

# **AGE AND GENDER DIFFERENCES IN EMPLOYEE CYBERLOAFING BEHAVIOR**

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## **Abstract**

Cyberloafing at the workplace, a form of deviant behavior, refers to the use of organization's Internet access by employees during work for non-work purposes. Recently, researchers have an increased interest in cyberloafing on the job among employees as they realize the negative outcomes of this behavior. This study examined whether there were differences in cyberloafing among younger and older employees as well as males and females. Using survey questionnaires, data were gathered from 260 Malaysian employees from a public sector organization. We found that irrespective of age, males engaged in cyberloafing more than females. Implications for organizations and research are presented.

Keywords: cyberloafing, gender, age, Malaysia

## **Introduction**

As a form of deviant behavior, cyberloafing on the job is considered as counterproductive since engagement in cyberloafing activities lead to performance (Lim & Chen, 2012) effectiveness and efficiency (Jia, Jia, & Karau, 2013), as well as reduced workplace involvement (Lieberman et al., 2011). Based on Robinson and Bennett's (1995) typology of deviant workplace behavior, cyberloafing is a form of production deviance and it can be minor (eg., checking one's personal email, visiting mainstream news) and serious (eg., downloading music illegally, online gambling) deviance (Blanchard & Henle, 2008). Besides its negative consequences, cyberloafing can help reduce stress (Anandarajan & Simmers, 2005) and monotony at work (Anandarajan & Simmers, 2005). Employees cyberloaf for self-development and career advancement, too (Anandarajan,

Paravastu, Caiib, & Simmers, 2006). Cyberloafing can serve as a temporary relief for job demands (Anandarajan & Simmers, 2005). Despite this, cyberloafing behavior has been a research area of focus due to its negative consequences. This study examined whether there are differences in cyberloafing among younger and older employees as well as males and females.

### ***Age differences in cyberloafing***

Previous studies have shown that younger employees tend to engage in cyberloafing more than older employees (Jia, Jia, & Karau, 2013, Vitak et al., 2011), and use the internet on the job for personal purposes (Everton, Mastrangelo, & Jolton, 2005). When using the Internet, older employees are more likely to comply with the expected organizational norms (Morris & Venkatesh, 2000), while younger employees are more likely to violate the norms (Zhang, 2005). However, Restubog et al. (2011) found that older workers cyberloaf more than younger workers and Ozler and Polat (2012) found no significant difference in cyberloafing behavior according to age. Although the difference in age has been more empirically supported by researchers, there is still a need to further examine since the findings on this difference is inconclusive.

### ***Gender differences in cyberloafing***

Researchers focusing on internet usage behaviors including cyberloafing have considered gender as an important factor. Gender has been found to be significantly related to cyberloafing behavior whereby male employees tend to loaf more than female employees (Lim & Chen, 2012; Jia, Jia, & Karau, 2013; Vitak et al., 2011). Additionally, males tend to use the Internet on the job for personal purposes (Everton, Mastrangelo, & Jolton, 2005) and therefore tend to experience greater Internet abuse risk (Stavropoulos, Alexandraki, & Motti-Stefanidi, 2013). In a study among younger Malaysians employees as consumers, males tend to use the internet for e-commerce activities more than females (Dileep, Normala, Govindarajo, & Othman, 2014). Although previous literature seems to support the notion that gender difference exists in cyberloafing among employees, and considering the scarcity of studies on cyberloafing especially in Malaysia, there is still a need to examine this behavior with respect to gender among Malaysian employees.

## **Method**

The sample consisted of 260 Malaysian employees from a public sector organization. Data were gathered using questionnaires in both the English and Malay languages. The questions were translated to the Malay language and then back translated to English.

Cyberloafing was assessed using nine items modified from two cyberloafing scales developed by Blanchard and Henle (2008), and Lim (2002). A seven-point response options ranging from 1 (never) to 7 (very often) were used.

We determine the scale reliability by calculating the Cronbach alpha coefficient, and a coefficient of .964 obtained was acceptable based on the rule of thumb (.7) suggested by Nunally (1978). For each scale item, the mean and standard deviation were computed. We conducted independent sample t-test to examine the differences in cyberloafing behavior according to age and gender.

### Results and Discussion

Demographic information revealed that the respondents had a mean age of 33.63 years ( $SD = 8.41$ ), with 58.8% females and 41.2% males. There were 47.7% administrative officers and 52.3% clerical and other support staff. Among the respondents, 68.8% had diploma and bachelor's degrees or higher.

Table 1. Differences in cyberloafing by age and gender

	Variable	N	Mean	S.D	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Age	30 and below	130	3.82	1.749	.982	.327
	31 and above	130	3.59	1.938		
Gender	Male	107	4.20	1.943	3.721	.000
	Female	153	3.36	1.696		

Overall, the extent of cyberloafing was moderate ( $M = 3.71$ ,  $SD = 1.846$ ). The engagement in cyberloafing was significantly greater among male than female employees ( $t = 3.721$ ,  $p < .001$ ) (Table 1). The difference according to age group was not significant.

The non-significant results on the difference in cyberloafing according to age group could be explained by the possibility that the older employees in this present study are also computer savvy

and tend to perceive technology as useful for work as well as personal use, and hence engage in cyberloafing like their younger counterparts. This is contrary to earlier findings by Phillips and Reddie (2007). Although past researchers have associated skills in IT as the reason for Internet abuse among the younger age group (Stavropoulos, Alexandraki, & Motti-Stefanidi, 2013), this may not be so based on the findings of our study whereby despite the greater engagement in cyberloafing among the younger as compared to the older employees, the difference is not significant. The belief that the older age group lag behind in IT skills, as a reason to engage less in cyberloafing, may not hold true among employees in this study.

The significant difference by gender could be explained by the difference in technological abilities and attitude towards Internet usage. Previous research has shown significant gender differences in individuals' attitudes toward technological abilities (Hargittai & Shafer, 2006). Men are relatively more confident in the use of Internet than women, and they tend to cyberloaf for leisure purposes and entertainment (Jackson, Ervin, Gardner, & Schmitt, 2001). On the contrary, women, having less positive attitudes towards Internet use, are less likely to use the Internet (Broos, 2005; Hargittai & Shafer, 2006).

### **Conclusion**

It can be concluded that irrespective of age, males engage in cyberloafing more than females. Employee engagement in cyberloafing has significant implications for employers since this behavior has increasingly become a pervasive problem. The findings imply the need for organizations to formulate prevention–intervention policies on the use of Internet to curb this problem at the workplace. As for researchers, when examining outcomes of cyberloafing, they may need to consider gender as a likely moderating variable or as a control variable.

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