

Journal Club

ORGANIZATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY



USING SOCIAL CYBERLOAFING TO COPE WITH WORKPLACE OSTRACISM

The internet is ubiquitous in most workplaces and many workers take advantage of it for personal reasons during work hours, known as cyberloafing. Using the internet specifically to increase or maintain social connection while at work is referred to as social cyberloafing.

Social cyberloafing behaviour has increased as a result of social media becoming a source of interaction and information, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. Many researchers argue that social cyberloafing reduces productivity within the workplace and should be discouraged or eliminated. However, in a 2021 paper, Hu, Chen and Ye argue that this behaviour can paradoxically be used to increase productivity by countering workplace ostracism and loneliness.

Hu and colleagues report that feelings of workplace ostracism, defined as perceived exclusion or isolation, were positively related to social cyberloafing. They further found that this relationship was mediated by workplace loneliness, as measured by a standard loneliness scale.

The authors claimed that ostracism had an adverse effect on the basic need of individuals

for belonging and that social cyberloafing helped to mitigate these emotions and fulfil this need. The researchers suggest that cyberloafing should not be considered a harmful behaviour, and instead organisations should seek to understand why employees are engaging in this behaviour and to address the underlying cause rather than punishing employees for appearing unproductive.

This was the first paper I read that provided evidence for social cyberloafing as a beneficial behaviour within the workplace. The authors convinced me that even though cyberloafing can result in times of unproductivity, the long-term benefits outweigh the costs.

I found this paper to be extremely intriguing, given changes to the nature of work owing to the COVID-19 pandemic. Although the paper did not specifically mention the pandemic, it was conducted in China in 2020, during a period of high infection rates. The changes to everyday life due to the pandemic provide unique research opportunities.

Many organizations are opting to allow their employees to work remotely permanently, so employees

“ even though cyberloafing can result in times of unproductivity, the long-term benefits outweigh the costs ”

might be getting less social interaction during work hours than before. This lack of social interaction might produce loneliness, which can result in an increase in cyberloafing to combat the potential harm. Conducting research on workplace loneliness when many employees were working from home is extremely timely and highlights issues that might have been previously overlooked, such as the consequences of remote work on mental health.

Before reading this paper, I was focused on the negative impacts of cyberloafing or how cyberloafing can act as a small break for employees. The findings from this study helped me to develop and justify my hypotheses and provided a strong foundation for my research. This paper is the beginning of a new exciting avenue for research in the wake of the pandemic and could result in changes to the perceptions of acceptable workplace behaviour.

Natalie Mason

Aston Business School,

Aston University, Birmingham, UK.

e-mail: nataliejanemason@hotmail.com

Competing interests

The author declares no competing interests.

ORIGINAL ARTICLE Hu, Y. et al. Eager to belong: social cyberloafing as a coping response to workplace ostracism. *Curr. Psychol.* <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12144-021-01690-y> (2021)

RELATED ARTICLES Naeem, M. The role of social media to generate social proof as engaged society for stockpiling behaviour of customers during Covid-19 pandemic. *Qual. Mark. Res.* **24**, 281–301 (2020)