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RESEARCH ARTICLE

CYBERLOAFING AND STRESS: EVIDENCE FROM THE LARGE-SCALE APPAREL MANUFACTURING INDUSTRY IN SRI LANKA

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Abstract: Objective: Cyberloafing, engaging in non-work-related activities at work, is extensive in modern work settings, which are information communication-enabled. The extant research frequently highlights its negative effects on organisations and employees. Researchers have started to explore its positive impact on employees and organisations. This study contributes to this exploration by examining the impact of cyberloafing on stress. We draw from the conservation of resources and the transactional theory of stress and coping to explain cyberloafing and stress. **Design**: Data from 322 merchandisers from the apparel manufacturing sector in Sri Lanka were analysed using PLS-SEM. **Main outcomes:** It was found that cyberloafing did not function as a medium to promote stress. **Results**: Results indicated that cyberloafing did not cause stress but served as a tool to mitigate stress. **Conclusions**: This suggests that cyberloafing in organisations can serve as a tool to mitigate stress resulting from work. Moreover, it is possible to suggest that the cohort examined in the study managed their level of cyberloafing to ensure that it did not exceed the limit that might influence stress. They were able to perceive stress appropriately and engage suitable actions to reduce it. These findings imply that organisations should refrain from prohibiting cyberloafing completely and ensure that it functions within guided limits to guarantee that employees achieve their performance goals. This research is confined to a specific cohort in the apparel manufacturing industry; hence, it needs more research in the future to assess cyberloafing and its impact on stress in the industry.

Keywords: Apparel Manufacturing, Cyberloafing, ICT-enabled, Merchandisers, Stress,

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INTRODUCTION

The increased use of information communication technology (ICT) has paved the way for improved organisational performance by meeting customer requirements speedily (Parvianinen et al., 2017; Nicolás-Agustín et al., 2024). Against this backdrop, the internet has also offered employees opportunities to cyberloaf at work (Anandarajan et al., 2006; Banerjee et al., 2025). With the pervasiveness of cyberloafing, incidences of stress have increased, leading to lower employee productivity (Wu et. al., 2020; Krishna and Agrawal, 2023). Some researchers have noted that cyberloafing can be beneficial as it provides employees an avenue to detach from work psychologically and reduce stress (Oravec, 1999; Askew, 2014; Tsai, 2023). Smartphones are another tool that employees can use to cyber-loaf at work, surreptitiously reducing performance and producing technology overload, impacting work performance (Ali-Hassan et al., 2015; Wu et al., 2020; Zafar et al., 2025). Apparel manufacturing is an industry that has also become ICT-enabled, and its employees also use the internet to meet customer demands. The apparel industry is a leading industry in the Asian region and a major contributor to their national economies.

The highly demanding work environment in this sector is expected to predispose employees to cyberloafing to mitigate stress. Extant research has not covered the impact of cyberloafing on stress in the apparel manufacturing sector, leaving a major research gap in the literature. Accordingly, the research objective is to determine whether cyberloafing causes stress among merchandisers in the large-scale apparel manufacturing sector in Sri Lanka. This study addresses merchandisers in the apparel manufacturing industry in Sri Lanka, as their work is ICT-enabled, demanding and complex.

Stress is a phenomenon that is prevalent in modern work environments and is identified as a modern epidemic (Avey et al., 2009; Bilderback, 2025). Stress has been discussed since the 1960s, as it was known to be a mental state of a human being that could affect behaviour. Scholars have agreed that the phenomenon of stress is accompanied by symptoms such as trepidation, fear, anxiety, exasperation and irritation (Motowidlo et al., 1986). Recently, Lu et al. (2024) defined stress as a state that one finds in which the homeostasis is being challenged.

Scholars have noted that attempting to fulfil multiple work responsibilities promotes stress among employees. Stress is said to be high among employees who are trying to fulfil their job roles and organisational-member roles by demonstrating initiative (Bolino and Turnley, 2005; Bilderback, 2025). Lack of clear boundaries between work and non-work in modern work settings and hand-held devices becoming an inseparable part of employees has made employees more stressed than in the past (Tran et al., 2020).

Stress is a condition that affects the physical and mental capacity of individuals. It is said to be accompanied by problems such as restlessness, emotional disturbance, having trouble sleeping, consuming alcohol excessively, being anxious, tense and nervous (Adiguzel and Kucukoglu, 2019).

Interestingly, Selye has stated that "Everyone knows what stress is, and nobody knows what it is" (Selye, 1970). Scholars have suggested that persistent stress can cause illness (Sørensen et al., 2021; Iqbal et al., 2024). When an individual encounters situations which require more resources than he has, such situations can lead to stress (Pandey, 2020). Stress, according to Weinberg and Cooper (2017), cannot originate from a single source but from several sources. Researchers noted that stress can originate from organisational, individual and global sources, contradicting the common belief that it arises mainly from organisational sources. Similarly, Bhatti et al. (2010) suggested that stress can occur from intra and extra-organisational sources. The climate, family and economic conditions were identified as extra-organisational, while working hours, organisational policies, workload, working conditions and supervisory style were identified as intra-organisational.

Pascoe et al. (2020) and Itunu et al. (2024) posited that stress can affect student performance. Their research suggests stress can originate from academic environments, leading to negative consequences. Similarly, Saqib and Rehman (2018) claimed that stress is a major impediment to students during their academic careers and is a feeling of psychological pressure that affects the individual physically. Stress is identified as a generator of psychological disorders that can lead to both positive and negative consequences (Saqib and Rehman, 2018).

Nelson and Simmons (2003) argued that a moderate level of stress can motivate individuals, while a high level of stress can lead to negative consequences. However, Corbett (2015) asserted that stress at any level causes a disturbance to homeostasis, leading to negative consequences. Vahedi and Saiphoo (2018) proposed that smartphone use is a major cause of stress for individuals as they have become an important part of their lives. Studies noted above offer very similar descriptions of stress and agree that it is detrimental to the well-being of an individual.

Despite the circumstances, stress is likely to mitigate the wellness of individuals. Research has also highlighted that stress can originate from various sources in life. The notion that low level of stress is motivational while high levels of stress are detrimental to individuals was highlighted by Yerkes and Dodson (2008). However, this notion was disputed by Corbett (2015) argued that any level of stress is problematic for individuals and can affect their wellbeing.

Cyberloafing is using the Internet for non-work-related activities (Lim, 2002; Cohen and Özsoy, 2024). Hoonakker (2014) suggested that the integration of information communication technology (ICT) has not always been positive in work settings, as it has made work more complex, prompting employees to work at high speed with tight schedules. Oravec (1999) suggested that intermittent use of the Internet for non-work-related activities provides employees an opportunity for much-needed rest from work.

Al Abbasi (2018) indicated that cyberloafing is the unauthorised use of the Internet for personal work. Cyberloafing is identified as a counterproductive behaviour as employees deviate from work to engage in non-work activities (Ahmad and Jamaluddin, 2009; Nguyen et al., 2025). Recent studies have indicated that the pervasiveness of smartphones among students has increased cyberloafing among them (Anoglu and Korabatak, 2020). Lim (2002) posited that cyberloafing is a deviant behaviour that affects the organisation negatively.

Similarly, Martin et al. (2010) indicated that counterproductive behaviour in organisations is time banditry. Koay et al. (2017) compared cyberloafing to an endemic that is hidden, affects the work performance of individuals and is detrimental to organisational performance. Cyberloafing encompasses activities such as making travel arrangements, searching for jobs, making online purchases and reading news (Anandarajan et al., 2006; Nguyen et al., 2025). Lim and Teo (2005) suggested that cyberloafing would entail activities such as checking emails, playing games and browsing non-work-related websites.

Expanding the list further, Aybas and Gungor (2020) identified cyberloafing as activities such as reading the news, viewing websites such as sports, entertainment, chatting, messaging, shopping, gaming and pornographic materials. However, other researchers provided different classifications, such as minor and major (Ozler and Polat, 2012) and browsing and emailing (Lim, 2002). Peng et al. (2023) posited that cyberloafing is engaging in personal leisure activities using office internet resources. It is commonly understood that cyberloafing is the internet behaviour that takes individuals out of their work tasks to engage in non-work-related activities. Some scholars have identified cyberloafing as a negative behaviour, while others have considered it to be beneficial to employee performance. However, with the advent of handheld devices, cyberloafing has become common among individuals (Ozdamli and Ercag 2021).

THE CONSERVATION OF RESOURCES THEORY

This theory, promoted by Hobfoll (1989), suggests that individuals are predisposed to conserve and accumulate resources they value. At times of strain, individuals are likely to exhibit such behaviour to preserve resources they value. Research by Oravec (2002) indicated that internet recreation is essentially a behaviour that supports the conservation of resources.

As such, this theory is outlined to explain cyberloafing as a potential source of recreation to preserve and acquire depleted resources at work. Using this theory to explain the preservation of resources, Yang et al. (2020) posited that cyberloafing is used to conserve resources at times of job burnout, lack of psychological well-being and poor work-life balance. Zhong et al. (2022) suggested that informational cyberloafing was positively related to innovative performance during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Researchers noted that cyberloafing could improve the perceived meaning of work, leading to improved performance. Khan et al. (2021) also suggested that mental strain caused by abusive supervision can be alleviated through cyberloafing. Hence, the theory of conservation of resources is appropriate for explaining cyberloafing at work.

THE TRANSACTIONAL THEORY OF STRESS AND COPING

This research explains the concept of stress using the above theory. The theory suggests that successful handling of stress is dependent on individuals' ability to appraise the stress and initiate an effective coping mechanism. During an encounter of a stressful event, the demand for resources exceeds the resources available, creating psychological and physiological unease in the individual (Gmelch and Chan, 1992).

Effective steering depends on the appraisal of the stress and the coping mechanism initiated (Si et al., 2023). Si et al. (2023) used this theory to discuss stress due to excessive social media use and detrimental job behaviour. Here, the theory explains stress management based on its appraisal and the strategy initiated to mitigate it. Similarly, Li et al. (2018) suggested that problem-focused coping is essential when an individual is attempting creative performance. Coping mechanisms employed by individuals differ from emotion-focused to problem-based approaches, depending on the circumstances.

However, external rewards are more successful when problem-focused approaches are used. By contrast, threat assessment of a reward for creativity (assessing the potential for harm or loss) is positively related to emotion-based coping. Andel et al. (2019) claimed that the problem-focused approach is beneficial in controllable situations, and the emotion-focused method is favourable in situations when faced with uncontrollable stress situations. Successful appraisal and effective mitigation of stress are necessary when driving towards creative performance.

Dewe (2004) argued that stress at work is handled by initiating a process of appraisal and the meaning given to the stressful event. Based on the meaning, actions are initiated to mitigate the stress. Andel et al. (2019), using this theory, noted that in situations of stress at work, employees are likely to appraise the situations and employ mechanisms to cope with them.

HYPOTHESIS OF THE STUDY

Cyberloafing and Stress

Although some scholars have suggested that cyberloafing is an activity to take a respite from work (Oravec, 2002), others have indicated that it is a potential source of employee stress (Aghaz and Sheikh, 2016; Agrawal and Krishna, 2025). Agrawal and Krishna (2025) noted that social cyberloafing had a negative impact on learning satisfaction. Lim and Chen (2012) and Skeja and Lorcu (2022) also noted that cyberloafing increases anxiety and stress among individuals. These researchers noted that the emotional capacities of individuals are depleted by cyberloafing. Sonnentag et al. (2018) also postulated that cyberloafing can promote stress among employees.

Other scholars posited that emailing is a major source of stress among employees (Barley et al., 2011). Barber and Santuzzi (2015) also indicated that cyberloafing with messaging and emailing is stressful. Wu et al. (2020) suggested that cyberloafing can trigger negative emotions and reduce work engagement. Similarly, Sonnentag et al. (2017) also noted that cyberloafing can lead to mental fatigue in individuals. Stress-related to cyberloafing was found to lower the productivity of employees in the organization (Day et al., 2010).

Thomée et al. (2007) suggested that cyberloafing can cause mental fatigue and stress among college students who have used ICT for their work. Lim (2002) posited that emailing is far more detrimental than browsing as it consumes a significant amount of the cognitive capacity of individuals. Gökçearslan et al. (2018) indicated that smartphone addiction leads to cyberloafing, promoting psychological strain among university students. This is significant with the pervasiveness of smartphones among university students and their addiction to them.

O'Neill et al. (2014) suggested that cyberloafing causes stress among employees as it leads to dissatisfaction among those who engage with work remotely. Leikas and Ilmarinen (2016) proposed that extensive use of social media to loaf depletes the limited resources of individuals causing stress. Trougakos (2014) claimed that using social media to loaf during intermittent breaks can consume vital cognitive resources causing stress. Cyberloafing has been identified as a cause of exhaustion leading to mental strain among employees (Shaddiq et al., 2021; Metin-Orta and Saygili, 2023). The above studies have indicated that cyberloafing is a potential source of employee stress due to the strain it imposes on individuals.

Although the above narrative seems to indicate a global agreement that cyberloafing is a potential source of stress for individuals, some researchers seem to have qualified that certain types of cyberloafing can promote stress (Lim, 2002; Barber and Santuzzi, 2015; Skeja and Lorcu, 2022). For example, emailing is considered stressful as it consumes high levels of cognitive resources (Lim, 2002).

This being said, most recent research suggests that cyberloafing does not cause stress instead, stress promotes cyberloafing behaviour as it serves as a tool to mitigate stress (Chen et al., 2021; Wiastuti et al., 2022; Lu et al., 2024; Nweke et al., 2024). For instance, Nweke et al. (2024) noted that academic stress prompts students to cyberloaf. Similarly, Sriwahyuningsih and Barseli (2023) posited that University students with academic stress cyberloaf to mitigate academic stress. There has also been research to indicate that stress caused by role ambiguity promotes cyberloafing (Wiastuti et al., 2022). The above studies indicate a mixture of findings related to cyberloafing and stress. Hence, it appears that the specific interests of researchers could drive conclusions of the research.

The contexts of studies could also influence research findings, as individuals are likely to consider cyberloafing from different perspectives in different work settings. Contextual elements are important in research to gain a more widespread understanding of a concept (Sonnentag et al. 2017). Studies in the past have concentrated on settings such as academic institutes (Metin-Orta and Saygili,2021; Krishna and Agrawal, 2023), Knowledge-intensive work settings (Professionals such as lawyers, accountants, academics, medical professionals and engineering professionals) (Aghaz and Sheikh, 2016), Management employees, service sector employees and technical employees (Sonnentag et al., 2017), investment management, recruitment (O'Neill et al., 2014) and administrative employees of universities (Skeja and Lorcu, 2022), corporate workers (Shaddiq et al., 2020) and their conclusions have differed.

Contextual similarities were also observed in the above research findings. For example, cyberloafing and stress related to the hospital sector were minimal, although most nurses carried personal mobile devices at work (Alqahtani et al., 2022). This notion was previously supported by others such as Arslan and Demir (2016) and Kemer and Özcan (2021) in the same industry. Similarly, university students' cyberloafing using social media was found to be detrimental to their academic performance and psychological well-being. This finding was confirmed by others such as Feng et al. (2019), Skeja and Lorcu (2022), and Metin-Orta and Saygili (2023). The above confirms the notion of Sonnentag et al. (2017), which suggested that contextual factors may influence research findings. The same view can apply to research on cyberloafing and stress.

However, there seems to be a dearth of research on cyberloafing and stress related to the apparel manufacturing sector globally. The apparel manufacturing sector is a leading industry in the Asian region, especially in countries such as Sri Lanka, Vietnam, Bangladesh, China and India. This industry plays a major role in contributing to their national economies and provides direct and indirect employment to many. Similarly, the Sri Lankan apparel manufacturing industry is identified as a major industry contributing to the national economy.

As the industry has become ICT-enabled, work in this sector has become complex and demanding, increasing the propensity for employees to engage in cyberloafing. Hence the dearth of research related to this industry in the past creates a gap in the literature. Hence, the following hypothesis is formulated to ascertain the effect of cyberloafing on the stress of merchandisers in the large-scale apparel manufacturing sector in Sri Lanka.

H1: Cyberloafing has a significant impact on Stress of merchandisers in the large-scale apparel manufacturing sector in Sri Lanka.

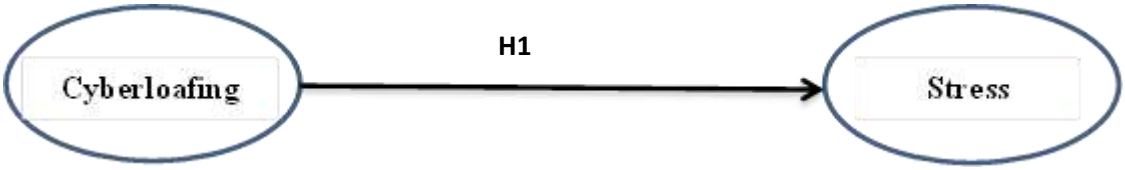

Figure 1: The theoretical model of the study
Source: Authors own work

MATERIALS AND METHODS

A self-report online questionnaire was considered most appropriate as it is a method that is practical and efficient in getting data from a large number of participants dispersed throughout the country (Paulhus and Vazire, 2007; Rovers et al., 2019). Hence, an online questionnaire was used to collect data from a cohort of employees whose work is complex, demanding and time-bound. They use the internet for their work regularly to communicate with customers and to satisfy production requirements.

The target population of the study is merchandisers of large-scale apparel manufacturing companies in Sri Lanka. A sample of 322 merchandisers was selected out of the 2000-member population of the study, using the Krejcie and Morgan table (1970). The convenience sampling method was used as these employees are geographically dispersed and are generally difficult to access. All participants are volunteers, and no personal or other details were requested during the study. A five-point Likert scale questionnaire was used to collect data online.

The questionnaire was approved by the merchandising managers of 5 different companies of its comprehensibility. Pre-testing a questionnaire is necessary to identify and remove questions that do not fit well with the context expected to be used (Zikmund et al., 2000). A Likert scale questionnaire is considered an appropriate tool to collect data online from dispersed participants of research and a simple tool to use (Chyung et al., 2017). Yaska and Nuhu (2024) suggested that a 5-point Likert scale is the best as it provides a mid-point to indicate neutrality of the participant. The questionnaire comprised two main sections related to constructs, namely cyberloafing and stress.

The independent variable, cyberloafing, was measured using items proposed by Lim (2002). Seven (7) items were used to measure the construct and included items linked to browsing and emailing.

Among them, statements such as "I check personal emails", "I read personal emails at work" and "I send personal emails" were connected with emailing and "I visit sports Websites", "I visit general news sites", and "I visit entertainment sites" were connected with browsing. The dependent variable stress was measured with the depression, anxiety and stress (DASS) scale developed by Crawford and Henry (2003) using three (3) items for depression, four (4) items for anxiety and six (6) items for stress.

The statements included "I felt nothing to look forward to", "I felt breathing difficulty", "I found it difficult to work up an initiative", "It is difficult for me to tolerate interruptions", "I overreact to situations", etc.

Data was analysed using partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) version 4.0. This particular method was selected due to its flexibility in accommodating complex research and the efficiency it offered in social science research (Hair et al., 2019).

RESULTS

The response rate was 97%, with 315 participants returning the questionnaire, of which 62% were male and 38% were female. More than 81% of respondents had tenure of employment above 7 years, and about 85% were above the age of 35, indicating employment and age maturity. This depicts the likelihood of greater respect, reliability and responsible behaviour towards responding to the questionnaire.

Validity Reliability

This study used PLS-SEM version 4.0 to prove validity and reliability and to test the hypothesis of the study (Hair et al., 2019). SWe performed a preliminary analysis to test for validity and reliability. The Cronbach's alpha values for cyberloafing and stress were 0.850 and 0.925, respectively, indicating internal consistency. Convergent validity was assessed with average variance extracted (AVE), the results indicated 0.503 for cyberloafing and 0.530 for stress, depicting convergent validity.

Discriminant validity was assessed using the Fornell-Larcker criterion, which indicated the following results.

Table 1: Fornell-Larcker criterion

	Cyberloafing	Stress
Cyberloafing	0.709	
Stress	0.415	0.728

Source: SmartPLS Output (2025)

The above results prove validity and reliability of the model of the study.

Hypothesis Testing PLS-SEM was used to test the hypothesis and the following results were obtained.

Table 2: Direct Effect between cyberloafing and stress

	Orignal Samle (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics (O/STDEV)	P values
Cyberloafing Stress	0.017	0.035	0.041	0.163	0.458

Source: PLS-SEM Output (2025)

The result of the study has indicated that cyberloafing does not cause stress among merchandisers in the large-scale apparel manufacturing sector in Sri Lanka. The P value in the above table is above 0.05, which rejects the hypothesis of the study.

DISCUSSION

The main purpose of this research is to determine the impact of cyberloafing on stress of merchandisers in large-scale apparel manufacturing companies in Sri Lanka. This is an important area as there is a dearth of research related to the apparel manufacturing industry in Sri Lanka and globally on cyberloafing and stress. It is significant as the apparel manufacturing sector today is ICT-enabled; as such, most individuals employed in the industry are likely to engage with the Internet as a part of their work. Merchandisers are employees who use the internet profusely to perform their functions. Such prolonged internet use may predispose them to cyberloafing. This finding is also significant as it may offer an opening for researchers to expand research into other occupations that are more prone to use the Internet for work in the apparel manufacturing sector. The contribution of the finding is significant as this fills a significant gap that existed in research in the past.

Results of the study affirmed that cyberloafing does not cause stress among merchandisers in large-scale apparel manufacturing companies in Sri Lanka. This finding rejects the hypothesis that cyberloafing has a significant impact on stress of merchandisers.

The above finding seems to contradict some past research results. Many have claimed that cyberloafing is a potential source of stress as it consumes valuable cognitive resources of individuals (Sonnentag et al, 2018; Koay and Soh, 2018). Barber and Santuzzi (2015) and Askew et al. (2014) claimed that prolonged cyberloafing can cause stress. This notion seems to have specified the duration of cyberloafing for it to be stressful. Day et al. (2010) suggested that ICT integration for work settings has increased employee stress levels. It has been argued that high exposure to ICT at work leads to depression, anxiety and stress among employees (Thomée et al., 2007). Gökçearslan et al. (2018) posited that cyberloafing with smartphone addiction increased stress among university students. Gökçearslan's finding corroborates with the recent finding of Metin-Orta and Saygili (2021), which reiterated that cyberloafing causes adverse effects on university students. Cyberloafing was found to be a major cause of stress among employees in the financial sector (O'Neill et al., 2014). Leikas and Ilmarinen (2016) and Trougakos et al. (2014) also posited that cyberloafing on social media causes stress as it depletes cognitive energy. Krishna and Agrawal (2023) also determined that psychological well-being is affected by cyberloafing using smartphones. Similarly, Wu et al. (2020) noted that cyberloafing can cause mental fatigue. Similarly, Skeja and Lorcu (2022) confirmed that cyberloafing causes stress among individuals. However, none of the studies noted above have specifically indicated the work environments within which these studies were carried out in detail. This could be important as the work

environment may affect cyberloafing behaviour. Further, the group of individuals is also a potential source that could affect the outcome of the research.

Interestingly, others have disclaimed the above view and posited that cyberloafing functions as a tool to mitigate stress. In the 90s, Oravec (1999) determined that cyberloafing functioned as a tool to reduce strain at work. Lim and Chen (2012) argued that cyberloafing in the form of browsing had a positive effect on employees as it served as an instrument to mitigate stress. These conclusions suggest that cyberloafing is a tool to reduce stress and improve performance. The performance improvement is likely to happen as an employee with reduced strain is predisposed to enhance performance, thus supporting organisational performance. An interesting point is that the above research does not specify the time duration of cyberloafing, indicating that cyberloafing supports performance. Sao et al. (2020) also suggested that browsing activities have the potential to improve employee learning new skills and improve performance. In this situation, the duration of browsing has not been identified, leading to the assumption that browsing is good for employee performance. Andel et al. (2019) posited that cyberloafing is complex and serves as a coping apparatus during periods of stress. Pindek et al. (2018) found that cyberloafing is a coping strategy for those bored at work due to work underload. These findings reiterate the function of cyberloafing as a coping mechanism. Coker (2013) posited that cyberloafing facilitated a higher level of recovery from fatigue. It was also suggested that recovery achieved with cyberloafing increased work commitment (Syrek et al. 2017). Additionally, Soelton et al. (2024) confirmed that fatigue generated with work can be successfully reduced with cyberloafing. They argue that employees are prone to deviate from work when they are mentally fatigued, and cyberloafing is an option that is immediately available for them to deviate from work. Wu et al. (2025) also suggested that cyberloafing by listening to music helps individuals recover from stress. Discussing the benefits of cyberloafing, Yan et al. (2025) contended that it could serve as a medium to alleviate negative emotions. The findings of the above research broadly suggest that cyberloafing is a tool to reduce stress and improve job performance. None of the above research has highlighted the influence that the contexts of the studies might have had on the conclusions. Context of a research could be vital to understand the outcome as they differ from industry to industry and country to country. Instead, they broadly claim that cyberloafing functioned as a tool to reduce stress.

Nonetheless, some have noted that a moderate level of cyberloafing is beneficial for employees as it helps them cope with stress (Stoddart, 2016). Askew et al. (2014) promoted that cyberloafing at a moderate level serves as a tool to reduce strain. Psychological detachment is a state in which an individual can achieve complete psychological removal from work, alleviating strain (Sonnentag and Bayer, 2005). Wu et al. (2020) agree with this view and claim that social cyberloafing is helpful to reduce strain. Employees using the internet during their breaks are taken as a recovery activity (Quinones and Griffiths, 2017). This finding implies that cyberloafing is useful to reduce stress, and enabling employees to re-engage with work at the end of the break with less stress and allowing them to be more productive. In a recent study, Banerjee et al. (2025) suggested that cyberloafing activities such as social media use, shopping online, communicating with friends and others are useful to mitigate stress at work. But the researchers argue that these activities should be limited to a short duration, otherwise they will impact job performance. A recent study by Guo et al. (2025) indicated an inverted-U shape relationship between cyberloafing and task performance. In this, the researchers argue that cyberloafing at a moderate level improved task performance and deterioration of the same was observed when cyberloafing continued unabated. Hence, it is observed that cyberloafing for a short duration supports individuals to relieve stress and improve job performance.

Further, other researchers identified both the beneficial and detrimental effects of cyberloafing. Bosamia (2013) proposed that cyberloafing has both positive and negative impacts on the individual. Other researchers have also indicated that cyberloafing has positive and negative effects on employee health (Caldwell, 2005; Fritz and Sonnentag, 2006; Fritz et al., 2010). Koay and Soh (2018) suggested that cyberloafing has positive and negative effects on organisations. Recently,

Banerjee et al. (2025) called cyberloafing complex, as it has a dual nature and serves as the cornerstone for innovation and blueprint for organisational failure. The above assertions highlight the complex nature of cyberloafing and imply that this phenomenon should be handled with carefully to ensure that it does not impact organisations negatively.

While the above assertions are diverse, it is interesting to note the diverse interests of the researchers in pursuing research on cyberloafing in different contexts. Cyberloafing is still evolving as there are numerous developments in ICT, including its uses and the devices that can be used to access the internet. These changes will encourage researchers to consider cyberloafing from different perspectives and contexts. These contextual variations are essential to highlight findings which will help expand current literature on the concept. Further, one can argue that the level of cyberloafing could vary from context to context and how researchers choose to operationalise cyberloafing. In the case of merchandisers in the apparel industry in Sri Lanka, they could have been less prolific cyberloafers than others, leading to the above results. Additionally, most findings on cyberloafing were from cross-sectional studies and can limit the understanding of the effects of long-term cyberloafing among many participants.

This study makes three major contributions, which have implications in research and practice. First, it contributes to the extant theory by examining the interplay between two theories, namely the conservation of resources and the transactional theory of stress and coping. As the results suggest, merchandisers seem to engage in cyberloafing as a means of conserving and replenishing resources lost during work. The stress that could originate due to cyberloafing is mitigated with the capacity of merchandisers to perceive the nature of stress and engage appropriate tools to reduce the same to prevent deleterious effects. It also explains the conservation of resources and transactional theory of stress and coping in a new setting, i.e. among merchandisers in the apparel manufacturing sector in Sri Lanka. This research also deviates from mainstream studies that overlook the potential benefits of cyberloafing in demanding, complex and time-bound work arrangements, such as merchandisers in the apparel manufacturing industries. As observed, the extant research has considered cyberloafing from both positive and negative perspectives in different contexts. However, there has been no research on merchandisers in the apparel manufacturing sector. This study hypothesised that cyberloafing has a significant impact on stress. However, the study revealed that cyberloafing did not reach far enough to cause stress and the ability of merchandisers to perceive the trigger level of stress and initiate actions to prevent any negative effects. This has a significant implication as it suggests that cyberloafing should not be viewed as a stressful behaviour that causes stress among merchandisers in the large-scale apparel manufacturing sector.

Second, this study enlarges the extant research on options available to recoup lost energy in a work setting with declining boundaries between work and life. Relying heavily on ICT for work, disappearing boundaries are common with their potential dangers to the well-being of individuals (Köffer et al., 2015; Banerjee et al., 2025). Maslach and Leiter (2017) noted that modern individual encounter increasing and demanding workloads, leading to exhaustion. Such demanding workloads necessitate some arrangements to let go of this tension. Cyberloafing is an option available to engage in non-work activities to release this tension and recoup lost energy. Individuals' cyberloafing in modern work settings with complex, demanding and exhaustive work arrangements, such as merchandising in the large-scale apparel manufacturing sector, is justified as a source to conserve and regain lost energy. This transcends what was earlier considered a break (Roy, 1959). Cyberloafing offers a different form of a break that does not require individuals to move away from the place of work at a scheduled time but allows detachment from work instantaneously when needed at their discretion. This implies that cyberloafing should not be rejected as deviant behaviour, but encouraged in moderation in the large-scale apparel manufacturing sector to enhance productivity.

Third, this study expands the understanding of this phenomenon, cyberloafing, and its inevitability in work settings that are ICT-

enabled and with easy access to smartphones. This expansion is relevant to human resources management literature as managing human resources in ICT-enabled organisations has to be realigned with these new issues and search for appropriate measures to mitigate the deleterious effects of cyberloafing in such industries. This study demonstrates that psychological detachment to relieve stress is vital in industries where employees strive to meet customer demands on a 24/7 basis. As such, psychological detachment in the form of rest should be understood as an occupational need to gain employee satisfaction and a higher level of performance. Hence, human resources professionals should accept that cyberloafing is a part of performance that needs monitoring and, in some instances, encouraged to reap the full potential of employees.

Given the prevalence of stress and burnout in modern job settings, this study offers important practical implications for employees and organisations. The study highlighted that cyberloafing is a double-edged sword that can promote positive and negative effects (Lim and Chen, 2012; O'Neill et al., 2014; Sonnentag et al., 2017; Liu et al., 2025). While it is often observed that cyberloafing is detrimental, this study demonstrated that cyberloafing does not generate stress. Cyberloafing is used as a medium to relieve stress and can prevent work stress from causing negative effects on performance. From a real-world perspective, cyberloafing was perceived as a negative behaviour that prompted companies to restrict it or place stringent conditions for its use. These restrictions may cause employee discontentment and potentially work against the positive effects of cyberloafing. Therefore, managers in industries that are ICT-integrated should holistically reflect on the impacts of cyberloafing when contemplating restricting and blocking it from organisations or leaving it open for employees to decide (Ivarsson and Larsson, 2012). When permitted to use it responsibly, cyberloafing can offer micro-pauses from work, providing much-needed breaks for employees (Trougakos et al., 2014; Wu et al., 2025). However, as demonstrated, cyberloafing can also lead to mental fatigue (Sonnentag et al., 2017; Wu et al., 2020). Hence, we suggest that organisations allow employees to decide on cyberloafing, and managers should inform them of the potential detrimental effects of excessive cyberloafing on their psychological well-being. Further, organisations can promote organisational-based-self-esteem of employees to reduce their interest in cyberloafing.

Additionally, companies can introduce guidelines for cyberloafing and encourage employees to adhere to them to promote ethical cyberloafing. Managers can also provide employees with SMART goals and manage performance to encourage goal-directed behaviour.

This study has several limitations. First, the study has explored cyberloafing of a single group of employees whose jobs are ICT-enabled, leaving out many other positions within the large-scale apparel manufacturing industry. This would limit the understanding of cyberloafing within the industry. Second, the research was carried out using a self-administered questionnaire, which may have led to a lack of openness in expressing the true nature of cyberloafing among merchandisers. This may pose a bias towards the more comfortable level of cyberloafing. Third, this research is confined to the large-scale apparel manufacturing sector, leaving out many other industries whose jobs are ICT-enabled. Finally, this study is limited to stress as a dependent variable, confining its findings to that single relationship between cyberloafing and stress.

Future research can concentrate on other positions that are ICT-enabled within the large-scale apparel manufacturing industry in the country to gain a complete picture of cyberloafing behaviour in the industry. Future research can concentrate on mixed methods to gain nuanced articulations of individuals related to cyberloafing. Research can also observe cyberloafing in other industries to gain a broader understanding of the same in those industries in the country. Researchers can also look into the causes of strain and depletion of resources that precipitate cyberloafing and identify actions to lessen its effects on employees. Research could also focus on the apparel manufacturing industries of other countries to ascertain whether the impact of cyberloafing on stress is the same. Further, research can also use stress as a mediator to ascertain how it mediates the effect of cyberloafing and job performance in the apparel manufacturing industry.

CONCLUSION

The study attempted to discover whether cyberloafing caused stress among merchandisers in the apparel manufacturing industry in Sri Lanka. The results revealed that cyberloafing does not cause stress among merchandisers in this industry. We have highlighted the significance of cyberloafing as a tool to mitigate the stress of employees. In doing so, we have indicated that cyberloafing is not broadly a potential source of stress, especially for those who can perceive stress and have the ability to initiate actions to prevent its effects. Further, this has illustrated that cyberloafing could also be a source of psychological detachment in industries that are ICT-enabled, with 24/7 customer service. The study has also highlighted the interplay between the theories of conservation of resources and the transactional theory of stress and coping. Therefore, employers should be mindful of both the negative and positive consequences of cyberloafing at work and consider action cautiously to enhance employee potential. Future research can look for the mediating effect of stress on cyberloafing and job performance and use research methodologies such as mixed method to understand the impact of cyberloafing on stress.

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