A Multidimensional Scaling Approach to Personal Web Usage in the Workplace

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ABSTRACT

In this study, a typology of workplace personal Web usage (PWU) behaviors was developed using multidimensional scaling techniques. Results suggest that personal Web usage behaviors vary along two dimensions: opportunities versus threats and organizational versus interpersonal. On the foundation of these two dimensions, PWU behaviors appear to fall into four distinct categories: disruptive, recreational, personal learning, and ambiguous PWU. This typology should prove useful for developing conceptual and empirical research agendas of PWU behavior in the workplace.
INTRODUCTION

Reports indicate that about 55 million people in the United States access the World Wide Web ("the Web") from their workplace on a daily basis (Horrigan, 2002). A Department of Commerce study indicates that Web usage in the workplace has a growth rate of approximately 54% per year (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2002). While such growth has the potential to increase worker productivity, it is not without significant problems (Lim et al., 2002; Simmers, 2002). The American Management Association indicates that more than 50% of all workplace-related Web activities are personal in nature (Greengard, 2000). A recent study indicates that, on average, employees spend 8.3 hours a week surfing the Web for non-work-related activities (Websense, 2002). These activities include online entertainment, reading news, making travel arrangements, online purchases, and searching for jobs. Such activities translate into billions of dollars a year in revenue lost due to lost productivity (Mills et al., 2001).

In addition to the costs incurred due to losses in productivity, personal Web usage has caused organizations to face a host of other detrimental issues (Siau & Nah, 2002). There is an increased burden on company servers as bandwidth and system storage gets clogged with non-work-related files (Mills et al., 2001). Organizations also face heightened security risks from viruses and other malicious programs inadvertently downloaded by employees as they use the Web for personal reasons (Sloane, 2002). The costs of such security risks are significant, with an estimated worldwide economic impact of approximately $13.2 billion for 2001 (Computer Economics, 2002). In addition to security costs, companies also face innumerable legal costs as a result of issues ranging from copyright infringement to sexual harassment lawsuits (Roberts, 1999; Panko & Beh, 2002). Personal Web usage is increasingly becoming an issue which management cannot ignore (Simmers, 2002).

Organizations have attempted to respond to the challenges of personal Web usage with policies that range from laissez faire to zero tolerance (Urbaczewski & Jessup, 2002); yet, merely establishing a policy does not adequately address this challenge (Anandarajan, 2002). Management must make an effort to understand the dimensions underlying personal Web usage behaviors if they are to hope to effectively manage workplace Web usage (Lim, 2002). Currently very little research has specifically addressed personal Web usage behaviors (Anandarajan, 2002; Lim, 2002). The goal of this research is to assist in the development of a framework that may be used to categorize personal Web usage behaviors and further our understanding of them.
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