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# DIGITAL SURVEILLANCE AND DEVIANCE IN VIRTUAL TEAMS: THE ROLE OF EMPLOYEE SILENCE AND SOCIAL ISOLATION IN INDONESIAN FINTECH WORKPLACES

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## ABSTRACT

*As virtual work becomes increasingly institutionalized, digital surveillance has emerged as a central managerial practice that reshapes employees' emotional and relational experiences. Grounded in Affective Events Theory (AET), this study investigates how persistent monitoring environments are associated with employees' tendencies to withhold voice, experience social disconnection, and engage in counterproductive work behaviors within virtual teams. Survey data collected from 323 employees work in Indonesia FinTech companies and analyzed using PLS-SEM reveal that emotional withdrawal in the form of silence, relational detachment manifested as social isolation, and pervasive digital surveillance are each associated with higher levels of counterproductive behavior. The findings further indicate that surveillance intensifies the translation of silence and isolation into deviant responses, functioning as an affective amplifier rather than a purely preventive control mechanism. By conceptualizing digital surveillance as an ongoing socio-technical affective event, this study extends AET to virtual work contexts and highlights the importance of balancing performance monitoring with psychological safety and relational integrity in digitally mediated organizations.*

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**KEYWORDS:** Digital Surveillance, Counterproductive Work Behavior, Employee Silence, Social Isolation, Virtual Teams, FinTech.

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## INTRODUCTION

The advent of virtual work arrangements—accelerated markedly by the COVID-19 pandemic—has ushered in a paradigmatic transformation in how managerial oversight is conceived and operationalized. With the dissolution of physical boundaries and the ascendancy of digital communication infrastructures, organizational control mechanisms have been recalibrated to suit the demands of distributed labor. Digital surveillance technologies, initially adopted for efficiency and task coordination, now constitute a pervasive layer of managerial architecture, engendering novel relational dynamics between supervisors and employees (Becker et al., 2022; Pratt et al., 2022).

Contemporary remote work configurations frequently utilize algorithmic oversight tools, including keystroke tracking, communication analytics, and project management dashboards. These tools, while offering real-time performance monitoring, simultaneously evoke concerns over psychological strain and erosion of personal boundaries (Lund-Tønnesen & Fossheim, 2025; Pratt et al., 2022). Continuous surveillance may exacerbate stress and elevate cognitive load, undermining motivation and adversely impacting work performance if unmoderated (Bhatia et al., 2021).

This tension is particularly pronounced in digital-native firms such as those in the FinTech sector, where surveillance is integrated deeply into operational logics for risk mitigation, data protection, and service optimization (Abdullah & AL-Abrow, 2022). In such contexts, surveillance is not merely administrative but constitutive of organizational identity. However, its normalization prompts ethical quandaries around autonomy, fairness, and trust, with intensifying surveillance often correlating with diminished psychological safety.

Although surveillance is ostensibly intended to improve compliance and accountability, its excessive implementation may produce counterproductive outcomes. Heightened visibility can cultivate a culture of suspicion, inhibiting interpersonal trust and provoking defensive psychological postures among employees (Kovalenko et al., 2023; Lund-Tønnesen & Fossheim, 2025). When perceived as disproportionate, surveillance transforms into a psychosocial stressor that undermines morale and catalyzes deviant workplace behaviors (He et al., 2021).

Scholars and practitioners increasingly advocate for human-centric surveillance governance frameworks. These include transparent

communication of surveillance objectives, the provision of emotional and psychological support for monitored employees, and the cultivation of empathetic leadership (Bhatti et al., 2022). Effective implementation requires a delicate balance: maintaining operational control while safeguarding employee dignity and relational cohesion (Kim & Ishikawa, 2021).

The psychosocial ramifications of sustained digital surveillance are multifaceted. For some employees, it may bolster performance by reinforcing accountability; for others, it evokes chronic anxiety and emotional fatigue (Choi, 2019; Bhatti et al., 2022). Research confirms that persistent monitoring contributes to elevated levels of mental distress, particularly anxiety and depressive symptoms, which degrade cognitive focus and social functioning (Bhatti et al., 2022; Li et al., 2021). Such outcomes may manifest in behavioral withdrawal or diminished occupational commitment (Yanchus et al., 2014; Mazzone et al., 2023).

Importantly, these psychological outcomes are not confined to the individual level—they influence collective dynamics as well. Emotional depletion and motivational decline are commonly reported under high-surveillance regimes (Chung, 2015; Wu et al., 2011), and perceived restrictions on autonomy suppress creative and innovative impulses (Choi, 2019). Interpersonal mistrust may also intensify, as employees become wary of peer interactions under ubiquitous monitoring, thereby weakening team cohesion (Bhatti et al., 2022).

Non-instrumental consequences of digital oversight further compound these issues. Declines in job satisfaction and morale are frequently observed when surveillance is interpreted as coercive or excessive (Koay, 2018). Employees may respond with disengagement strategies such as cyberloafing. Social bonds suffer as workers retract from interactions perceived as performative or risky (Mazzone et al., 2023; Li et al., 2021), while fear of reputational harm deters proactive or experimental behavior (Choi, 2019; Wu et al., 2011).

These patterns coalesce within the framework of counterproductive work behaviors (CWB)—volitional actions that undermine organizational goals or well-being (Al-Romeedy & Khairy, 2024). In virtual work contexts, where ambiguity and surveillance intersect, CWB becomes a salient behavioral outlet. Acts such as withholding effort, misrepresenting progress, or disengaging from collaboration are often symptomatic of deeper psychological contract breaches (Griep & Vantilborgh, 2018).

Despite growing scholarly attention, extant research has yet to fully explicate the indirect pathways linking surveillance to CWB. While some evidence points to performance gains under controlled surveillance, others warn of long-term harm to morale and interdependence (Karim et al., 2021). A salient oversight in the literature concerns the mediating roles of affective and relational responses—specifically, how perceived surveillance elicits feelings of exclusion or emotional risk.

One such mediating mechanism is social isolation: persistent monitoring may attenuate informal interpersonal interactions, fostering detachment and loneliness. Another is employee silence—the strategic withholding of feedback or dissent in environments deemed evaluative or unsupportive (Gkorezis et al., 2016). Together, these dynamics may explain why even technically benign surveillance regimes yield maladaptive behavioral consequences.

This study engages with these gaps by examining the intersecting roles of employee silence and social isolation in mediating the relationship between digital surveillance and CWB. By integrating organizational behavior, occupational psychology, and information systems literatures, it reconceptualizes surveillance as a socio-emotional condition—not merely a managerial tool. The aim is to provide a theoretically enriched and empirically grounded account of how surveillance reshapes workplace behaviors in distributed digital environments, and how its effects might be modulated through affective and relational mechanisms.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### *Reconceptualizing Counterproductive Work Behaviors (CWB)*

Counterproductive Work Behaviors (CWB) refer to intentional actions by employees that violate established organizational norms and hinder the achievement of workplace goals (Spector & Fox, 2002). These behaviors span a continuum from overt acts of aggression—such as sabotage, theft, and verbal hostility—to more covert forms like work withdrawal, non-compliance, and passive resistance (Miao et al., 2020). Building upon foundational typologies, scholars have categorized CWB into domains of destructive behavior, interpersonal antagonism, and strategic disengagement (Ali & Johl, 2020; Clercq et al., 2021). Such behaviors inflict not only operational disruptions but also broader relational damage, including diminished trust, fractured collaboration, and demoralization.

Emerging literature underscores that CWB arises from both psychological and contextual antecedents. Psychologically, emotional exhaustion, perceived ostracism, and job dissatisfaction act as salient precursors (Awad & Sayed, 2023). Psychological contract violations—wherein perceived discrepancies exist between organizational promises and realities—further trigger retaliatory or avoidant behaviors (Griep & Vantilborgh, 2018). Contextually, toxic leadership, weak procedural justice, and fragmented social norms create permissive environments for behavioral deviance (Kouchaki & Wareham, 2015; Sahoo et al., 2022).

### *Virtual Team and the Displacement of Normative Control*

The proliferation of virtual work models has upended traditional mechanisms of normative control. Previously enforced through in-person supervision and spatial visibility, social regulation is now increasingly mediated through digital infrastructures. While remote work offers flexibility, it also produces ambiguity in accountability, behavioral expectations, and social boundaries (Becker et al., 2022). This erosion of shared cues and informal feedback diminishes normative constraints, thus weakening behavioral regulation.

Coordination within distributed teams relies heavily on digital platforms that encode norms and structure interaction. These platforms may streamline tasks but also foster miscommunication and relational strain when norms are poorly codified or inconsistently reinforced (Liang et al., 2021). Digital surveillance technologies, though potentially helpful for clarifying task accountability, can engender emotional fatigue and behavioral reactance if perceived as excessive or mistrustful (Bhatia et al., 2021). This duality—efficiency versus alienation—reveals the paradoxical nature of digital control mechanisms.

When experienced as punitive or coercive, surveillance can provoke defensive responses such as cyberloafing, passive resistance, or procedural sabotage (Pratt et al., 2022). As such, digital monitoring must be interrogated not solely for performance enhancement but for its psychosocial reverberations across employee behavior and team dynamics.

### *Digital Surveillance as a Socio-Technical System*

Digital surveillance encompasses a spectrum of algorithmic tools used to monitor employee behavior—including keystroke tracking,

performance analytics, and productivity dashboards (Inglezakis, 2017). These technologies decouple oversight from temporal and spatial constraints, enabling continuous data collection at scale. While intended to optimize efficiency, they fundamentally alter the relational contract between employer and employee (Bhatia et al., 2021).

Functionally, digital surveillance enhances visibility and managerial control. Psychosocially, however, it can erode perceptions of autonomy, trust, and psychological safety. Surveillance mechanisms that lack transparency or are experienced as intrusive may undermine discretionary effort and organizational identification (Bollmann & Krings, 2015). Furthermore, algorithmic interpretations of behavioral data—absent context, tone, or intent—may foster misjudgments and increase anxiety.

In high-autonomy, cognitively complex roles, the psychological costs of surveillance are amplified. Without relational buffers such as supportive leadership or empathetic peer networks, employees may experience anticipatory stress, emotional depletion, and hyper-vigilance (Bhatia et al., 2021). Digital oversight, therefore, must be situated within a broader socio-technical analysis that acknowledges its affective, relational, and ethical dimensions.

### *Surveillance, Withdrawal, and the Affective Mechanisms of Deviance*

A growing corpus of scholarship identifies employee silence and social isolation as mediating pathways through which digital surveillance induces CWB. Employee silence refers to the intentional withholding of concerns, feedback, or ideas due to perceived interpersonal risk or futility (Ünder & Gerede, 2021). In surveillance-rich environments, expressive behavior becomes increasingly fraught, prompting risk-averse communication strategies that impair organizational adaptability.

Similarly, social isolation denotes a weakening of relational ties and a diminished sense of belonging within teams. High-intensity monitoring can reduce informal exchanges and increase self-consciousness, leading to emotional withdrawal and relational disengagement (Wang et al., 2020). These affective responses are adaptive on an individual level but deleterious to collective functioning.

Affective Events Theory (AET) elucidates these dynamics by positing that affective stimuli in the workplace shape emotional reactions, which then guide behavior. Within this framework, digital surveillance functions as a persistent ambient stressor—a structural condition rather than a discrete event. Silence and isolation, in turn, serve as affective

intermediaries that translate perceived threat into behavioral deviance (Ünder & Gerede, 2021).

These patterns contribute to broader disintegration of team cohesion and shared norms. As employees retreat to protect emotional resources, mutual accountability and communicative reciprocity decline, thus fostering CWB. Surveillance thus not only governs cognitive behavior but reconfigures the affective and relational foundations of organizational life.

### *Research Contributions and Gaps*

Although digital surveillance has become pervasive in contemporary organizations, its psychosocial ramifications—particularly within the context of virtual teams—remain underexplored. Existing literature has predominantly treated surveillance as a technical intervention focused on compliance and performance optimization, with limited attention to its affective, emotional, and relational costs (Rasool et al., 2020).

Moreover, prior research on psychosocial antecedents of CWB has rarely integrated digital surveillance as a core predictor. While discrete stressors such as ostracism, perceived injustice, and workload burden are well documented (Lynch & Rodell, 2018; Chung, 2015; Islam et al., 2022), few studies have modeled how the convergence of these stressors within digitally mediated environments escalates risk for CWB. Notably, the mediating roles of employee silence and social isolation remain theoretically underspecified despite their salience in virtual contexts.

This study addresses these lacunae by positioning digital surveillance as a socio-technical condition that modulates affective states and relational dynamics. Extending Affective Events Theory (AET), the research conceptualizes surveillance not merely as a managerial tool, but as a persistent affective stimulus that restructures communication patterns, impairs trust, and fosters withdrawal. In doing so, the study offers an integrated framework that captures the emotional, behavioral, and contextual determinants of CWB in digital work environments—particularly in high-intensity sectors such as FinTech operating in emerging markets. This theoretical advancement responds to the urgent need for ethically attuned, empirically grounded insights into the behavioral implications of workplace surveillance.

## **METHODS**

### *Research Design and Justification*

This research adopted a cross-sectional, explanatory design to investigate the structural

relationships among digital surveillance, employee silence, social isolation, and counterproductive work behaviors (CWB) within virtual teams. The analytical strategy employed Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). PLS-SEM was selected instead of covariance-based SEM (CB-SEM) because the study emphasizes prediction and theory development rather than strict theory confirmation, and the model includes multiple mediation pathways with latent constructs. In addition, PLS-SEM is more suitable for behavioral research contexts where data distribution may deviate from normality and where sample sizes are moderate (Bari et al., 2020).

PLS-SEM provides robust estimations of both direct and indirect effects, making it appropriate for the dual-mediator model hypothesized in this study. Additionally, its capacity to accommodate both reflective and formative constructs allows for a nuanced operationalization of socio-psychological variables. This aligns with the study's objective of capturing latent psychological mechanisms through rigorous model diagnostics, including reliability indices, Average Variance Extracted (AVE), and discriminant validity through Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratios (Wang et al., 2020).

### Research Setting and Sampling Strategy

The empirical setting was the Indonesian FinTech industry, a sector marked by rapid digitalization and extensive reliance on distributed work arrangements. This context provides fertile ground for examining

the psychosocial consequences of digital surveillance. The unit of analysis comprised individuals working in virtual teams—defined as interdependent collectives collaborating through digital means without consistent face-to-face interaction (Ebrahim et al., 2009).

A stratified purposive sampling technique was employed, leveraging segmentation data from the Association of Fintech Indonesia. Inclusion criteria mandated that respondents: (1) were employed in a FinTech organization, (2) functioned within a team that met the virtual team criteria, and (3) had a minimum of six months of experience under a digitally monitored work regime. Out of 398 collected responses, 323 were retained after rigorous screening for completeness and eligibility.

### Measures and Instrumentation

All focal constructs were operationalized using multi-item Likert scales ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree), adapted from validated instruments in the literature. To counteract response bias and detect straightlining, three reverse-coded items were embedded strategically within the survey.

A pilot study involving 37 respondents was conducted to enhance the clarity, logical sequencing, and cultural appropriateness of survey items. Where relevant, a forward-backward translation procedure was used to ensure semantic equivalence and conceptual fidelity across languages (Knoll et al., 2021).

**Table 1. Construct Summary and Sample Items**

Construct	Items	Source	Dimension	Sample Item
Digital Surveillance (DS)	4	Bhatia et al. (2021)	Monitoring intensity and visibility	"My work activities are constantly monitored through digital tools."
Employee Silence (ES)	4	Ünder & Gerede (2021)	Defensive/acquiescent silence	"I choose not to express concerns to avoid possible backlash."
Social Isolation (SI)	5	Wang et al. (2020)	Emotional detachment from peers	"I feel emotionally disconnected from my coworkers."
Counterproductive Work Behaviors (CWB)	5	Miao et al. (2020)	Deviant work behaviors	"I deliberately put less effort into my work than I could."

### Data Collection Procedure

Data were collected through an anonymous, web-based survey platform—aligned with the virtual work environment of the sample—to minimize social desirability bias and enhance candor when reporting sensitive behaviors such as CWB. The survey preamble employed neutral framing to reduce demand characteristics. Further methodological rigor was ensured by delaying CWB items until later in the instrument and defining a temporal reference frame for behavioral reporting.

Best practices for sensitive data collection were

observed, including explicit assurances of anonymity, informed consent, neutral phrasing of items, and clear delineation of the study's purpose.

### Data Analysis Strategy

Hypothesis testing was conducted using PLS-SEM, leveraging its strengths in modeling latent constructs, handling non-parametric data, and testing complex mediation pathways. Measurement validity was established through composite reliability, AVE, and discriminant validity via HTMT ratios. Structural relationships were assessed using

bootstrapping procedures with 5000 resamples, and key parameters—including path coefficients, effect sizes ( $f^2$ ), and predictive relevance ( $Q^2$ )—were reported. Robustness checks, including alternative model specifications and subgroup analyses, were employed to enhance inferential confidence.

### *Ethical Safeguards*

The research protocol adhered to established ethical standards in organizational research. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, participation was strictly voluntary, and anonymity was guaranteed through secure data handling practices. Given the sensitive nature of constructs such as digital surveillance and CWB, respondents were permitted to skip any item without penalty. Results were reported only in aggregate form to protect individual identities. These procedures align with normative ethical frameworks advocating transparency, proportionality, and data privacy in workplace surveillance studies (Inglezakis, 2017).

## **RESULT**

Following a rigorous data screening protocol, only responses deemed valid and complete were included in the final analysis. Participants were all affiliated with FinTech firms in Indonesia and actively engaged in virtual or hybrid team settings. Preliminary diagnostics showed no indications of excessive item non-response, response sets, or patterned answering that might signal inattentiveness. Distributions of individual items showed no extreme skewness or kurtosis, supporting the suitability of the dataset for PLS-SEM, which does not assume multivariate normality.

To ensure the reliability of path coefficient estimates, collinearity diagnostics were conducted prior to structural modeling. Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values for all latent variables and structural paths fell well below the threshold of 5.0, indicating the absence of multicollinearity issues. These assessments affirmed the statistical adequacy of the dataset for subsequent structural and measurement model estimations.

### *Measurement Model Assessment*

The assessment of the reflective measurement model adhered to established guidelines within the PLS-SEM framework. Indicator reliability was determined through standardized outer loadings, with all items pertaining to digital surveillance (DS), employee silence (ES), social isolation (SI), and counterproductive work behaviors (CWB) demonstrating strong loadings on their respective

latent variables. These exceeded the commonly accepted thresholds, indicating that the items reliably captured the theoretical variance of their constructs.

Internal consistency was evaluated using both composite reliability and Cronbach's alpha. Each construct displayed reliability indices well above accepted cut-off values, reinforcing the internal coherence of the item sets. These results affirm that the measurement instruments maintained their integrity when applied to the Indonesian FinTech context involving virtual work arrangements. Table 2 presents a summary of the key measurement model statistics.

*Table 2. Measurement Model*

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability (CR)	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
DS	0.946	0.961	0.86
ES	0.774	0.875	0.685
SI	0.959	0.969	0.86
CWB	0.958	0.968	0.857

Convergent validity was evaluated using the Average Variance Extracted (AVE), with all constructs exceeding the standard cut-off values, thus confirming that each latent construct accounted for over 50% of the variance in its respective indicators. Discriminant validity was assessed using the Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio, and all HTMT values remained below the accepted thresholds, thereby establishing sufficient empirical distinction among the constructs. Taken together, these results demonstrate that the measurement model satisfied the necessary reliability and validity criteria, supporting its adequacy for subsequent structural modeling, providing evidence of adequate empirical separation among DS, ES, SI, and CWB.

Collectively, these results confirm that the measurement model met reliability and validity requirements and was suitable for structural model estimation. All constructs met the established criteria for internal consistency ( $\alpha$ , CR > 0.70) and convergent validity (AVE > 0.50). Discriminant validity was established through Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratios, all of which were below the 0.85 threshold.

### *Structural Model*

After confirming the robustness of the measurement model, the structural model was assessed by examining the coefficients of determination ( $R^2$ ), path estimates, and predictive relevance. The  $R^2$  values indicated that digital surveillance accounted for a substantial proportion of variance in employee silence ( $R^2 = 0.702$ ) and counterproductive work behavior ( $R^2 = 0.816$ ) as

presented in Figure 1. These results suggest that perceptions of surveillance are potent predictors of both communicative withdrawal and deviant conduct within digitally monitored virtual teams.

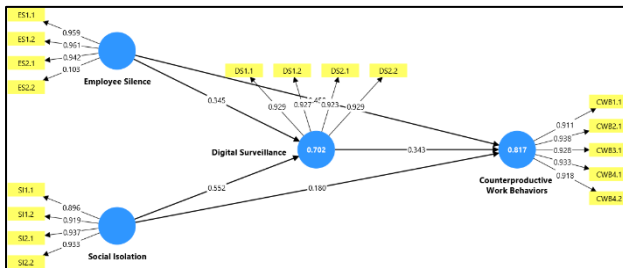


Figure 1. Structural Model

Notably, the model's capacity to explain CWB was particularly strong, with over 80% of its variance accounted for by the predictor variables. This reflects the theoretical strength and practical utility of the model in capturing both psychological and behavioral withdrawal in remote work contexts. The explanatory variables collectively provide a robust account of how affective and relational mechanisms, such as silence and surveillance, shape deviance in technology-driven organizational environments.

**Direct Effects**

The direct structural path from employee silence and social isolation to counterproductive work behaviors was positive and statistically significant, indicating that higher perceived intrusiveness of surveillance was associated with elevated levels of CWB among employees in virtual FinTech teams. This finding supports the premise that surveillance practices, when perceived as controlling or invasive, can elicit adverse behavioral responses. Table 3 reports the estimated direct effects.

Table 3. Direct Effects

Path	Coefficient (β)	t-Value	p-Value
SI → DS	0.802	27.585	0.002
ES → DS	0.749	24.101	0.010
SI → CWB	0.172	3.109	0.002
ES → CWB	0.46	7.804	0.001
DS → CWB	0.35	7.356	0.001

These results substantiate the theoretical contention that employee silence and social isolation serve not only as antecedents of perceived digital surveillance but also exert direct influence on deviant workplace behavior. Consistent with the mediation-based specification, digital surveillance was modelled as endogenous outcomes of employee silence and social isolation. Both constructs exhibited positive and significant associations with counterproductive work behaviors, suggesting that surveillance influences not only performance-related

behavior but also broader psychological and relational dynamics in virtual work environments.

**Indirect Effects**

The primary objective of the study was to test when social isolation and employee silence occurred, digital surveillance can amplify counterproductive work behaviors through the mediation process. Results indicate that surveillance perceptions are significantly evidence to heighten employees' sense of social disconnection within virtual teams, and this relational withdrawal contributes to increased counterproductive behavior. These findings validate a partial mediation mechanism, whereby digital surveillance channels the effects of psychological and relational withdrawal into behavioral deviance.

**Effect Sizes and Predictive Relevance**

Effect sizes ( $f^2$ ) were evaluated to determine the magnitude of each predictor's impact on counterproductive work behaviors. Among the predictors, employee silence exhibited the strongest effect size (0.280), signifying a substantial influence. Digital surveillance followed with a moderate effect size (0.162), while social isolation had the smallest yet still notable effect (0.038). This distribution supports previous empirical findings underscoring the affective underpinnings of deviant behavior in organizational settings. Prior studies have shown that feelings of ostracism can generate significant emotional distress, which in turn escalates withdrawal tendencies—particularly in digitally monitored environments (Inglezakis, 2017). Moreover, silence represents a behavioral strategy for coping with psychological strain, particularly in environments marked by high monitoring intensity and low psychological safety, ultimately contributing to disengagement and counterproductive conduct (Knoll et al., 2021).

To assess the model's predictive utility,  $Q^2$  statistics were calculated using the blindfolding procedure. The resulting  $Q^2$  values—0.695 for DS and 0.776 for CWB—were both well above zero, indicating strong out-of-sample predictive relevance. Notably, the high  $Q^2$  for CWB highlights the model's practical applicability in forecasting counterproductive behaviors in digitally governed work settings, particularly when accounting for relational and communicative withdrawal processes.

**Hypothesis Testing Summary**

This study proposed seven hypotheses to examine the direct and indirect relationships among social isolation, employee silence, digital surveillance, and

counterproductive work behaviors within virtual FinTech teams. The structural model results provide consistent and comprehensive support for all hypothesized relationships, offering both statistical validation and substantive theoretical insight.

H<sub>1</sub> posited that social isolation positively predicts perceptions of digital surveillance. The results support this hypothesis ( $\beta = 0.802$ ,  $p = 0.002$ ), indicating that employees who experience relational disconnection are more likely to perceive monitoring practices as salient and intrusive. This finding suggests that isolation heightens vigilance and sensitivity to organizational control mechanisms, consistent with the notion that weakened social bonds amplify the perceived intensity of managerial oversight.

H<sub>2</sub> proposed a positive relationship between employee silence and digital surveillance perceptions. The significant path coefficient ( $\beta = 0.749$ ,  $p = 0.010$ ) confirms that communicative withdrawal is associated with heightened awareness of monitoring practices. Employees who refrain from voicing concerns or ideas may become more attuned to surveillance cues, interpreting them as signals of evaluative scrutiny rather than developmental support.

H<sub>3</sub> examined the direct effect of social isolation on counterproductive work behaviors. The results indicate a significant positive association ( $\beta = 0.172$ ,  $p = 0.002$ ), demonstrating that relational withdrawal contributes directly to deviant behavior. This supports prior research suggesting that isolation erodes normative commitment and reduces informal social controls, thereby increasing the likelihood of disengagement and misconduct.

H<sub>4</sub> tested whether employee silence predicts counterproductive work behaviors. The findings strongly support this hypothesis ( $\beta = 0.460$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), revealing that suppressed voice is a substantial antecedent of deviance. When employees feel unable or unwilling to express dissatisfaction, frustration may be redirected into behavioral withdrawal or acts that undermine organizational functioning.

H<sub>5</sub> addressed the direct effect of digital surveillance on counterproductive work behaviors. The significant positive relationship ( $\beta = 0.350$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) indicates that surveillance, when perceived as intrusive or punitive, functions as a contextual stressor that increases the propensity for misconduct. This finding underscores surveillance as an active socio-technical driver of behavior rather than a neutral control instrument.

Beyond these direct effects, the mediation

hypotheses further clarify the underlying mechanisms:

H<sub>6</sub> predicted that digital surveillance mediates the relationship between social isolation and counterproductive work behaviors. Bootstrapping results confirm a significant indirect effect ( $p = 0.002$ ), indicating partial mediation. This suggests that isolation not only directly increases deviance but also intensifies surveillance perceptions, which in turn exacerbate counterproductive responses.

Similarly, H<sub>7</sub> proposed that digital surveillance mediates the relationship between employee silence and counterproductive work behaviors. The significant indirect effect ( $p = 0.001$ ) provides evidence of partial mediation, demonstrating that silence contributes to deviance both directly and indirectly through heightened surveillance perceptions. Employees who withdraw communicatively may interpret monitoring as threatening, thereby amplifying emotional strain and behavioral resistance.

Taken together, these findings demonstrate that employee silence and social isolation function as critical affective and relational antecedents of counterproductive work behavior, with digital surveillance acting as an amplifying mechanism. The partial mediation pattern highlights that reducing deviance in virtual teams requires not only managing surveillance practices but also addressing the underlying emotional and relational conditions that shape how surveillance is perceived and enacted.

## DISCUSSION

### *Interpreting the Direct Effect of Digital Surveillance on CWB*

The positive association between digital surveillance (DS) and counterproductive work behaviors (CWB) underscores a critical tension: while DS is often implemented to enhance transparency, accountability, and operational efficiency in virtual teams—particularly in digital-native sectors such as FinTech—it may inadvertently function as an evaluative or punitive presence. On the positive side, DS can drive performance by clarifying expectations, providing real-time feedback, and promoting accountability (Liu et al., 2014; Koay, 2018). It enables early identification of performance bottlenecks and can help secure sensitive data assets, enhancing both productivity and risk management.

Beyond security and performance monitoring, digital surveillance may also support governance and coordination in virtual teams. By making work processes more traceable and standardized, surveillance systems can reduce uncertainty

surrounding task ownership, deadlines, and performance expectations. This clarity can be particularly valuable in virtual environments where informal clarification and spontaneous coordination are limited. When employees understand how their contributions fit within broader workflows, surveillance may function as an enabling structure rather than a coercive control. Nevertheless, these benefits depend strongly on proportional use and clear communication, as excessive or opaque monitoring risks undermining autonomy and trust.

However, the findings of this study suggest that such benefits are contingent on context and perception. In practice, the omnipresent and often opaque nature of DS amplifies psychological strain, particularly in virtual settings where social cues are limited. Persistent monitoring environments elevate the salience of evaluation, heighten self-regulation demands, and erode psychological safety. These conditions can trigger defensive, deviant, or withdrawal behaviors among employees, consistent with a surveillance paradox: increased monitoring, rather than reducing misconduct, may provoke it. As DS becomes ambient and routinized, it risks being interpreted less as support and more as scrutiny—fueling emotional distress and, ultimately, CWB (Stanek et al., 2017; Ramos-Villagrasa et al., 2019).

### ***Employee Silence as a Behavioral Amplifier of CWB***

The analysis affirms that employee silence (ES) is a critical psychological antecedent of counterproductive work behaviors (CWB). Rather than simply reflecting passive disengagement, silence often constitutes a strategic form of withdrawal rooted in employees' perceptions of risk, injustice, or marginalization. Silence signals a lack of psychological safety, especially in organizational climates that discourage dissent or downplay employee voice.

Viewed through the lens of Affective Events Theory (AET), employee silence emerges as an emotional consequence of negative affective experiences—such as ostracism, exclusion, or invalidation—which over time may precipitate behavioral reactions like CWB. AET posits that such emotional events at work shape affective states, which subsequently drive behavioral responses. In virtual teams, where emotional cues are often subdued or misread, silence becomes a subtle but powerful signal of emotional suppression. This unvoiced emotional strain can accumulate, leading to deviant behavior as a form of emotional release or protest (Clercq et al., 2019).

The findings of this study indicate that ES contributes to CWB through several interrelated mechanisms. First, silence correlates with diminished engagement and motivational decline—employees who feel ignored or undervalued are less inclined to invest effort, leading to withdrawal and, in some cases, deviance (Koay, 2018). Second, silence is often a product of perceived injustice. In work settings where employees feel voiceless or unfairly treated, CWB can emerge as a retaliatory or compensatory response (Shaukat & Khurshid, 2021). Finally, silence may function as a psychological justification for CWB: when employees are unable to express dissatisfaction constructively, they may rationalize disengagement or deviant conduct as acceptable alternatives (Shaukat & Khurshid, 2021).

These findings position employee silence not merely as an outcome of adverse conditions but as a behavioral amplifier that exacerbates deviance risk. Mitigating silence thus becomes a strategic imperative. Organizations must cultivate climates of open dialogue and psychological safety, not only to encourage expression but also to reduce the downstream behavioral risks associated with chronic silence. This entails trust-building, responsive leadership, and proactive inclusion of diverse perspectives.

### ***Social Isolation as a Relational Trigger of CWB***

Social isolation (SI) is a salient relational antecedent of counterproductive work behaviors (CWB), particularly within virtual teams where face-to-face interactions are inherently limited. Drawing from Affective Events Theory (AET), SI can be understood as a chronic affective condition stemming from ongoing deficits in social connectivity. AET posits that such emotionally salient workplace experiences influence affective states, which in turn shape behavioral outcomes. In this view, isolation constitutes not just a contextual absence but an affective event—eliciting negative emotional states such as frustration, anxiety, or alienation, which may manifest in behavioral deviance.

The analysis suggests that SI undermines engagement and psychological belonging, both of which are crucial for pro-social work behavior. As relational bonds weaken, employees may disengage cognitively and emotionally from the team, heightening the risk of deviance as a means of emotional release or symbolic protest. Furthermore, SI can provide implicit moral license for CWB: when employees perceive themselves as marginalized or unrecognized, they may feel justified in withholding

effort or violating norms as a form of equilibrium restoration (Griep & Vantilborgh, 2018).

These findings underscore that the behavioral risks associated with SI extend beyond individual distress—they are fundamentally relational disruptions that destabilize collective functioning. Addressing SI in virtual contexts thus requires not only structural interventions but also intentional emotional and relational scaffolding to reconstitute trust, connection, and belonging.

### ***Partial Mediation: Digital Surveillance as a Conduit between Silence, Isolation, and Deviance***

Beyond the direct influence of digital surveillance (DS) on CWB, the study uncovers its critical mediating role in the relationship between employee silence (ES) and social isolation (SI) on one hand, and CWB on the other. Specifically, DS partially mediates both the ES-CWB and SI-CWB pathways. This indicates that DS functions not only as a contextual antecedent of deviance, but also as an affective amplifier that conditions how silence and isolation evolve into behavioral outcomes.

For employees experiencing ES, DS exacerbates the psychological risk climate—intensifying perceived surveillance pressure, undermining voice safety, and fostering emotional suppression. These dynamics deepen alienation and reinforce disengagement, which over time may manifest as CWB. In this way, DS transforms silence from a passive act into a stress-laden, emotionally taxing experience, increasing the likelihood of deviant outcomes (Mitchell et al., 2022).

Similarly, for socially isolated employees, DS amplifies emotional disconnection. Rather than serving as a neutral managerial tool, DS becomes a symbolic reminder of organizational detachment. When coupled with isolation, it heightens psychological distance and erodes the perceived legitimacy of organizational expectations. This fosters emotional withdrawal and normalizes deviance as a form of self-preservation or retaliation (Anwar et al., 2020).

This dual mediating role highlights DS as a socio-affective channel—transmitting and transforming psychological and relational strain into behavioral consequences. As such, mitigating CWB in virtual contexts requires more than reducing DS intensity; it demands strategic attenuation of its emotional impact through transparent policies, participatory governance, and affective support structures.

### ***Theoretical Contribution: Extending Affective Events Theory (AET)***

This study offers a significant extension of Affective Events Theory (AET) by applying it to the interrelated dynamics of employee silence (ES), social isolation (SI), digital surveillance (DS), and counterproductive work behaviors (CWB) within virtual teams. While previous research has applied AET to singular constructs such as emotional labor or workplace injustice, limited work has systematically integrated these psychosocial antecedents within digitally mediated work settings.

Drawing on emerging evidence, including Saei and Liu (2023), who demonstrate that workplace frustration mediates silence behaviors, and Knoll et al. (2020), who examine the emotional climate of voice, our findings suggest that DS operates as a continuous affective event that both triggers and transforms emotional experiences. Specifically, we show that DS magnifies the affective impact of ES and SI—shaping how these states evolve into deviant outcomes. This supports and extends AET's core premise that emotional experiences at work influence behaviors via affective mechanisms.

Furthermore, while Gillet et al. (2021) have identified the affective roots of CWB in relation to workplace frustration, our findings emphasize the relational and communicative precursors of those affective states—namely, isolation and silence—which are exacerbated by surveillance intensity. In doing so, the study bridges discrete literatures on virtual work, deviance, and affective processes, offering an integrative perspective on how technology-mediated monitoring reshapes emotional climates and behavioral responses.

In essence, this study contributes to the AET literature by modeling DS not merely as a contextual stressor but as an active mediating mechanism in affective event chains. This reinforces AET's relevance for understanding complex, multi-layered affective processes in modern digital work arrangements and invites future research to explore additional pathways and moderators in similar contexts.

### ***Organizational and Managerial Implications for Virtual Teams***

Given the dual role of digital surveillance (DS) as both a managerial tool and a socio-affective trigger, organizations overseeing remote or hybrid teams must adopt a nuanced implementation strategy. Rather than treating DS purely as a compliance mechanism, it must be approached as a sensitive

relational intervention. Transparency about the scope, objectives, and data usage is crucial to reduce employee apprehension and to reposition DS as a supportive, rather than punitive, practice.

To address employee silence, organizations should prioritize psychological safety by cultivating a voice-enabling climate. This includes establishing inclusive, multi-modal communication channels, providing non-retaliatory feedback structures, and offering anonymous or asynchronous options that allow employees to express concerns without fear of interpersonal repercussions. Such strategies not only encourage open dialogue but also disrupt the emotional pathways linking silence to CWB.

Combating social isolation requires intentional relational engineering. Managers must proactively foster belonging and inclusion through regular structured check-ins, peer mentoring systems, and informal virtual interactions that replicate the social spontaneity of in-person settings. These interventions are critical for reestablishing relational cohesion, especially in environments where digital mediation often suppresses affective cues.

Crucially, mitigating the mediating effects of DS on both silence and isolation involves more than technical design—it demands cultural transformation. Organizations should frame surveillance as a collaborative safeguard aligned with collective goals, supported by participatory governance and empathetic leadership. By recognizing DS as an affective event in itself, managerial practices can more effectively neutralize its adverse effects and support healthier, more engaged virtual teams.

### ***Limitations and Directions for Future Research***

This study's cross-sectional design limits causal inference; future research should use longitudinal or experimental designs to trace dynamic patterns over time. Second, all variables were self-reported in a single survey, raising potential common method concerns—triangulation through peer or supervisor ratings would strengthen validity.

Contextual limitations must also be acknowledged. The study was conducted within Indonesian FinTech firms, where cultural characteristics such as collectivism, hierarchical organizational structures, and strong regulatory pressures in the financial technology sector may influence how employees interpret and respond to digital surveillance. These contextual conditions may shape perceptions of monitoring, communication norms, and behavioral responses differently than in other national or industry settings. Therefore,

caution should be exercised when generalizing the findings beyond similar digital-intensive sectors or cultural environments. Future research should replicate this model in other industries and cross-cultural contexts to further validate and refine the theoretical relationships identified in this study.

Lastly, future work could explore additional mediators (e.g., emotional exhaustion, trust erosion) and moderators (e.g., leadership style, job autonomy) to capture the full complexity of how DS operates. Theoretical expansion could integrate AET with insights from self-determination theory or control theory to enrich understanding of employee behavior under persistent monitoring. These findings call for a rethinking of surveillance not merely as a compliance tool but as an affective and relational force that shapes work meaning and behavior in distributed digital environments.

### **CONCLUSION**

This research demonstrates that digital surveillance, though designed for control and efficiency, has complex affective consequences in virtual teams. When interpreted as punitive or omnipresent, surveillance fosters emotional suppression (employee silence) and relational detachment (social isolation), both of which serve as affective conduits to counterproductive work behavior. Rather than functioning as a neutral managerial tool, surveillance becomes an ambient affective event that shapes how employees interpret their environment, engage with others, and regulate behavior.

By empirically validating the partial mediation of silence and isolation, this study extends Affective Events Theory into the digital surveillance context of remote work. It shows that emotional and relational disruptions—exacerbated by surveillance—translate into behavioral deviance. This reconceptualization highlights the dual role of surveillance as both structural control and affective trigger.

Practically, these insights call for redesigning surveillance systems with affective and relational sensitivity. Transparent governance, inclusive communication channels, and active mitigation of isolation are critical to counteracting deviance risks. Although focused on Indonesian FinTech, these findings offer a transferable framework for understanding affective regulation in digitally monitored workplaces. Future studies should explore longitudinal trajectories and cross-cultural dynamics to further refine theory and practice.

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