misbehavior. As such, they are not really guilty as they believe those factors were beyond their control. Previous research shows that the denial of responsibility technique will positively impact an individual's intention to continue cyberloafing (Lim 2002). Thus, the following assumption is made:

H2: Denial of responsibility will positively affect a student's intention to use technology in class for non-class related activities.

Appeal to higher loyalties refers to the technique where individuals committing a deviant act to justify their behavior as being part of the greater good, or of a higher order ideal (Li and Cheng 2013). Students in a class may believe that once they complete the activities they were given by the instructor or feel like they know the learning outcome of the course, they can do whatever they want. Such behavior of trying to appeal the higher loyalties by completing the activities on time and devoting it for other non-class but so-called "productive" activities would lead to higher cyberloafing activities (Cheng et al. 2014). Thus, it can be assumed:

H3: Appeal to higher loyalties will positively affect student's intention to use technology in class for non-class related activities.

The metaphor of the ledger neutralization technique implies that individuals may use the idea of compensating bad acts with the good acts claiming that the deviant behavior in one part would be made up by the rightness in other parts (Siponen and Vance 2010). Students may use similar metaphor and assume that the good things that they have performed in the class such receiving a good grade, working on first few class activities, or asking questions once in a while would give them the right to use technology in the class for non-class activities. The use of the metaphor of ledger has been found to be positively associated with the higher cyberloafing activities (Cheng et al. 2014).

H4: Metaphor of ledger loyalties will positively affect a student's intention to use technology in class for non-class related activities.

When people engage in deviant behavior, they are often in denial that no injury or harm to any property or individual occurred and for that reason, such behaviors are more acceptable. As such, students who engage in cyberloafing behavior in class also may not deny their actions, but they may simply think that no harm was done. For a student, browsing shopping websites or a chat app in your own computer during the class may not seem to be behavior that will harm anyone. The denial of injury has been previously found to positively impact the intention to violate security policies (Silic et al. 2017). Hence it is hypothesized that:

H5: Denial of Injury will positively affect a student's intention to use technology in class for non-class related activities.

Consumerism Theory

Consumerism can be defined as the promotion and protection of the interests of the consumers (Taneja et al. 2015). The student consumerism can be defined as the concept that students function as the consumers of their higher educational institutions as colleges and universities are selling services related to education and degrees while students are purchasing them by paying a certain tuition fee (Bunce et al. 2017; Harrison and Risler 2015).

The "rise of student consumerism" among students is a growing concern for many schools, universities, scholars, and instructors as it has a negative impact on student learning. Student consumerism negatively impacts the goal of effective pedagogy by impacting students decision-making process (Saunders 2014). Students would find excuses to engage in cyberslacking behavior (Taneja et al. 2015) and would engage in neutralization technique to downplay the repercussion of the deviant behavior such as using technology in class for non-class related activities. Thus, it can be hypothesized that student consumerism would positively impact all the different neutralization technique that a user may use as a defense mechanism to eliminate shame that would normally feel while violating class policy such as using technology for non-class related activities.

H6: Student consumerism will positively influence condemnation of condemners' technique.

H7: Student consumerism will positively influence the denial of responsibility.

H8: Student consumerism will positively influence appeal to higher royalties.

H9: Student consumerism will positively influence the metaphor of ledger.

H10: Student consumerism will positively influence denial of injury.

Habit Theory

Previous studies have explored deviant cyberloafing behavior of individuals in organizational settings using theories of Criminology and Psychology, such as Deterrence Theory (Cheng et al. 2014), Neutralization Techniques (Silic et al. 2017) and organizational justice (Lim 2002). While these theories have aided the understanding of the cyberloafing behavior, it is important to examine the influence of impact of past and automatic behavior such as habit on the present (Vance et al. 2012). Cyberloafing is an activity people tend to do out of habit as they are not accustomed to go through a few hours without using technology. Habit is a routinized behavior that is assessed based on past behavioral frequency and automaticity of those behaviors at present (Verplanken and Orbell 2003).

Habits can be generally defined as a learned sequence of acts that often becomes an automatic response to a context or some kind of stimulus (Verplanken et al. 1997). Following the findings of Vance et al. (2012), which used habit as antecedents to cognitive mediating processes such as threat appraisal and coping appraisal, this study would focus on the impact of habits on neutralization behavior of the students in using internet and technology in class for non-class activities. The daily technology using habits of students can become an automatic behavior without conscious deliberation. Things repeatedly done at past does not require much cognitive mental process (Moody and Siponen 2013; Triandis 1977) and as such, habits will allow students to rationalize and justify their deviant behavior of using technology in class for non-class related activities. Thus, it can be hypothesized that habits would positively impact all the different neutralization technique that a user may use to reduce their shame or guilt of engaging in course deviant behavior.

The theory of student consumerism believes that students act as consumers and for that reason they believe they are entitled to better academic outcome even if their work is poor (Saunders 2014). The student consumerism can act as a preoccupation or obsession with commercializing higher education. Because of the consumerism attitude, students will grow a habit of demanding guaranteed satisfaction and degree from educational institutions. Such consumerist attitudes are not only detrimental to learning but also creates habitual automaticity of engaging in deviant behavior.

H11: Habit will positively influence condemnation of condemners' technique.

H12: Habit will positively influence the denial of responsibility.

H13: Habit will positively influence appeal to higher royalties.

H14: Habit will positively influence the metaphor of ledger.

H15: Habit will positively influence denial of injury.

H16: Consumerism will positively influence Habit.

Research Design

Sample and Sample Procedure

To test the research hypotheses, data were collected from students at different educational level across United States using a survey design through Qualtrics. Participation in the survey was voluntary. Out of 341 surveys collected, 303 responses were used and 38 were discarded as they either failed the attention checker questions, or a pattern was detected in the way their answer was submitted, or the survey was completed in impossibly shorter time period. 44.8% of respondents were female and the remaining 45.2% were male. The average age of the respondents was 29.1 years with approximately 48% of the respondents studying in Undergraduate level and 41% of them in Graduate level. 53% of the respondents agreed that they are in the course for both grade and learning while 15% of them showed apathy towards both learning and grade of the course, they are in.

Survey Instrument

Survey scales were adapted from well-established and reliable research instruments published in the previous literature. All the items were measured using a five-point Likert-type scale. The five constructs for different neutralization techniques such as the condemnation of condemners, denial of responsibility, appeal to higher loyalties, the metaphor of ledger, and denial of injury were all adapted to the cyberslacking context from the work of Siponen and Vance (2010). Each of the construct was measured using three items each. The four items for habit were adopted to the cyberslacking context from the work of Verplanken and Orbell (2003). The items for consumerism as well as the intention to cyber-slack in a classroom were adapted from the work of Taneja et al. (2015). Both of these constructs were measured using three items each. The questionnaire was tested for content validity by getting feedback and suggestions from three students who did not participate in the final study. Some changes were made based on the feedback provided by them. A round of pilot study of 18 students was conducted to enhance psychometric properties of the survey instrument. Further minor changes were made on the findings of the pilot test.

Data Analysis and Results

Measurement Model

This study uses Smart-PLS (Ringle et al. 2005) to conduct Partial Least Squares (PLS) analysis to evaluate the measurement and the structural models. Internal consistency of the items of this research study was confirmed by examining the composite reliabilities, AVE and Cronbach's alpha (see Table 1 below). Also, the average variance extracted (AVE) for all the constructs should exceed the threshold of 0.5 for all the constructs used in the study (Fornell and Larcker 1981). A value of 0.70 and above in Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability is often considered as evidence of good reliability in IS research (Hair Jr et al. 2010). However, anything above 0.60 is acceptable.

	AVE	Composite Reliability	Cronbach's Alpha
AHL	0.757	0.903	0.839
CC	0.730	0.890	0.815
CON	0.563	0.794	0.614
DI	0.809	0.927	0.882
DR	0.664	0.856	0.747
HABIT	0.743	0.921	0.885
INT	0.769	0.909	0.850
MOL	0.740	0.895	0.824

Table 1. Psychometric properties for constructs

Note: AHL: Appeal to higher loyalties; CC: Condemnation of condemners; CON: Consumerism; DI: Denial of injury; DR: Denial of responsibility; HABIT: Habit; INT: Intention to Cyberslack; MOL: Metaphor of ledger

All items that load together for each construct show loadings of 0.7 and higher. After looking at the loadings and cross-loadings of the items(table redacted because of space limitation), it can be stated that all items that load together show loading of 0.7 and higher. The results demonstrate that the constructs met the required thresholds (Chin et al. 2003), and hence, displays discriminant validity.

As can be seen in Table II, the construct correlation matrix was explored to determine if any constructs correlated extremely highly (more than 0.73) with each other (Taneja et al. 2015). The correlation matrix of this study did not have any extremely high correlations (the highest correlation was 0.73). Discriminant validity is recognized when the square root of average variance extracted (AVE) for each construct is greater than the inter-construct correlation corresponding off-diagonal correlations of the construct to their latent variables (Loch, et al., 2003). The square root of the AVE for each construct as shown in the diagonal of the correlation construct matrix in Table 2 was greater than the inter-construct correlation corresponding off-diagonal correlations of the constructs to their latent variables.

	AHL	CC	CON	DI	DR	HABIT	INT	MOL
AHL	0.870							
CC	0.562	0.854						
CON	0.163	0.364	0.750					
DI	0.798	0.613	0.223	0.900				
DR	0.622	0.697	0.352	0.734	0.815			
HABIT	0.652	0.530	0.280	0.613	0.582	0.862		
INT	0.698	0.570	0.217	0.724	0.647	0.720	0.877	
MOL	0.658	0.609	0.239	0.676	0.624	0.622	0.713	0.860

Table 2. Correlation matrix and average variance extracted for principal constructs.

Testing of The Structural Model

In Figure 1 and Table 3, the results of the structural model testing and the standardized PLS path coefficients for the research model and hypotheses are presented. The path coefficients and their significance levels are also shown in Figure 1. The model explained approximately 64% variance in the intention to cyber-slack in a classroom environment. The path coefficient presented in the structural model in Figure 1 represents the strength of the relationship between the independent variables, mediating variables, and the dependent variables of the research model. As assumed, the majority of the hypotheses were significant towards the direction we thought they would be.

Hypotheses	Path Coefficient(β)	t-value	p-value	Supported?
H1: Condemnation of condemners - Intention to cyberslack (+)	0.024	0.459	> .05	Not supported
H2: Denial of responsibility - Intention to cyberslack (+)	0.130	2.075	< .05	Supported
H3: Appeal to higher loyalties - Intention to cyberslack (+)	0.208	3.621	< .001	Supported
H4: Metaphor of ledger - Intention to cyberslack (+)	0.328	6.488	< .001	Supported
H5: Denial of injury - Intention to cyberslack (+)	0.226	3.203	< .001	Supported
H6: Consumerism - Condemnation of condemners (+)	0.234	4.513	< .001	Supported
H7: Consumerism - Denial of responsibility (+)	0.206	4.242	< .001	Supported
H8: Consumerism - Appeal to higher loyalties (+)	-0.022	0.439	> .05	Not supported
H9: Consumerism - Metaphor of ledger (+)	0.070	1.483	> .05	Not supported
H10: Consumerism - Denial of injury (+)	0.056	1.141	> .05	Not supported
H11: Habits - Condemnation of condemners (+)	0.465	9.055	< .001	Supported
H12: Habits - Denial of responsibility (+)	0.525	10.804	< .001	Supported
H13: Habits - Appeal to higher loyalties (+)	0.658	14.187	< .001	Supported
H14: Habits - Metaphor of ledger (+)	0.602	12.813	< .001	Supported
H15: Habits - Denial of injury (+)	0.597	11.806	< .001	Supported
H16: Consumerism - Habits (+)	0.280	4.434	< .001	Supported

Table 3. Summary of findings

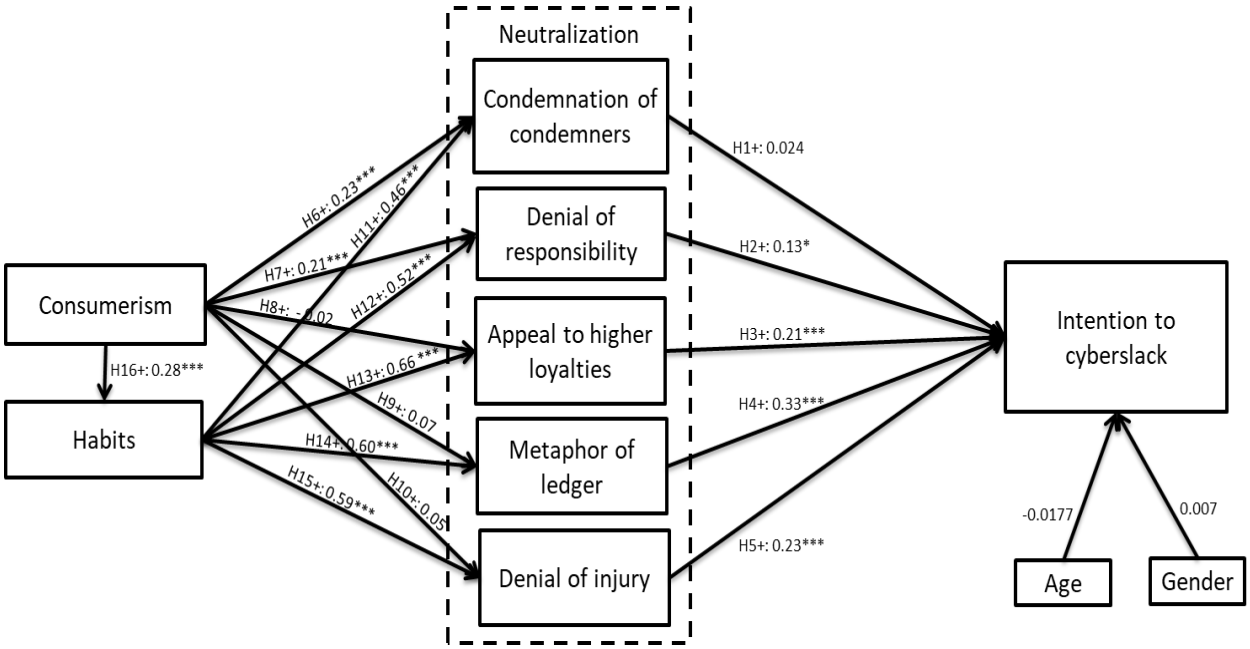

Figure 1. Results of structural modeling test.

Condemnation of condemners was found to be positively associated (β = 0.024, p>0.05) with the intention to use technology in class for non-class activities but the hypothesis was not significant. Thus, hypothesis H1 was not supported. Denial of responsibility was positively associated with the intention to use technology in class for non-class activities. This supported hypothesis H2 (β = 0.13, p<0.05). Appeal to higher loyalties was found to positively affect student's intention to use technology in class for non-class related activities. This supported hypothesis H2 (β = 0.208, p<0.001). Hypothesis H4 was supported (β = 0.328, p<0.001) implying that metaphor of ledger loyalties will positively affect student's intention to use technology in class for non-class related activities. Denial of Injury was found to positively affect student's intention to use technology in class for non-class related activities (β = 0.226, p<0.001) and thus, supported hypothesis H5. The impact of consumerism on condemnation of condemners (β = 0.234, p<0.001), and denial of responsibility (β = 0.206, p<0.001), were both positive as well significant. Thus, hypothesis H6 and H7 were supported. The impact of consumerism on appeal to higher loyalties (β = 0.02, p>0.05), metaphor of ledger (β = 0.07, p>0.05), and condemners were not significant (β = 0.05, p>0.05). Thus, hypothesis H8, H9, and H10 were not supported. Habit predicted condemnation of condemners (β = 0.46, p<0.001), denial of responsibility (β = 0.52, p<0.001), appeal to higher royalties (β = 0.65, p<0.001), metaphor of ledger (β = 0.60, p<0.001), and denial of injury (β = 0.59, p<0.001). All of these relationships were positive. Thus, hypothesis H11, H12, H13, H14, and H15 were all supported. Similarly, hypothesis H16 shows a positive significant relationship between consumerism and habits (β = 0.28, p<0.001).

Also, age and gender were used as control variables. The impact of both control variables was found to be not significant.

Discussion and Implications

Implication for Research and Practice

The theory of planned behavior (TPB) and the theory of interpersonal behavior (TIB) are both commonly used in explaining employees' cyberloafing behavior of employees and students (Gökçearslan et al. 2018; Soh et al. 2018; Taneja et al. 2015). While these theories help us understand the concept and antecedents to cyberslacking well enough, to evolve the existing research, more perspectives need to be added. Recently, some studies have explored how individuals use neutralization techniques to engage in cyberloafing in an office environment (Cheng et al. 2014; Li and Cheng 2013; Lim 2002). However, the

concept of neutralization has not be explored in a classroom environment. This study adds the theory of habits and consumerism as antecedents to the neutralization techniques to study why students engage in internet and technology in class for non-class activities.

The result of this study will be important for the educators as it will help them understand the antecedents of student's cyberslacking behavior. This will help them understand how students will try normalizing their deviant behavior and how habits and consumerism may also play a role in this process. The educational institutions may have to reach out to the students and parents in a personal level to make sure that an educational institution is not a commercial commodity and a degree, and a learning isn't guaranteed (Taneja et al. 2015). While developing a blanket policy may not be an option, educators have to create stronger and university-wide policy regarding cyberslacking to send a strong message to the students. Such policy may even require severe punishment for violation of the policy.

This may also imply that the instructor should change the structure of the classroom seating so that the students face the instructor, shuffle seating areas every now and then, and structure the lessons around topics that require students to participate and contribute. Also, this study puts focus on the technology habits of the students which impact their neutralization techniques and in return impacts cyberslacking behavior. Technology and internet habits formed away from class are in some ways the responsibility of the parents and guardians of the students. Students are responsible for their own habits too. As such, all these stakeholders should also assume responsibly and promote the message to curb cyberslacking behavior in the classroom.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

One potential limitation of this study is related to generalizing the findings of this research to all student groups. Because of the limitation of the convenience sampling, this research may be affected by the cultural differences that one institution has over another. The self-selection bias that occurs in the survey design may impact the outcome of this study. Also, this study uses cross-sectional data rather than longitudinal data. Future research can avoid one such limitation by mixing research methodology such as observation or focus group to the survey design over a longer period of time.

Conclusion

This study has contributed to the extant literature of understanding the use of internet and technology in class for non-class activities using the theory of habits, consumerism, and neutralization. The findings from this study support the tenets of neutralization theory that students will use different neutralization techniques to rationalize their deviant behavior in the classroom environment. This study offers an integrative understanding of the impact of habits and consumerism on neutralization technique to further understand cyberslacking behavior in the classroom. While the relationship between condemnation of the condemners and intention to cyberslacking was not significant and the impact of the consumerism on three of the neutralization techniques couldn't be confirmed, the rest of our hypothesis were positively significant as expected. This study would extend the existing research by expanding the concepts and theory of habits, consumerism, and neutralization to cyberslacking behavior in the classroom and also help educators and parents understand the antecedents of such behaviors.

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