EXPRESSIVE OR INSTRUMENTAL: THE DUAL PERSPECTIVE MODEL OF PERSONAL WEB USAGE AT WORKPLACE

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Abstract

IT devices such as computers, tablets, smartphones as well as Internet are playing extremely important role in both work and non-work fields. Meanwhile, IT facilities also blurred the boundary between work and non-work. With the ubiquity of IT devices and Internet at workplace, organizational employees nowadays increasingly engage in online activities for personal purposes, which are not related to work, during office hours using organizational IT resources, hereafter Personal Web Usage (PWU) at workplace. Previous studies have identified multiple motivations behind employees’ PWU behavior from different perspectives. By reviewing existing literature, we propose the dual nature of PWU with respect to its antecedents, namely expressive nature and instrumental nature. Accordingly, we develop a dual-perspective model of PWU, in which different types of antecedents as well as their interactions are explained. In specific, drawing from job demand-control model, we identify a new antecedent addressing expressive aspect of PWU, namely burnout. And perceived benefit is identified to be the antecedent addressing the instrumental nature of PWU in our model. The proposed model sheds new light on PWU research by proposing an important, yet not recognized previously, nature of PWU, and thus offering a framework to unify existing research and proposing directions for future research.

Keywords: Dual Nature, Personal Web Usage, Expressive, Instrumental.
1 Introduction

Various IT devices such as computers, tablets and smartphones as well as Internet have become ubiquitous in both workplace and personal life settings, which have brought great change to employees in both work and non-work fields. Meanwhile, with the increased availability of computers, tablets, smartphones and Internet at workplace, as well as the increased reliance of people’s daily life on these IT devices, employees in organizations may also find themselves increasingly using these facilities for personal purposes during work hours (Sunny & Sahara 2011). The term Personal Web Usage (PWU) is coined to refer to employees’ voluntary acts of engaging in personal activities that are not related to work tasks by using organizational IT devices and Internet resources during office hours (Anandarajan 2002). Examples of PWU include but not limited to surfing news sites, visiting online SNSs, instant messaging, online shopping, online chatting, online gaming, stock trading, etc. Evidences suggest that PWU is prevalent in organizations (Weatherbee 2010, Wagner et al. 2012). Human resource professionals estimated that employees spend about one hour engaging in personal activities using the Internet everyday (Lim & Chen 2012), while employees admitted to spending around two hours per day (Rajah & Lim 2011). An International Data Corporation (IDC) survey indicates that 30 to 40 per cent of on-the-job Internet use is non-business related (Spy. 2011). Due to the prevalence of PWU and its potential consequences to organizations, both scholars and practitioners are paying increasing attention to PWU.

Previous studies have examined PWU from different perspectives. On the one hand, some studies were conducted based on the assumption that PWU has negative impacts on organizations in terms of productivity, legal compliance, and information security (Henle et al. 2009; Wagner et al. 2012). On the other hand, other studies emphasize more on the positive impact of PWU in terms of improving creativity and learning ability of employees (Oravec 2002, Lim & Chen 2009, Coker 2011). In line with different opinions on the impact of PWU, different streams of antecedents of PWU have been identified by previous studies. For instance, studies holding the assumption of negative impact of PWU propose antecedents of PWU from the viewpoint that PWU is a deviant work behaviour, accordingly antecedents such as perceived injustice (Lim 2002), role ambiguity and role conflict (Henle & Blanchard 2008), work dissatisfaction (Mahatanankoon 2006) are proposed, in reference to the literature and theories from deviant work-behaviour fields (e.g., social exchange theory, justice theory). By contrast, studies highlighting the positive side of PWU suggest that employees engage in PWU due to various benefits, such as utility of Internet (Garrett & Dansiger 2008), convenience and work-life balance (D’Abate 2005, König & Guardia 2014).

It is our contention that both positive and negative effects are potential outcomes of PWU. Namely PWU might exert positive effect in some circumstances and it could also exert negative effects in other ones. Based on this dual nature of the impacts of PWU, PWU has a dual nature with respect to its antecedents as well. In specific, in line with the negative impact of PWU, PWU might be a deviant work behaviour engaged by employees to express their negative affections towards outside encounters, such as perceived injustice from organizations (Lim, 2002). In this case, PWU is mainly presented as a loafing or slacking behaviour, or even retaliating and sabotaging behaviour. By contrast, in line with the positive impact of PWU, employees might also utilize PWU as a means to pursue some utilities, such as taking a mental break or maintaining work and family balance. In this case, PWU is mainly presented as a strategic behaviour with certain utilities. In other words, PWU could be both a means for employees to express their negative affections in some circumstances, and an instrument for employees to pursue various utilities in other ones. Therefore, we propose that PWU has a dual nature with respect to antecedents, namely expressive nature and instrumental nature.

Recognizing the dual nature of PWU is important, because leaving unexplored any one of the two aspects might prohibit us from fully understanding why employees engage in PWU and how it affects
employees and organizations. Although previous studies have examined PWU from multiple angles (Lim 2002, Henle & Blanchard 2008, Liberman et al. 2011) and multiple antecedents of PWU have been identified, all of them address only one perspective of the two aforementioned each time, while none of them captures the dual nature of PWU. By considering only one side, scholars probably would find various antecedents of PWU, which is valuable on the one hand, but also gives rise to confusions for organizations to deal with PWU issues on the other hand. By examining both of the dual nature of the antecedents of PWU in a single model, it is possible to unify the previously multiple viewpoints on the antecedents of PWU under the dual framework (i.e., expressive aspect and instrumental aspect), and further to better understand the impacts of PWU and better formulate regulating policies in terms of PWU. Therefore, we propose and validate a dual-perspective model of PWU adopting dual perspective as opposed to single perspective.

Our study is expected to have implications for both research and practice. In terms of research, the dual nature of the antecedents of PWU that we articulated, namely expressive nature and instrumental nature, have not been recognized previously. The dual-perspective model that we proposed not only enhances our understanding on PWU, but also unifies different perspectives and opinions in existing research on PWU, and the dual nature of PWU we proposed is expected to direct the future research on this topic. In terms of practice, organizations can benefit from the findings of this research to understand PWU from a dual perspective, and thus, better formulate and implement their Internet policies in terms of employees’ PWU behaviour.

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows. In the next section, we review existing research addressing the antecedents of PWU in more detail, and further articulate the dual nature of PWU in terms of its impacts and antecedents. This is followed by a dual-perspective model of PWU that we proposed to validate the dual nature of PWU. In the forth section, we present our model measurement, data collection and data analysis. The result is presented in the fifth part. We finally conclude this paper by discussing its implication, limitation and potential avenues for future research.

2 The Dual Nature of PWU

In this section, we review the findings of existing literature addressing antecedents of PWU, and summarize different streams of antecedents that have been identified previously. However, as we suggested earlier, scholars identified different streams of antecedents of PWU (i.e., expressive aspect of antecedents and instrumental aspect of antecedents) because they have different viewpoints on the impact of PWU. Therefore, to better explain that the dual perspective of the antecedents of PWU roots from the dual viewpoint regarding to the impact of PWU, we first review the existing viewpoints on the impact of PWU. Based on this, we review antecedents-related research and further propose the expressive nature and instrumental nature of PWU in terms of its antecedents.

Previous research has adopted different terms to describe the phenomenon of employees’ usage of organizational IT resources to engage in personal activities that are not related to work tasks during work hours. In addition to the PWU term, examples of other terms include Non-Work Related Computing (NWRC) (Lee et al. 2005, Chou et al. 2008), Cyberloafing (Lim 2002, Lara et al. 2006, Henle & Blanchard 2008, Liberman et al. 2011, Coker 2011, Sawitri 2012), Cyberslacking (Block 2001, Mills et al. 2001, Ugrin, et al. 2007, Vitak et al. 2011), Junk Computing (Guthrie & Gray 1996), Personal Internet Use (Garrett & Danziger 2008), Internet Abuse (Chen et al. 2007), Workplace Internet Deviance (Pablo 2006), name a few. Although these terms are not exactly the same with regard to their definitions and connotations (Kim & Byrne 2011), we include all of them in our literature review given that they are all used to describe the similar phenomenon.
2.1 Duality of PWU With Regard To Its Impact

There has been a discussion about the impact of PWU on employees and organizations for a decade. In brief, there are two streams of viewpoints on the impacts of PWU. At the early stage of the literature, PWU is solely considered as an idling behaviour at work, which should be prohibited by organizations. For example, Block (2001) views PWU to be no difference from other traditional “goofing off” behaviours such as long time lunch. Lim et al. (2002) and Wagner et al. (2012) also consider PWU to be deviant but with its own characteristics, for example, PWU do not require employees to be physically absent from the office, thus it is not visible, and it is easier for employees to engage in PWU than other idling behaviours. Furthermore, engaging in certain types of PWU behaviours such as downloading pirated software might give rise to security and legal risk to organizations, in addition to productivity loss (Blanchard & Henle 2008). Consequently, studies in this stream are based on the position that PWU is a deviant behaviour at work, which negatively affects employees’ work performance and organizational interests (Lim 2002, Lim & Teo 2005, Prasad et al. 2010). These studies attempted to identify the antecedents of PWU in reference to the literature of counterproductive work behaviour (Lim 2002), as well as address how to control or deter employees’ PWU behaviour (Henle et al. 2009) or the effectiveness of these control mechanisms or deterrence policies (Ugrin et al. 2008, Bock et al. 2010).

By contrast, other studies are standing on position of the positive effect of PWU. For instance, Oravec (2002) highlights that constructive use of online recreation can enhance many workplaces and perhaps ultimately make them more productive, in particular, engaging in activities such as online leisure can allow employees to re-establish a sense of control, which is deemed as a key contributor to both mental and physical well-being (Abeles 1991, p297). Similarly, Coker (2011) also documents the positive effects of Workplace Internet Leisure Browsing (WILB) on employee productivity, in particular, engaging in WILB enables restoration of mental capacity and fosters feelings of autonomy. In their recent empirical research, Rajah and Lim (2011) found that there is a positive relationship between employees’ non-work related Email use and their organizational citizenship behaviours, which is an important indicator of employees’ work commitment. Messarra et al. (2001) found a positive relationship between employees’ freedom to Internet access and their work satisfaction. Accordingly, in this stream, scholars examined the antecedents of PWU from the angle of positive outcomes of using Internet (Garrett & Dansiger 2008, Li et al. 2010), as well as how to develop constructive policies with regard to PWU and the effectiveness of these constructive policies (Wong et al. 2005).

In summary, both positive and negative outcomes of PWU are highlighted by previous studies, and the subsequent studies addressing antecedents and regulating issues of PWU follow both of these two streams. Therefore, we propose PWU has a dual nature with regard to its impact on employees and organizations, namely PWU might exert positive effect in some circumstances and it could also exert negative effects in other ones. This proposition is in line with Anandarajan & Simmers (2005), whose qualitative research suggests that PWU in the workplace is a complex issue, with the potential for both dysfunctional and constructive outcomes. As a result of the dual opinions on the impact of PWU, two streams of cognitive antecedents of PWU have been identified by previous studies, which is discussed in the following section in more detail.

2.2 Duality of PWU With Regard To Its Antecedent

The seminal study to theoretically examine the antecedents of PWU is conducted by Lim (2002), in which PWU is considered as a deviant behaviour due to waste of time and loss of productivity. Building upon the theories from counterproductive work behaviour, specifically social exchange theory, justice theory and neutralization technique, Lim (2002) found that employees are more likely to legitimize their PWU behaviour by invoking the neutralization technique (i.e., the metaphor of the
ledger) when they perceive injustice from organizations. Based on those findings, Zoghbi conducted multiple studies to examine the relationship between organizational justice and PWU. Specifically, the results suggest that fear of punishment fully mediates the link between interactional justice and PWU (Zoghbi 2006), while normative conflict fully mediates the relationship between procedural justice and PWU (Zoghbi 2008). In addition, Zoghbi further empirically show that work “Anomia” (Zoghbi 2007) and self-control (Zoghbi 2011) serve as a moderator to the relationship between organizational justice and PWU. Besides organizational justice, some studies show that work stressors also lead to PWU. In specific, based on role theory, Henle & Blanchard (2008) found that employees’ perception of role ambiguity and role conflict are positively associated to their PWU behaviour while role overload perception is negatively related to PWU. RuningSawitri (2012) provided the same result in terms of the relationship between role ambiguity, role conflict and PWU, and according to their study, the relationship between role overload and PWU is moderated by Internet experience.

Despite that organizational justice and work stressors are different antecedents of PWU that are identified from different perspectives, these two types of antecedent research have one point in common, which is, in both cases PWU is considered as a deviant behaviour and PWU is considered as a tool to cope with negative affections toward organizations (i.e., perceptions of injustice or role problems). In other words, engaging in PWU per se is not the purpose of employees; PWU is just a means for employees to express their negative affections towards some encounters. In specific, we argue that there are two mechanisms through which negative affection is related to PWU, coping mechanism and retaliating mechanism. Coping mechanism means that employees might engage in PWU as an escaping cope of negative encounters. As Griffiths (2010) suggested that online behaviour could provide a potent escape from the stresses and strains of real life. Retaliating mechanism means that employees engaging in PWU to retaliate the organizations or supervisors due to the perceived injustice or other negative encounters (e.g., work dissatisfaction, role conflict, etc.).

Beyond the expressive perspective, by contrast, another stream of studies concerning the antecedents of PWU argue that other perspectives should also be examined. In this stream, Garrett & Dansiger (2008) validated that expected outcomes of Internet use (e.g., perceived utility of Internet) are the main incentive for employees to engage in PWU. Garrett & Dansiger (2008) further contend that negative affections toward the workplace might have powerful influence on most extreme forms of deviant Internet behaviours such as the theft or destruction of proprietary data and software, but has only a limited role in accounting for more extensive personal Internet use during work. The finding of Garrett & Dansiger (2008) is consistent with the study of D’Abate (2005), which examined the issue of employees engaging in personal business during work. By collecting qualitative data, D’Abate (2005) found that engaging in personal business on the job could give rise to various benefits such as convenience, work-life balance, making boring job interesting. In a similar vein, Li et al. (2010) found that perceived benefit of engaging in PWU significantly contribute employees’ PWU behaviours.

To summarize, previous studies have explored the antecedents of PWU from two perspectives, namely expressive perspective and instrumental perspective. In line with the dual nature with respect to the impact of PWU, we argue that both expressive nature and instrumental nature are important aspects of PWU nature with respect to its antecedents.

Taken together, the previous research on antecedents of PWU suggests that both negative affections and positive utilities might lead to employees’ PWU behaviour. Therefore, we argue that PWU has a dual nature with respect to its antecedents, namely expressive nature and instrumental nature. In specific, employees might engage in PWU as an expression of their negative affections in some cases, and they might engage in PWU to pursue some positive utilities in other ones. Both expressive nature and instrumental nature are important aspects of PWU nature. To validate the dual nature of PWU regarding to its antecedents, we propose a dual-perspective model of PWU. While keeping the factors that have been validated by previous studies in our model as control variables, we also propose new expressive factors in our study, which will be discussed in details in the following section.
3 An Dual-Perspective Model of PWU

3.1 Expressive Factor of PWU: Burnout

As analyzed in the previous section, employees might engage in PWU as an expression of their negative affections toward their jobs or organizations. As an expressive means, researchers have identified multiple antecedents of PWU such as organizational injustice (Pablo, 2007; Restubog et al., 2011), work stressors (role conflict and role ambiguity) (Henle & Blanchard, 2008), job dissatisfaction (Mahatanankoon, 2006), etc. Drawing from the literature of occupational stress literature, we propose that burnout is an important indicator of employees’ negative affection toward work. As Peeters & Rutte (2005) pointed out that “it is almost impossible to imagine stress research without the concept of burnout”. Burnout is defined as “a syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and reduced personal accomplishment” (Maslach & Jackson 1986).

According to Maslach & Jackson (1986) and Maslach (1993), burnout consists of three separate dimensions, which have been widely discussed in the related literature: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment. Emotional exhaustion refers to feeling emotionally overextended and depleted of one's emotional resources. Depersonalization refers to a negative, cynical, or detached reaction to other people, usually the clients or colleagues one has worked with. Reduced personal accomplishment refers to diminished feelings of personal competence during the performance of the work accomplished by reduced achievement in one's work (Peeters & Rutte, 2005).

Based on the concept of burnout and its importance in job stress literature and employees’ negative affection field, we argue that when employees suffer job burnout, they are more likely to have negative affections towards work and organizations, and thus, are more likely to express their negative affections toward work or escape from work by engaging in PWU, which is an ideal means for them to virtually loaf or idle around. As Griffiths (2010) suggested, online behaviour could provide a potent escape from the stresses and strains of real life. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed.

H1. Employees’ burnout in job is positively associated with their PWU behaviours.

Burnout, as a negative affection of employees, is an end stage of a chain of reactions. This chain starts with a misbalance between one's capacities and one's work demands, which in turn can be the cause of burnout (Peeters & Rutte 2005). Karasek (1979) proposed the Job Demand-Control (JDC) model, which identifies two crucial job aspects in the work situation: job demands and job control. The main proposition of JDC is that adverse job conditions may lead to the low level of psychological and physical well-being and health (Sanne et al., 2005). In specific, employees working in a high-strain job (high demands-low control) experience the lowest well-being (Van der Doef & Maes, 1999). JDC has been validated by previous studies, which found that job demands are positively related to some negative outcomes such as employees’ anxiety, depression and burnout, whereas job control is negatively related to the negative outcomes above (Sanne et al., 2005). Based on the main proposition and previous empirical findings of JDC, as well as the literature on burnout research, we propose the following hypotheses.

H2. Employees’ perception of job demands is positively associated with their perception of burnout in job.

H3. Employees’ perception of job control is negatively associated with their perception of burnout in job.
3.2 Instrumental Factors of PWU

In addition to serving as an expressive means of negative affections, PWU might also be engaged by employees to pursue some positive utilities. Previously identified antecedents that are related to the instrumental nature of PWU include expected work utility of Internet (Garrett & Danziger 2008), perceived benefit (Li et al. 2010) such as convenience, work-life balance (D’Abate, 2005), private demanding (König & Guardia 2014).

In a qualitative study addressing employees engaging in personal activities on the job, D’Abate (2005) suggests that engaging in personal activities at work is a widespread pattern of behaviour, and the reasons for employees engaging personal activities at work include convenience, time constraint, boredom of work, on one’s mind, etc. In spite that D’Abate (2005) examined employees engaging in personal activities in general rather than specifying attention on PWU, this study still have significant implications to the research on PWU, given that IT facilities and Internet have pervaded into every aspect of employees’ daily life and have played increasingly important role in both work and non-work fields. In a similar vein, Li et al (2010) examined employees’ compliance of organizational Internet policy under the framework of Rational Choice Theory (Paternoster & Simpson 1996), and found that perceived benefit of PWU, including time saving, money saving, convenience and interesting work life, contribute significantly on their intention to violate Internet use policy. And these findings are consistent with the findings from Pee et al. (2008), which indicate that perceived consequence (including both perceived positive consequence and perceived negative consequence) is a significantly important factor to contribute employees’ intention to engage in PWU.

In line with these findings of the previous studies, we argue that perceived benefit is an important impetus for employees to engage in PWU. For the sake of parsimony of our research model, we take perceived benefit as a formative construct, and we propose the dimensions of this construct by combining the findings of Li et al (2010) and the findings of D’Abate (2005). In specific, we define the perceived benefit in the PWU context with respect to time saving, money saving, convenience, interesting work life, and respite. Therefore, we propose the following hypothesis.

H4. Employees’ perceived benefit of engaging in PWU is positively associated with their PWU behaviors.

3.3 Self-Regulation and External Regulation

Previous research suggests that regulation (i.e., both self-regulation and external regulation) plays an important role in employees’ PWU behavior.

Multiple previous studies have highlighted the importance of self-regulation in PWU context. For instance, Ugrin et al. (2008) found that employees with lower level of self-control are more likely to overlook the potential consequence of PWU, and are more likely to engage in PWU for slacking. Wagner et al. (2012) argue that PWU can be viewed as a workplace temptation that requires employees to exercise self-control and conscientiousness in order to stay on task, and self-regulation (i.e., self-control and conscientiousness) was empirically found to be a moderator between lost sleep and PWU behaviour. Furthermore, as we discussed earlier, Zoghbi (2011) found that self-control moderate the relationship between perceived injustice and PWU.

Self-control is the ability of an individual to control his emotions, behaviours and desires in order to obtain some reward or avoid some punishment. Conscientiousness is the ability to be organized and be responsible (Barrick & Mount, 1991). Both self-control and conscientiousness are about an individual’s ability or willingness to perform or not perform an action, thus we term these two factors as self-regulation. Individuals exercise self-regulation when they confront the conflict between temptations with short-term benefit and their long-term goals. Therefore, self-regulation (i.e., self-
control and conscientiousness) is supposed to be invoked when people engage in deviant behaviour or engage in behaviour that is not in line with their long-term goal. In the context of PWU, we argue that self-regulation is involved when employees engage in PWU due to expressive factors. The reason is that in the case of expressive factors, PWU itself does not help the actors of PWU to solve the problems that they are confronting, instead PWU is just a means to avoid or escape of these problems or encounters for a while, and thus PWU is inconsistent to the long-term goal as well as organization’s expectation, therefore the personal characteristics like self-control or conscientiousness would be provoked in this sense.

**H5 Self-regulation moderates the relationship between employees’ burnout in job and PWU behaviour.**

As for external regulation, the impact of related policies on employees’ PWU behaviours have been widely discussed as well. For example, Shepherd & Klein (2012) found that employees’ PWU behaviour would lessen after a non-intrusive reminder of the Internet use policy. In addition, Henle et al (2009) found that employees are less likely to engage in PWU if the Internet usage policy includes periodic monitoring. Ugrin et al. (2008) found that security detection mechanisms and awareness of enforcement have significant deterrence on employees’ intentions to PWU. However, Johnson & Ugray (2007) found that that adoption of acceptable Internet use policy alone to combat unproductive use of computer and Internet is ineffective. This result is consistent with Zoghbi & Olivares (2010), which suggests that only interacting together with punishment is monitoring mechanism able to deter employees from PWU behavior. In addition, there is interaction between self-regulation and external regulation in regulating employees’ PWU behavior. Specifically, Ugrin et al. (2008) found that security detection mechanisms (external regulation) have lower level effect on employees with greater self-control. Given the inconsistency of the effectiveness of Internet usage policy on employees’ PWU behavior, and particular given that the term Internet usage policy do not necessarily include punishment that is important to the effectiveness of the policy of interest, we take external regulation (i.e., Internet usage policy or monitoring mechanisms) as a control variable. We also include some other factors that have been proposed and validated previously into our model as control variables, such as perceived in justice, work dissatisfaction, role ambiguity & role conflict, habit.

Taken together, by recognizing the dual nature of PWU and reviewing previously identified antecedents of PWU, we propose two types of cognitive antecedents of PWU, namely expressive factors and instrumental factors, as well as an unconscious factor that is habit. The three types of antecedents as well as their interactions with two types of moderators that we articulated above, formulate the proposed Integrative Model of PWU, which is represented as Figure 1.

![Figure 1. The Dual-Perspective Model of PWU](image-url)
References


