

Right to Disconnect: Employee Well-being and Legal Awareness in the Digital Workplace

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ABSTRACT

Digital communication technologies have expanded their reach into modern workplaces because this technology provides employees with constant access to their work through emails and messaging applications and virtual meetings and remote working platforms. Digitalization provides organizations with better operational performance and flexible work processes but creates challenges for employees who need to separate their work duties from their personal life activities. The ongoing ability to stay connected with work has resulted in increased work-related stress and burnout and mental exhaustion and psychological pressure which employees experience. The "Right to Disconnect" serves as a crucial legal and organizational framework that protects employees who want to stop receiving work messages during their non-working hours from facing any disciplinary action. The present study examines employee well-being and legal awareness regarding the Right to Disconnect in the digital workplace. The research investigates how excessive digital working hours affect employees' ability to balance their personal and professional lives and their knowledge about their legal employment rights. The study further examines how organizational culture and employer demands impact employees' work activities during their non-working hours. A descriptive research design was adopted, and data were collected from employees working in corporate, educational, and service sectors through structured questionnaires and secondary sources. The research shows that excessive digital connectivity results in negative effects on employee mental health and family responsibilities and work performance. Employees from various organizations showed that they experienced work-related stress because they needed to communicate with others during times outside their designated work hours. The research found that people who worked in office environments showed low understanding about their legal rights and office policies which explained digital disconnection. The study found that organizations without official digital communication rules experienced increased employee dissatisfaction and burnout symptoms. The research shows that organizations need to develop legal regulations which require them to protect employee health in workplaces that use digital technology. The organization should develop workplace communication standards which include employee training programs and work-life balance initiatives. The study concludes that recognizing the Right to Disconnect is essential for promoting employee mental health, improving productivity, and ensuring sustainable digital work culture in modern organizations.

Keywords: Right to Disconnect, Digital Workplace, Employee Well-being, Work-Life Balance, Legal Awareness, Remote Work, Burnout, Workplace Stress, Digital Communication, Organizational Policy.

Introduction

The digital revolution has changed the way work operates throughout the globe. Organizations today depend on digital technologies which include emails and smartphones and virtual meetings and instant messaging applications to enhance their communication capabilities and boost productivity. The

technological progress has made organizations more efficient and flexible but it has established a situation where employees must remain reachable throughout their entire day. The ongoing digital presence has created a scenario where employees cannot separate their work obligations from their personal time which results in higher psychological pressure and burnout and poorer work-life balance.

The pandemic triggered digital overconnectivity problems which hybrid and remote work models emerged during the COVID-19 pandemic. Employees now face pressure to address work communications which occur outside of standard business hours. The expectations create psychological stress which disrupts both personal time and family connections. People who continuously face work demands through their digital devices experience sleep disturbances and emotional difficulties and overall mental health problems. Organizations and policymakers and labor rights advocates now consider employee well-being to be a critical matter that requires their attention.

The concept of the "Right to Disconnect" has become an international movement which emerged as a solution to these existing problems. Employees hold the Right to Disconnect as their legal and ethical entitlement which allows them to stop all work-related communication during non-working hours without facing any professional penalties. France and Spain and Italy and Ireland have passed laws and created workplace regulations which enable workers to disconnect from digital technology. The regulations exist to establish work-life balance standards while protecting workers from suffering digital burnout.

People in India and other developing countries have not yet developed full understanding of the Right to Disconnect because digital jobs and remote work have expanded rapidly. Organizations do not yet establish official communication procedures which show their expectations about work that occurs after normal business hours. Employees keep answering emails and messages because they worry about how their work performance will be judged or whether they will lose their jobs.

The research investigates how digital work rights impact employee mental health and their understanding of the Right to Disconnect. The research investigates how ongoing digital technology use affects workers and assesses their knowledge about legal rights and company policies. The research study shows that organizations need to build sustainable digital workspaces which enable employees to maintain their mental health while delivering productive work.

Background of the Study

The current work environment in the 21st century has undergone fundamental transformation because people increasingly use digital communication technologies. Employees across different sectors access workplaces through smartphones and laptops and emails and virtual collaboration platforms which enable companies to operate beyond standard business operating hours. Organizations have discovered increased operational efficiency through digitalization, which has enabled better employee work arrangements, yet this implementation has created higher demands for employees to remain accessible at all times.

The Right to Disconnect law emerged as an answer to the increasing problem of digital devices causing employee mental pressure, professional burnout, and the loss of personal time. France established the Right to Disconnect as a legally recognized law in 2017, which mandated companies to develop rules that govern their employees' post-work communication activities. Similar initiatives have since been adopted in several countries to protect employee well-being.

Remote and hybrid work models received significant growth in India after the COVID-19 pandemic. Digital labor rights together with legal protections remain unknown to most people. The pressure to maintain ongoing work communication leads many employees to experience mental exhaustion together with emotional distress and job dissatisfaction.

The current research investigates how ongoing internet access affects employee health while it assesses employees' knowledge about their Right to Disconnect. The research aims to contribute to discussions on digital labor rights and sustainable workplace practices.

Objectives of the Study

- To examine how persistent digital connectivity affects the well-being of employees.
- To analyze employee awareness regarding the Right to Disconnect.
- To investigate how work-life balance connects with digital workplace practices.

- To discover which organizational elements cause employees to experience stress and burnout.
- To establish a digital work environment that supports employees' well-being.

Hypothesis of the Study

Primary Hypothesis

H₀₁ (Null Hypothesis)

The research shows no evidence of a relationship between continuous digital connectivity and employee well-being in the digital workplace.

H₁₁ (Alternative Hypothesis)

The research shows that continuous digital connectivity has a major impact on both employee well-being and work-life balance in the digital workplace.

Secondary Hypothesis

- Continuous digital connectivity affects employee well-being.
- After-hours work communication increases employee stress.
- Awareness about the Right to Disconnect improves work-life balance.
- Lack of digital workplace policies increases employee burnout.
- Remote work affects employees' personal life.

Review of Literature

Derks and Bakker (2014) The researchers investigated how employees experienced psychological effects from employee smartphone usage in their study. The research found that workers who used digital devices for work purposes after their scheduled time experienced higher emotional exhaustion levels while their ability to manage work and personal life suffered. The authors demonstrated that employees who face constant availability requirements experience increased mental stress which hinders their ability to recover from work. The study established that organizations need to set technological boundaries to protect their employees' health in workplaces that rely on technology.

Eurofound (2020) Eurofound (2020) examined how European countries implement remote work practices and how these practices affect employee well-being. The report showed that employees who work remotely tend to work longer hours while experiencing higher stress levels because of their need to stay digitally connected. The study demonstrated that organizations which lack established methods for workplace communication experience higher rates of employee burnout and decreased work performance. The report strongly supported legal recognition of the Right to Disconnect.

Messenger (2018) The study of Messenger (2018) explained how the Right to Disconnect became established as a labor right in the digital world. The research study investigated how international legal systems developed when countries adopted laws from France and Spain. The author argued that companies need to establish digital disconnection policies which will safeguard employee mental health while maintaining their work-life balance. The research demonstrated that labor regulations have become essential for employment systems which depend on digital connections.

Mazmanian, Orlikowski, and Yates (2013) Mazmanian et al. (2013) investigated how mobile communication technologies affected professional work performance. The results demonstrated that smartphone usage created new demands which required users to remain available all the time and this situation caused their work to extend into nonworking hours. Employees faced challenges when they tried to stop working during their free time. The research demonstrated that organizational culture functions as the primary factor which determines how employees implement digital work methods and how these methods affect their stress levels.

Grant, Wallace, and Spurgeon (2013) The researchers conducted their investigation about how employees experienced work in remote environments. The study showed that remote work flexibility allowed employees to achieve better work independence but it created new problems which made them feel more isolated and worked beyond their regular hours. Employees faced difficulties when they tried to achieve work life balance because they received digital messages throughout the day. The authors emphasized the need for balanced digital work policies to support mental health and employee productivity.

Methodology

Research Design

- The study employed a descriptive research design for its research purposes.
- The study investigated how employees experienced digital workplace practices and their understanding of legal regulations.

Study Area

- The research focused on employees from corporate, educational, and service sectors.
- The researchers conducted surveys in urban workplaces through online and offline methods.

Sample of the Study

- The study used purposive sampling to select 120 employees for participation.
- The participants included workers from remote, hybrid, and office work environments.

Data Collection

- Researchers used structured questionnaires to obtain primary data for their study.
- The research team obtained secondary data from journals, reports, and legal documents.
- The researchers collected data about working hours and stress levels and digital communication habits and knowledge of Right to Disconnect policies.

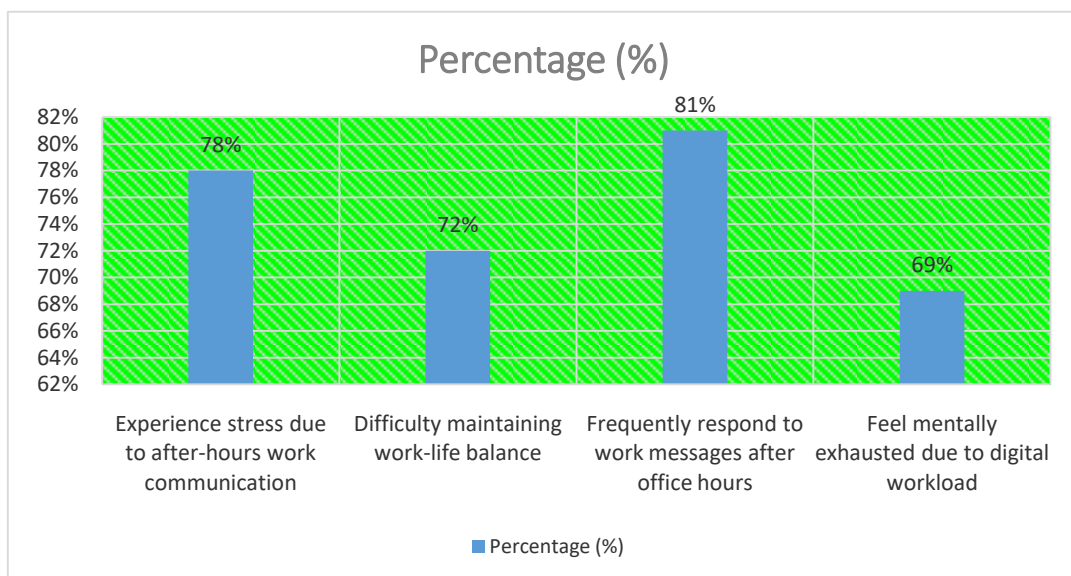
Data Analysis

- The research team employed percentage analysis together with basic comparison techniques for their data examination.
- The study results were shown through tables which included explanatory text.

Data Analysis

Table 1: Employee Experience with Digital Connectivity

Response Category	Percentage (%)
Experience stress due to after-hours work communication	78%
Difficulty maintaining work-life balance	72%
Frequently respond to work messages after office hours	81%
Feel mentally exhausted due to digital workload	69%

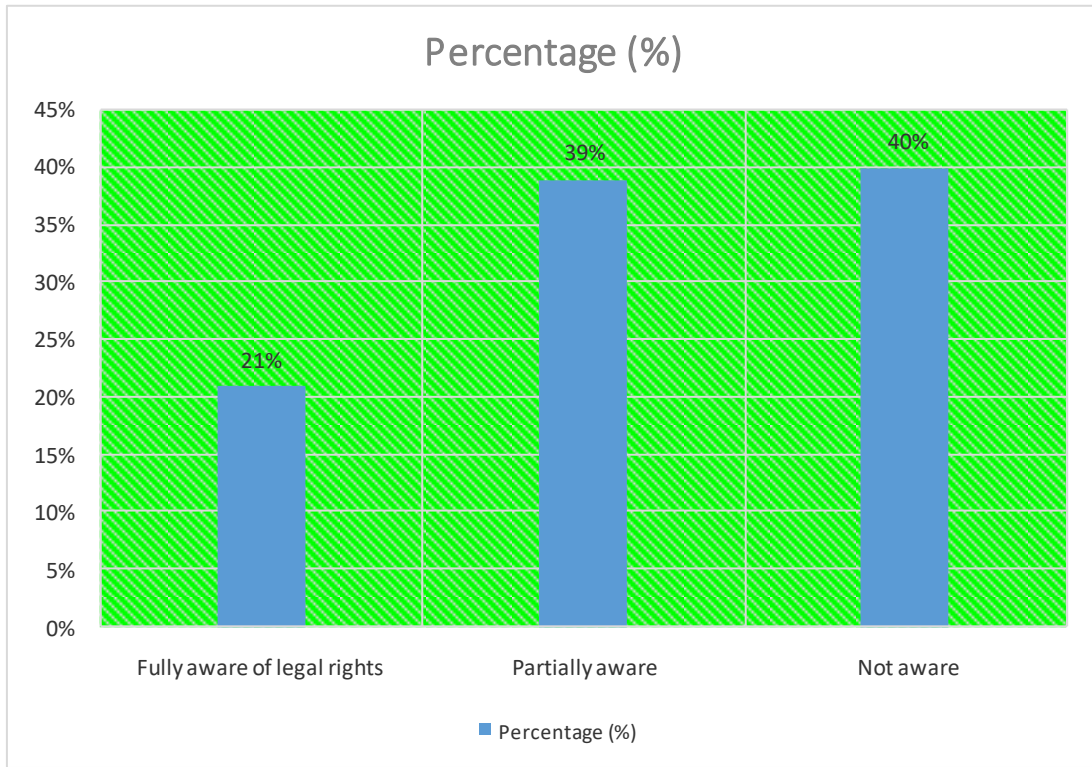


Interpretation

The table shows that most employees suffer from mental exhaustion because they must keep up with digital communication throughout the day. More than 80% of employees reported responding to work-related messages after official working hours, indicating poor work-life boundaries in digital workplaces.

Table 2: Awareness Regarding Right to Disconnect

Awareness Level	Percentage (%)
Fully aware of legal rights	21%
Partially aware	39%
Not aware	40%



Interpretation

The findings show that most employees do not understand the Right to Disconnect law. Only 21% of respondents were fully aware of legal protections related to digital disconnection, highlighting the need for employee education and organizational awareness programs.

Discussion

The current research results show that ongoing access to digital networks which modern offices use to connect their employees creates negative effects on both employee health and their ability to manage work with personal time. Employees who work in environments with digital connectivity face increasing demands to remain reachable through their email and messaging platforms and virtual meeting tools during times that fall outside their designated work schedule. The requirements create mental strain which prevents people from taking necessary time to recover their mental health. The majority of respondents indicated they faced challenges with stress and emotional fatigue along with sleep problems and difficulties maintaining work-life balance because of their need to address work matters after regular office hours.

The study shows that organizations have developed a higher need for digital technology usage since they adopted remote and hybrid working systems. Digital technologies enable users to work flexibly but they also create challenges because they make it difficult to separate work time from personal time. Employees continue to reply to work messages because their organizations expect them to do so and because they believe their performance will be assessed based on their response time and because they feel insecure about their job safety. The need for constant accessibility results in burnout which damages both work performance and family interactions.

The study discovered that people have insufficient legal knowledge about the Right to Disconnect rights. Many employees were unaware of their digital labor rights and the workplace policies which governed their after-work communication. Organizations without formal guidelines for digital communication experienced more employee dissatisfaction and stress. The findings support previous research which demonstrated that organizational communication boundaries together with labor regulations protect employee mental health.

The study demonstrates that organizations must develop digital communication guidelines together with work-life balance policies to establish better workplace conditions. The legal recognition of the Right to Disconnect serves as an important mechanism which helps organizations decrease workplace stress while increasing employee contentment and establishing a sustainable digital work environment.

Conclusion

The research demonstrates that digital workplace culture growth has caused fundamental changes to employee work methods and their ways of communicating with others. Digital technologies enable organizations to operate more efficiently while providing better flexibility and remote work solutions but these technologies create a new problem because they raise the requirement for employees to remain available throughout all hours of the day. The result leads to employees suffering from multiple health issues which include stress and mental exhaustion together with emotional burnout and difficulties in balancing their work and personal time.

The research shows that employees in modern workplaces experience burnout and psychological distress because they engage in excessive digital communication outside of their regular working hours. Employees working in remote and hybrid work environments are particularly vulnerable because digital technologies blur the distinction between work and private life. The absence of clear workplace communication boundaries leads to heightened emotional stress and diminished possibilities for employees to achieve proper rest and recovery.

The study demonstrates that employees possess insufficient understanding about their Right to Disconnect and the associated digital labor protections. Many organizations lack official policies that control after-hours communication which forces employees to stay available at all times because workplace expectations and concerns about potential professional repercussions dictate their behavior. The situation demonstrates an urgent requirement for improved legal systems together with increased organizational accountability to protect the health of workers.

The implementation of structured digital communication policies together with work-life balance programs and digital labor rights training for employees will lead to healthier workplace environments which also promote sustainability. The introduction of complete legal safeguards for digital disconnection and worker mental health protection should be considered by policymakers. The modern digital workplace requires organizations to recognize the Right to Disconnect because this practice improves employee happiness and work efficiency and mental health.

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