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A VIRTUAL ESCAPE: A SYNTHETIC OVERVIEW OF THE LITERATURE CONCERNING THE PHENOMENON OF CYBERLOAFING

Living in the contemporary world has to deal with the necessity to adjust to technological requirements as well as constant development of one's capabilities in operating digital devices. Such a situation puts pressure on various parts of life; new phenomena have emerged to neutralize it, the aspects of which can be observed in a human being's psycho-sociological disposition within the internet domain. One of such phenomena is cyberloafing, which can be defined as devoting time reserved for work or study to unrelated activities within the cyberspace. Behaviors such as cyberloafing are complex activities, which can be differently categorized, their occurrence predicted based on many determining factors. The phenomenon is even more worthy of attention as technological development is rendering internet access ubiquitous, also encompassing the work and study environments. Cyberspace, besides simplifying the process of studying or carrying out one's duties at work, offers a wide range of activities which average users will devote their time to, thus making it irreversibly go to waste. The aim of this paper is to present a complex and synthetic overview of the latest psychological research concerning cyberloafing, not only explaining its origins, but also its consequences in the realm of productivity and daily living. Cyberloafing is increasingly considered as one of the major workplace dysfunctions, therefore a thorough study of this phenomenon appears to be the best starting point towards a remedy for its persistence.

Keywords: cyberloafing, internet psychology, work and organizational psychology, social psychology

The impact the internet has on our daily functioning grows in intensity year upon year. Currently, we often do not merely “make use of it”, but even “live in it” (i.a. Carr, 2012; Turkle, 2013). Castells (2011) makes a point that the extremely dynamic development of the internet and its result, the digital revolution, will have even more profound consequences for the social functioning of people than the industrial revolution of the 19th century – the internet will irreversibly reshape the world we know and live in. The division between “digital” and “analog” is also more and more difficult to observe and

outline in a straightforward manner – more and more activities take place at the intersection of these two dimensions of functioning, crossing over each other (Zajac, Krejtz, 2007). Although the internet has brought humanity great good and propelled it considerably towards progress, its careless and thoughtless usage will bring a lot of harm. The discussion on the topic of such hazards as e.g. the possibility of internet addiction has been present in science for almost two decades. The questions related to aggression and harassment in the internet have already been described in a good and holistic manner

(i.a.: Pyżalski, 2011, 2012). There remains however a certain spectrum of virtual hazards the consequences which reach far outside of the internet environment and affect the functioning of its users in a broader scope.

The essence of the thorough understanding of the complexity of mental processes emerging during a human-internet interaction is therefore of utmost priority. More and more often is the point raised that the internet and new technologies are replacing advanced cognitive capabilities in human beings. Barr, Pennycock, Stolz and Fugelsang (2015) indicate that the particularly significant role in this process is played by smartphones and tablets – the devices through which one can almost instantaneously gain access to internet resources. The results of their research concluded that people who think analytically to a low degree while highly intuitively are characterized as prone to ceding the processing of information exactly to their smartphones. Users of new technologies “put themselves at their mercy” to a growing extent, which will in many cases lead to the emergence of significant psychosocial disorders (Spitzer, 2016).

An example of a behavior which origins are rooted in internet use and cognitive consequences far exceed such environment is cyberloafing. The goal of this paper is to attempt a synthetic description of this phenomenon specific to the times of the digital revolution. We theorize that cyberloafing is becoming one of the most significant dysfunctions related to professional activity and its efficiency. Analyzing existing publications we followed the rule of the applicability of their results as well as whether the authors indicated real and significant factors promoting cyberloafing.

Polish studies of this topic sometimes translate cyberloafing as “cyberidleness”, “cyberabsenteeism” or “internet overuse at work” (Wolski, 2010). Further in the paper we assume that one’s interruption of currently carried out task in favor of free internet use for private purposes is pivotal to the phenomenon of cyberloafing. It may be an interruption of one’s professional

work as well as study – what is essential is that it takes place in a digital environment (Lim, Chen, 2012; Piotrowski, 2012; Wagner, Lim, Barnes, Ferris, 2012). Cyberloafing resembles a unidirectional, accidental journey through internet resources, a virtual escape from currently performed action in which the users themselves have no precise plan as to what they intend to be doing (Kenyon, 2008).

Cyberloafing is a relatively unknown problem in the Polish literature, having been described in the foreign journals only recently. One of the Polish analyzes has been presented by Wolski (2010), who focuses on the reaction of the employers towards the cyberloafing of their employees. He additionally presents the usual means to limit the extra professional usage of the internet during working hours among employees, as well as presents complex suggestions for a policy preventing cyberloafing. Martin, Brock, Buckley and Ketchen (2010) point out that cyberloafing has currently become the most popular way of avoiding work by the people who should be doing it. Blanchard and Henle (2008) claim that employees resort to cyberloafing for as much as an hour in their workplace on average. Because the consequences of cyberloafing are highly significant socially, we are of opinion that a thorough analysis and understanding of this subject appears to be an important task for the modern internet psychology.

As is indicated by Martin, Brock, Buckley and Ketchen (2010), the practice of cyberloafing is becoming more and more common, which may be caused, among others, by limited knowledge about this phenomenon. Employers generally have no idea how they can effectively combat such tendencies among their employees. The following part of the paper will present a synthetic analysis of the previous research concerning cyberloafing as well as consequences of such activity on the social and psychological functioning. What is emphasized by Barlow, Bean and Hott (2003) – cyberloafing undermines the basic principles of good and smooth functioning of an organization: work productivity and its effectiveness.

CYBERLOAFING – A DEFINITION

Most researchers define cyberloafing as spending time which should be devoted to work or study on carrying out other, unrelated activities in the internet (Lim, Chen, 2012; Piotrowski, 2012; Wagner, Lim, Barnes, Ferris, 2012). It is worth to point out that cyberloafing can be invoked only if such work or study is conducted on a computer with internet access. Blanchard and Henle (2008) additionally classify cyberloafing as two types: “minor cyberloafing” and “serious cyberloafing”. They indicate sending private e-mails or checking news sites during work as an example of “minor cyberloafing”; as far as the context of “serious cyberloafing” is concerned, online gambling or browsing adult sites are given as an example. According to an analysis by Siau, Nah and Teng (2002), out of all online activities the ones undertaken the most – in the form of cyberloafing – are: using e-mail accounts, file downloading, browsing news sites, hacking, as well as visiting adult sites. It has to be noted however, that Siau et al’s (2002) analysis was compiled relatively long ago judging from the perspective of dynamic development of new technologies, which may lead to a conclusion that currently the list of the most undertaken online activities might be different.

SPECIFICS AND CHARACTERISTIC OF CYBERLOAFING

Cyberloafing is a notion that has been appearing in internet psychology for a relatively short time, and the basis of this phenomenon has not yet been clearly proven empirically in relation to the existing psychological theories. Askew, Buckner, Taing, Ilie, Bauer and Coovert (2014), taking the Theory of Planned Behavior as basis, related cyberloafing to other, similar kinds of “withdrawal behavior” described under the aforementioned theory. Withdrawal behavior is defined as an activity minimizing the amount of

time devoted to work. Furthermore, the particular activities which could be sometimes described as elements of cyberloafing – such as e.g. using social network sites or instant messaging – have already been accounted for in relation to the Theory of Planned Behavior (i.a. Mathieson, 1991; Lu, Zhou, Wang, 2009; Pelling, White, 2009). Ajzen (2012, cf: Askew et al., 2014) points to the perceived behavior control and subjective norms as the elements of behavioral intention in the Theory of Planned Behavior. As for cyberloafing, the first of these elements may be viewed as website access self-efficacy, manifesting in internet browsing fluency and lack of technical limitations, or in the ability to avoid being caught cyberloafing. The second, i.e. subjective norms, can be divided into prescriptive norms category – what is deemed acceptable; as well as into descriptive norms – what is in fact done (Cialdini, Reno, Kallgre, 1990; Park, Smith, 2007).

Askew et al. (2014) conducted two surveys juxtaposing website access efficacy, subjective norms, and attitude towards cyberloafing in several models as intention predictors of cyberloafing-triggering behavior. The first survey was conducted on a group of 429 people with positions requiring computer use, some of whom were students as well. The second was conducted on a group of 202, also with internet access at work. The results of this study have concluded that cyberloafing can in fact be treated as a withdrawal behavior in terms of TPB. Moreover, the authors point to a new perspective which they think cyberloafing should be viewed from – the juxtaposition of social norms and the ability to hide cyberloafing.

Askew et al. (2014) suggest that people may often have a high motivation towards activities leading to cyberloafing and putting currently carried out work on hold, but they avoid them so long as to be sure they cannot be caught. The authors indicate two crucial and applicable conclusions from their research. The first is reducing cyberloafing in a manner non-invasive to

employees, e.g. through the reorganization of working environment towards a more orderly and transparent one in places requiring computer use. The second is a possibility of utilizing previous methods based on TPB which aim to change behavior. The biggest flaw of the research conducted was choosing a survey method – the persons asked could suspect they were asked about behavior unwelcome by their employers, which in turn could lead to the falsification of results.

Similar to Askew et al. (2014), Sheikh, Atashgah and Adibzadegan (2015) based their cyberloafing research on the Theory of Planned Behavior. The results of their study showed that an employee's lapse into cyberloafing is especially reinforced by a subjective belief that she or he will not be caught avoiding work, as well as their subjective norms and convictions against such behavior. If a given employee deems it acceptable to interrupt their work during working hours – and has a feeling nobody will notice it – there is a very high probability such an activity will be undertaken.

What is worth noting is that the key role in reinforcing cyberloafing is played by the unbelievably dynamic advancement of new technologies. Thanks to the internet the access to a vast amount of information and its processing has become possible in a matter of split second. Never before had humanity access to such a large database in such an easy and largely effortless way (Lim, Chen, 2002; Ledzińska, 2009). The sociologists more and more often describe the society we live in as an “information society”. Golka (2013, p. 80) defines it as a society “the most important constituent of which remains the production, storage and circulation of information – which is considered a condition vital to its functioning (...). Information is treated as a product, a commodity for sale (sometimes even as a resource)”. All these aspects result in cyberloafing being a particular “invisible escape” from workplace duties, which becomes a more and more common issue (Wolski, 2010).

PSYCHOLOGICAL FUNCTIONING AND CYBERLOAFING

RuningSawitri (2012) presents experiencing work-related stress as one of the main factors leading to cyberloafing. Her survey conducted among 199 Indonesian civil servants outlines three main factors causing such type of stress. The first is related to the ambiguity of an employee's responsibilities, which makes the employee experience anxiety and dissatisfaction. As is pointed by RuningSawitri (2012), the employee resorts to cyberloafing in such a situation to change workplace atmosphere and improve their mood, thus providing oneself with a sort of leisure and respite from work-related stress. Another factor is related to experiencing contradictions in the entrusted tasks, resources, work rules, as well as other related situations. The final factor is linked to overloading the employee with excess duties, lack of support from one's superior, and time pressure.

RuningSawitri (2012) also points to the individual differences in experiencing something as well as the difference in web navigating efficiency. The results of the conducted statistical analyzes confirmed that the feeling of ambiguity and contradiction in the currently performed work might influence the tendency to cyberloaf independently from the efficiency of navigating the web. However, in the case of the impact task overburdening has on cyberloafing, the efficiency of navigating the web serves as the moderator of this relation. RuningSawitri (2012) emphasizes that excessively overburdened employees are simply too occupied with carrying out their duties to indulge in activities unrelated to work. If, however, their skill in navigating the web is on an adequately high level, they are able to handle such a combination.

The results of research conducted in the education sector also contribute to interesting conclusions for the psychological impact of the phenomenon of cyberloafing among employees. Although it is a different area of operation than

professional work, the basic mechanisms leading to cyberloafing appear to be significantly convergent. What has been noted by Yaşar and Yurdugül (2013), college students often drift to activities unrelated to the subject of the class during classes in computer labs. Such cases can too be considered cyberloafing. To specify the origins of such behavior researchers conducted a correlative study on a group of 215 Turkish students, using two questionnaires. The first concerned the division to four kinds of cyberloafing behavior – development, recovery, deviant, and addiction (Doorn, 2011). The second in turn referred to the frequency of various activities characterizing cyberloafing.

The cyberloafing behavior recalled the most by the persons in the study was e-mail checking, visiting social network sites, and reading news sites, which is also consistent with the data presented by Wolski (2010). The reasons for such behavior most often quoted by the surveyed was the desire to regenerate mentally and take a rest from work. It is however worth to note that Yaşar and Yurdugül (2013) did not achieve a statistically significant relation between any of the coefficients from both questionnaires, which further demonstrates how ambiguous and difficult to scientifically observe a phenomenon cyberloafing is. The study plan used also did not make it possible to ascertain whether the cause and effect relation really occurred.

With a desire to control the situation of cyberloafing among students and its manifestations during computer classes for gender, field of study, internet access location, and daily internet activity, Yılmaz, Yılmaz, Öztürk, Sezer and Karademir (2015) carried out a survey among a group of 288 Turkish students. The results indicate an average level of cyberloafing manifestation among students, however, men significantly more often indulge in such behavior than women (cf: Jia, Jia, Karau, 2013). The female part of the surveyed group declared more frequent internet usage for study purposes than men. Despite that, significant cross-gender differences in tech-

nological socialization have not been observed. Cross-gender differences in serious and insignificant cyberloafing behavior have also not been observed. The results indicated however a bigger tendency to cyberloaf among the students of fields requiring more frequent computer-related activities. Yılmaz et al. (2015) also observed a lack of significant discrepancies between the time and place of internet use and displaying cyberloafing behavior.

Lim i Chen (2012) attempted to verify the relation between cyberloafing and the specifics of experienced emotions among the people who take such actions. The data gathered showed that those relations are ambiguous and, furthermore, gender-dependent. Men who got involved in cyberloafing claimed it made a positive impact on the quality of their work – unlike women, who did not observe such a subjective influence on themselves. Furthermore Lim and Chen (2012) proved that various types of cyberloafing may be related to various emotional effects. Interrupting one's work to use the e-mail account turned out to have a negative impact on experienced emotions, unlike the regular web browsing – this was however noticed only among men.

Similar results were collected by Baturay and Toker (2015), who demonstrated in a study conducted among students that men would indulge in cyberloafing decidedly more often during work. Similarly, the amount of time spent in the internet during the day as well as the proficiency level in using this medium significantly promoted the higher intensity of cyberloafing. Baturay and Toker (2015) also proved the existence of a specific remedy for the behavior leading to cyberloafing among young men – it appeared to be socialization training. The rise of social capability level became a way for students to better organize their work and avoid resorting to the type of activities which could interrupt it. This paper mostly focuses on the issue of cyberloafing in the psychology of organizations, however the aforementioned research on cyberloafing in the context of studying and education helps to

deeper understand the psychological mechanisms related to this phenomenon.

A separate issue which is also worthy of scientific insight is the way employers could effectively combat the lapse into cyberloafing behavior. The results of a study conducted by De Lara and Rodriguez (2007) demonstrate that imposing severe punishment for this type of activities during work only managed to worsen the employees' reactions and in consequence lead to an even greater rise in the instances of cyberloafing. Blau, Yang and Ward-Cook (2006) indicated that the employees who indulge in cyberloafing often do it in protest against in their opinion unfair and ambiguous workplace rules. Cyberloafing has thus become one of the counterproductive activities which the employees do during work.

CYBERLOAFING AND PSYCHOLOGICAL INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES

When analyzing issues related to cyberloafing the research concerning the kinds of people who have a particular predisposition for such type of activities is also worthy of attention. Jia, Jia and Karau (2013) analyzed the answers provided in a questionnaire-based online study by 147 adult working people for whom being online was a part of job specification. The results, taking into account controlling for age and gender of the participants, demonstrated a significant role of the four personality traits as defined by the Theory of the Big Five: extraversion, openness to experience, conscientiousness, and emotional stability. The first two traits demonstrated a positive link to cyberloafing, which means that a higher intensity of these traits will result in a greater inclination for cyberloafing behavior. As for conscientiousness and emotional stability, their link to cyberloafing was proved to be reverse. Agreeability was the only trait of the Big Five which link could not be proven with a statistical significance.

This made the researches unable to confirm one of the hypotheses that agreeability would lead to the fulfillment of requirements and avoidance of breaking workplace rules, which was supposed to emerge as a negative correlation between agreeability and cyberloafing. The results of the research conducted by Jia, Jia and Karau (2013) additionally demonstrated how the relation between intensity and frequency of cyberloafing and the subjective worth of performed duties comes into shape. The more one's work is perceived as meaningful by a person, the less chance there is one will turn to cyberloafing.

SUMMARY

As is implied by the research presented in this paper, cyberloafing during work or study is a phenomenon difficult to clearly account for and define. The tendency to avoid imposed work has followed parts of humanity throughout its history, however, the advent of digital revolution has significantly increased the capabilities of its manifestation.

Due to the fact that cyberloafing happens more and more often and influences the quality of work in a counterproductive manner to a greater and greater extent, we are of opinion that understanding the origins and ways of coping with the phenomena described in this paper should be one of the more socially important tasks of modern internet and work and organizational psychology (cf. Jandaghi i in., 2015). The consequences of the employees' lapse into the state of cyberloafing have an obvious impact on the financial condition of a given company, but may also cause negative psychological effects in the employees themselves (Lim, Chen, 2012). A ramification that inspires further research is the link between a high level of socialization and the decrease in cyberloafing tendencies as demonstrated by Baturay and Toker (2015). These results have a high applicability value, providing the basis for creating holistic programs for

combating cyberloafing during working hours. What makes it even more significant is that cyberloafing is a phenomenon of many causes, which, however, lead to one result – avoiding doing one’s particular work in the moment one is supposed to do it. As demonstrated by Askew et al. (2014), the issue can be successfully interpreted under the Theory of Planned Behavior, which provides an additional scope for further research on cyberloafing to be conducted based precisely on this theoretical approach.

The weakness of the most of the research discussed here is the fact it was conducted with the use of questionnaire methodology, which may generate significant disturbance variables, such as e.g. the tendency to dissimulate related to the questions about professional functioning (Zawadzki, 2006). The results of studies based on the self-description questionnaire methods may be prone to errors resulting from self-presentation tendencies of participants (Paulhus, Vazire, 2007). It may be expected that the employees will be reluctant to acknowledge they undertake activities that might be considered cyberloafing during working hours. Hence, it appears justified to employ other research methods as well – such as the psychological experiment – owing to which one will be able to study the results and consequences of cyberloafing in a more controlled manner.

In a meta-analysis conducted on 94 research papers on work and business ethics Randall and Gibson (1990) point to the considerable weak points of self-description methods in comparison to research conducted under laboratory conditions. It is worth noting as well that the shortcomings of self-description methods is an issue often raised by researchers. The debate over this topic has even brought an accusation that psychology has become a science “of finger movements” made while providing exclusively declarative answers to the questions in questionnaires, largely ignoring the actual behavior and behavioral measurement of it (Baumeister, Vohs, Funde, 2007).

Selecting an alternative method of studying the phenomenon of cyberloafing would thus mean

to employ psychological experimentation while keeping the maximum possible ecological accuracy. In reference to Baturay and Toker’s (2015) research, what appears to be justified is a series of experiments which will test the effectiveness of a socialization training (vs. its omission) in the context of eliminating cyberloafing. It is worthy to emphasize, though, that a significant factor preventing cyberloafing is also the clarity and transparency of rules governing a given workplace, as well as their successful communication to an employee (Blau, Yang, Ward-Cook, 2006; RuningSawitri, 2012). The replication of the discussed research on different than original participant samples would allow to observe and test the multicultural generality of described relationships.

Unlike any of the previous media, the internet has created a space which allows its users to experience something that is sometimes described as “digital bilocation” – remaining in one place in person (e.g. at work) while being deeply cognitively engaged in online activity at the same time. The ease of internet access causes such “bilocation” to become a universal phenomenon and a means for a particular “escape from reality” employed more and more often (Turkle, 2013). One may expect that new technologies – the internet in particular – will accompany our daily living in an increasing degree. Therefore, developing the methods of combating cyberloafing in an effective way will become all the more urgent task, both for the employers and the researchers dealing with the internet from a scientific perspective alike.

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WIRTUALNA UCIECZKA: SYNTETYCZNY PRZEGLĄD LITERATURY DOTYCZĄCEJ ZJAWISKA CYBERDRYFOWANIA

ABSTRAKT

Życie w dzisiejszym świecie wiąże się z koniecznością dostosowywania się do wymogów technologicznych oraz z ciągłym poszerzaniem własnych umiejętności obsługi urządzeń cyfrowych. Taki stan rzeczy wywiera presję na różne dziedziny życia; aby ją rozładować powstają nowe zjawiska, których przejawy można zaobserwować także w funkcjonowaniu psychologiczno-społecznym człowieka w przestrzeni internetu. Jednym z takich zjawisk jest cyberdryfowanie, które można zdefiniować jako poświęcanie czasu zarezerwowanego na pracę lub naukę na rzecz niezwiązanymi z nimi aktywnościami w cyberprzestrzeni. Zachowania będące cyberdryfowaniem są aktywnościami złożonymi, które podzielić można na różne kategorie, a także przewidywać ich występowanie na podstawie wielu je determinujących czynników. Zjawisko to jest tym bardziej warte uwagi, gdyż wraz z postępowaniem technologicznym dostęp do internetu staje się powszechny również w środowisku pracy i edukacji. Cyberprzestrzeń poza ułatwieniem nauki oraz wykonywania obowiązków pracowniczych oferuje również szeroki zakres aktywności na które przeciętny użytkownik przeznaczają czas, bezpowrotnie go marnując. Celem niniejszego artykułu jest przedstawienie kompleksowego i syntetycznego przeglądu najnowszych badań psychologicznych dotyczących cyberdryfowania, wyjaśniających zarówno jego genezę, jak i konsekwencje w wymiarze jakości pracy i codziennego funkcjonowania. Cyberdryfowanie jest coraz częściej uznawane za jedną z największych patologii pracy, także dogłębne poznanie tego zjawiska zdaje się być najlepszym punktem wyjścia do poradzenia sobie z jego występowaniem.

Słowa kluczowe: cyberdryfowanie, psychologia internetu, psychologia pracy i organizacji, psychologia społeczna