

# **Employees' workplace cyberloafing: based on the perspective of *guanxi***

*Research-in-Progress*

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## **Abstract**

*Cyberloafing is the biggest time waster in organization, 69 percent of respondents admitted waste time on non-work related activities each day. This number might be higher in China for a larger population of cyber citizens. Previous Studies have investigated the antecedents from various perspectives, such as organization justice, deterrence and work stressor. No one addressed cyberloafing from the perspective of *guanxi*, even though the strength of *guanxi* directly determines the appropriate behavior of employees, and employees are grounded by such behavioral norms. To fill this gap, we proposed a research model from the perspective of *guanxi* theory to understand employees' cyberloafing behavior.*

**Keywords:** Cyberloafing, *Guanxi* theory, Monitoring, Confucianism

## **Introduction**

Cyberloafing (i.e. non-work-related computing, cyberslacking, workplace internet leisure browsing) has been identified as the use of the Internet and mobile artifacts during work hours for personal purposes, it is a form of workplace deviant behavior (Lim 2002; Lim and Teo 2005; Ugrin and Pearson 2013; Vitak et al. 2011). According to salary.com (2013), 69 percent of respondents admitted that they spending time on non-work-related activities each day, and cyberloafing is the biggest time-waster, comparing to other distraction in the workplace. Cyberloafing is a counterproductive behavior, which may result in a productivity loss of 200.6 million hours per week (Chen and Lim, 2009), 54 billion dollars per year (Young 2010). These numbers may be higher in China since there is a larger population of cyber citizen. The 42nd China statistical report on internet development reported that, due to June 30, 2018, the number of cyber citizens in China reached 802 million, the number of mobile internet users in China is 788 million, and instant messenger is the biggest time consumer of Chinese cyber citizen, which has been recognized as a tool for facilitating personal social networks in the workplace (Ou and Davison 2016).

Due to the prevalence and potentially destructive power cyberloafing have (Koay and Soh 2018), researchers have recognized the importance to identify the antecedents of cyberloafing, to understand the motivation of employee's cyberloafing behavior. Previous Studies have investigated the antecedents of cyberloafing from various perspectives, such as organization justice, deterrence, work stressor and so on (Henle and Blanchard 2008; Lim 2002; Ugrin and Pearson 2013). However, no one addressed cyberloafing from the perspective of social relationship to understand employee's cyberloafing behavior in the organization. Based on the norm of reciprocity, it makes sense to address it from a relationship perspective, as employees' behavior in an organization is a response to the behavior of others (Lim 2002).

The similar concept of social relationship in Chinese culture is *guanxi* (Hammond and Glenn 2004), which has long been recognized as one of the most significant and crucial culture features (Hwang 1987). But the concept differs in that relationship can be positive or negative, while *guanxi* can be

only strong or weak, and it works more like a personal connection, motivated by cultural force like Confucianism (Fock and Woo 1998). *Guanxi* is root in Chinese history and culture (Wei et al. 2010), contains social norms like mutual trust, loyalty, and obligation. The strength of *guanxi* determines the appropriate behavior and treatment to others. And Chinese people are always participating in social activities to establish, maintain and enhance *guanxi*. Previous research already shows that social bonds like *guanxi* have a direct impact on employees' workplace deviant behavior (Cheng et al. 2013; Zhai et al. 2013). Building on this line of argument, it is reasonable for us to identify the antecedents of employees' cyberloafing behavior from the perspective of *guanxi*, to examine *what is the relationship between different types of guanxi and cyberloafing intention?*

## Literature Review

As shown in table 1, the perspectives researchers chosen differ greatly, they employed all kinds of theory and strategies from other fields to help the understanding of cyberloafing behavior. Like Lim (2002) consider it from organization justice, when individuals perceived that there is unjust in the organization, they were more likely to engage in cyberloafing behavior, and they might invoke neutralization technique to legitimize their behavior. Henle and Blanchard (2008) consider work stressor as the main trigger of cyberloafing when employees perceived role ambiguity or role conflict, they will engage in cyberloafing behavior. Some studies have emphasized the importance of individual characteristics. Like Prasad et al. (2010) conceptualized cyberloafing behavior as a failure of self-regulate, and consider the moderator effects of individual characteristic like self-efficacy, conscientiousness and achievement orientation. Lim and Chen (2012) examined gender differences in employees' perception of cyberloafing. Wang et al. (2013) investigated the moderator effect of self-esteem. Khansa et al. (2017) propose that employees cyberloafing mechanism may change, due to organizational factors like the announcement of formal organizational controls.

Perspective	Antecedents of Cyberloafing	Reference
Organization justice	Distributive justice; Procedural justice; Interactional justice; Metaphor of ledger.	(Lim, 2002)
Theory of planned behavior	Perceived importance of ethical issue; Anonymity; Punishment level; Workplace privacy; Attitude towards Ethical Behavior; Personal Normative Beliefs.	(Dong Zhang et al., 2006)
Work stressor; organization sanction	Role ambiguity; Role conflict; Role overload; Sanctions.	(Henle and Blanchard 2008)
Workplace norms; external control	Perception of coworker and supervisor norms; employee's belief in powerful others; employee's belief in chance.	(Blanchard and Henle 2008)
Self-regulation, individual characteristics	Self-regulation; self-efficacy; conscientiousness and achievement orientation.	(Prasad et al. 2010)
Self-determination theory	The frequency of cyberloafing; The duration of cyberloafing.	(Coker 2011)
Demographic and work specific predictors	Demographic; Job dissatisfaction; Work utility; Perception of control at work; Routinized internet use; Job characteristics (Creativity or Repeatedly).	(Vitak et al. 2011)
Deterrence	Sanction; Detection; Enforcement; Perceived abusiveness.	(Ugrin and Pearson 2013)
Monitoring; self-esteem; job satisfaction	Perceived internet use policy; Perceived electronic monitoring; Self-esteem; job satisfaction.	(Wang et al. 2013)
Social learning theory	Neutralization; perceived risk; past Cyberloafing; peer cyberloafing	(Khansa et al. 2017)
Rational choice theory	Self-control, procedural justice, perceived deterrence, perceived benefits.	(Li et al. 2018)

At the meantime, a few scholars have demonstrated the effectiveness of social factors and subjective norms. Blanchard and Henle (2008) implemented research to clear out the relationship between

subjective norm and cyberloafing behavior, proved that employees' perception of their coworkers' and supervisor's norms are positively related to cyberloafing. Dong Zhang et al. (2006) applies the theory of planned behavior to investigate cyberloafing, and they found out that normative belief is significant in predicting cyberloafing intention. Ugrin and Pearson (2013) stated that cyberloafing activities like social networking are hard to deter.

Since then, we argue that social norms like *guanxi* might be a good perspective to explain these hard deterred social orientated cyberloafing behaviors. To our best knowledge, none of the work we reviewed has investigated it from the perspective of *guanxi*. And with the developing of the internet, the boundary between work and non-work is less distinct, personal activities into the work domain are common (Lim and Teo, 2005). Therefore, it has the potential to clarify the relationship between different types of *guanxi* and employees' cyberloafing behavior in an organization. Since human behavior is embedded in a network of *guanxi* (Hwang, 1987). These special cultural symbols (*guanxi*) shaped people's normative belief and has a very far-reaching influence on Chinese's behavior (Chen et al., 2004; Hwang, 1987; Luo et al., 2012; Park and Luo, 2001; Wei et al., 2010). Further, given the important role monitoring played in the researches of cyberloafing, we consider monitoring as a moderator in our model.

## Theoretical Background and Hypothesis Development

### *Guanxi* in the workplace

*Guanxi* is a complex social construct, which has its own logic and forms and constitutes the social structure of Chinese society, which originated from Confucianism (King 1991). It describes informal ties between individuals, involving shared social experiences, mutual obligations, reciprocity and trust (Luo et al., 2012; Wei et al., 2010). It is being regarded as underpinning the order and hierarchy of ancient Chinese society, still have major influences nowadays (Hwang, 1987; Law et al., 2000; Wei et al., 2010), has a significant influence on personal behaviors (Park and Luo, 2001). A lot of scholars interested in the category of different *guanxi*. For example, King (1991) traced the historical and cultural root of *guanxi*, concluded that it originated from the ancient Chinese philosophy Confucianism, and there are five different cardinal relationships (*wu lun*) been defined in Confucian ethics: ruler-subject, father-son, husband-wife, elder brother-younger brother, and between friends. Tsui and Farh (1997) divide *guanxi* into three sub-classes, family ties, familiar persons, and strangers. Hwang (1987) classify three sorts of interpersonal relationships, the expressive tie, the instrumental tie, and the mixed tie. Fan (2002) thinks if we defined *guanxi* by its social base, it would be locality (from the same town or province), classmate or alumni, teacher-student, co-worker (colleague or superior-subordinate), neighbor, and in the same profession.

After a detailed review of *guanxi* related literature, and given the Chinese organization context of this study, we adapted workplace *guanxi* and family *guanxi* in this research. For workplace *guanxi*, it can be separated into vertical (supervisor-subordinate *guanxi*) and horizontal (colleague *guanxi*) relationship (Chen and Chen, 2004; Chou et al., 2006; Hong et al., 2013). And existing literature already show that they have an impact on individuals behavioral and organization outcomes (Chen et al. 2004). For family *guanxi*, it is being recognized as the fundament of Chinese society. And with the development of the internet, the boundary between work and non-work is less distinct, it is common for employees to engage in personal activities in the workplace (Lim and Teo, 2005).

### Supervisor-subordinate *guanxi*

Supervisor-subordinate *guanxi* is seen as the corresponding to the "ruler-subject *guanxi*" in ancient Chinese society (Wei et al. 2010). It is defined as a personal relationship between supervisor and subordinate, developed from social interactions both inside and outside working hours (Cheung et al. 2009). The effect of "supervisor-subordinate" *guanxi* has attracted a lot of attention in organization behavior literature. Researches on supervisor-subordinate *guanxi* already proved that it has a predicted power on employees' behavior and intention. For example, Cheung et al. (2009) found it is associated with employees work outcome. Wei et al. (2010) proved that it is related to employees' career

prospects. Farh et al. (1998) indicated that supervisor-subordinated *guanxi* influences employees trust and work performance. Scholars also found that it can influence the supervisor's administrative decisions, for employees who have a good relationship with their supervisor, they tend to stand on their supervisor's side when there are conflicting opinions, and more likely to comply with supervisors' command and request (Chen and Tjosvold, 2006; Law et al., 2000; Tsui and Farh, 1997).

Based on this line of argument, we think that, when the supervisor-subordinate *guanxi* is strong, employees are more likely to reinforce *guanxi*, to comply with what supervisor ask and wish. They do not want to do things like cyberloafing that may damage this relationship, sabotaging their future career development. Since then, we hypothesize:

*H1: Supervisor-subordinate guanxi is negatively associated with cyberloafing intention.*

### **Colleague *guanxi***

In an organization, another important *guanxi* is between the colleagues, it describes a horizontal colleague relationship (Hong et al. 2013). This kind of relationship includes both affective and instrumental ties (Chen et al. 2013; Chen and Peng 2008; Hwang 1987). Previous studies indicated that it plays an important role in work teams, has a significant effect on team members' behavior (Chou et al. 2006). Hong et al (2013) empirically proved that colleague *guanxi* is a combination of an instrumental and expressive tie, and stated that *guanxi* prompts the forming of affective trust. Jiang and Hu (2016) signify the function of the norm of reciprocity in the process of knowledge sharing when employees have a good relationship with each other, they are more likely to share information, to talk with each other, to maintain and prove relationships. It contributes to their life satisfaction, but also might damage the productivity of an organization if they spend too much time chatting and information sharing.

Along with the above argument, we conclude that when colleague tie is strong, there will be more affective trust, they have to help each disregard with public or personal fair based on the norm of reciprocity. And when this tie is stronger enough, private affairs may even override public ones. They might spend a lot of working hours on each other's personal fairs, like chatting, sharing and other non-work related events. Hence, we argue that:

*H2: Colleague guanxi is positively associated with cyberloafing intention.*

### **Family *guanxi***

Outside the organization, family *guanxi* is the most important tie to an individual, it is the core of one's interpersonal relations (Fan 2002; Hwang 1987). The existing study already confirmed that staff's personal life will affect their workplace behavior and work performance (Ren and Chen 2018). The social exchange of family *guanxi* is based on the rule of need. Every family member should do their best to help others, they wouldn't expect to be repaid, and commitment to family overrides all other loyalties (Chow and Ng 2004). Fan (2002) concluded that family *guanxi* is stronger, stable and last longer than other types.

Family members are hard to refuse relatives ask, and a refusal to assist relatives might be perceived as a type of 'ruthlessness'. Sometimes, they could even behave unethically to preserve group solidarity (Wright et al. 2002). Thus, it is reasonable to assume that the stronger a family *guanxi* tie, employees are harder to refuse relatives non-work related event. They will have to process a lot of non work related events, in order to reinforce their family *guanxi*.

*H3: Family guanxi is positively associated with cyberloafing intention.*

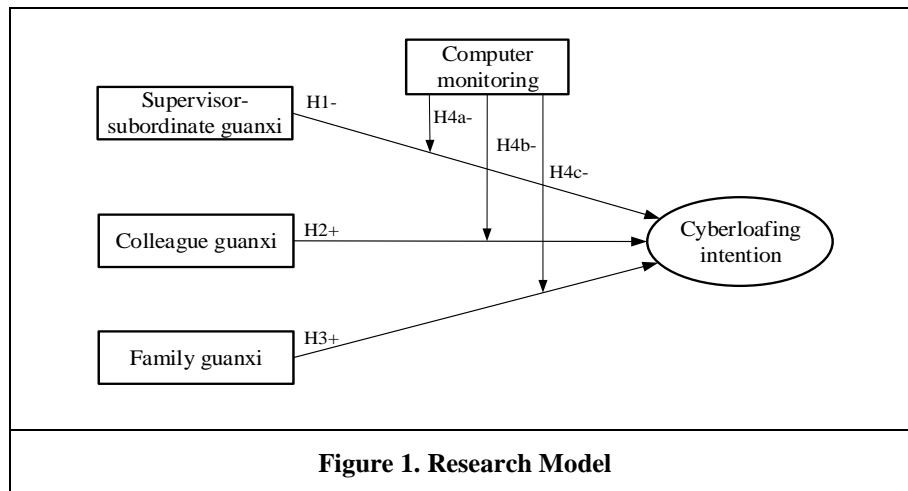
### **Computer monitoring**

Computer monitoring is one of the most important and effective strategies to reduce employee's cyberloafing and other deviance behavior (Glassman et al. 2015; Straub 1990; Ugrin and Pearson 2013; Zoghbi-Manrique-de-Lara 2011). It includes strategy like tracking employees' internet use, recording network activities, and performing security audits, it is an active measure that enables

organization's ability to detect and deter incidents that may cause by cyberloafing (D'Arcy et al. 2009; Dupré and Barling 2006; Glassman et al. 2015). It is also one of the most widely deployed policy in the industry (Posey et al. 2011). Since though, considering its importance on curbing employees' cyberloafing intention, we use computer monitoring as the moderator effect. It interacts with different types of *guanxi*, decrease employees' cyberloafing intention. That is, when there is computer monitoring, employees cyberloafing intention will be lower. Thus, we hypothesize that:

*H4: Computer monitoring moderates the relationship between a) supervisor-subordinate guanxi, b) colleague guanxi, c) family guanxi and cyberloafing intention, such that relationships are weaker, respectively for high-level monitoring than the low level.*

Figure 1 depicts the research model:



## Methodology

To test the relationships implied by our research model, we will use an online survey instrument for data collection. All items are adopted from well-established scales in prior literature and will be refined to fit our study context better. Our targeting respondents will be employed individuals who have internet access at the workplace and are internet savvy. To measure the constructs in our research model, we adapt previously-validated measurement scales to fit the context of this study. The items of supervisor-subordinate *guanxi*, colleague *guanxi* are adapted from Hong et al. (2013), Jiang and Hu (2016), Law et al. (2000). Family *guanxi* is using items from well-developed scale FACESII-CV. Monitoring and cyberloafing intention are adapted from D'Arcy et al. (2009), Pee et al. (2008), respectively.

## Expected contribution

This study is expected to empirically explain why cyberloafing continues to be a pervasive problem by shedding light on *guanxi* theory. Previous research has explored this problem from various perspectives, like organization justice, rational choice, deterrence theory and so on. But no one considers cyberloafing from the lens of social relationship (*guanxi*) yet, even though the strength of *guanxi* determines the appropriate behaviors and treatment to others (Hwang, 1987). The result of this study is also expected to rich the motivation research on cyberloafing. we also introduce monitoring as a possible moderator to provide a more comprehensive understanding of this research.

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