Screen Burnout in the Digital Workplace: Examining the Impact of Digital Fatigue on Work Performance among Generation Z Employees in Remote Work Settings

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Abstract

Technology has been an integral part of human lives in the 21st century, but the overdependence has constantly triggered both psychological and physical well-being. Generation Z is the first generation to be considered digital natives, and significantly constitutes today's growing workforce. The present study seeks to understand the impact of exhausting screen exposure on the overall performance at work of those employees who are working remotely from home, particularly in the information technology (IT) sector in Eastern India. The sample consisted of 106 Generation Z employees comprising 55 females and 51 males working remotely in the IT sectors of Eastern India through the purposive sampling technique. The data collection was conducted using digital fatigue and work performance questionnaires, along with a general information schedule. One-way analysis of Variance (ANOVA) and Pearson product-moment correlation were employed to test the hypotheses.

Concerning digital fatigue, males and females were found to have a statistically significant difference, with female employees reporting a higher level of screen burnout than males. Furthermore, the relation between digital fatigue and work performance revealed a significant negative correlation ($r = -0.227$, $p < .05$), showing that higher digital fatigue corresponded to lower work performance among employees working in a remote work setting. The findings accentuate how prolonged digital engagement affects not only the physical but also the psychological health of individuals working remotely from their homes. It underscores the importance of organizational strategies such as mandated micro-breaks, short meeting durations, and targeted well-being support that will benefit Generation Z employees by mitigating fatigue, preserving cognitive health, and improving overall work efficiency.

Keywords: Digital Fatigue, Technostress, Work Performance, Generation Z, Remote Work, Employee well-being, Digital Workspace

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Introduction

"We shape our tools, and thereafter our tools shape us" – Marshall McLuhan

The 21st century experienced transformations profusely in all aspects of life. Technology has evolved, altering human lifestyles, systems of communications, learning patterns and even work structures all over the world. Smartphones, laptops, artificial intelligence, social media, and cloud computing systems are dominating our personal, educational and professional environments. The COVID pandemic brought about a tremendous change in work cultures, which immediately shifted from traditional to a work-from-home model. This digitalisation of the workplace introduced conveniences and ease, but made us digital dependents, which impacted our psychological and physical health.

The mental exhaustion, emotional fatigue, attentional and concentration difficulties resulting from prolonged digital screen exposure lead to disruption in the flow of work and productivity and are referred to as screen burnout or digital fatigue. The present occupational landscape is characterised by over-dependence on screens and digital communication systems. Employees are attending online meetings, responding to emails, participating in chats, preparing presentations, analysing digital information, and multitasking across various online platforms. Recent empirical studies consider the normalization of remote work, particularly in the post-pandemic era, yet the ambient stress of constant connectivity remains, creating occupational difficulties and thus necessitating a deeper understanding of its long-term effect on modern workforce demographics.
Generation Z, commonly referred to as Gen Z, is the demographic cohort that succeeds the Millennial generation and precedes Generation Alpha, i.e., individuals born between 1997 and 2012. They are known as the first true "digital native" generation because they were brought up in an environment surrounded by digital connectivity and smartphones. In professional settings, Generation Z employees are technologically proficient, adaptable, independent, bestowed with multitasking abilities, and have a preference for flexibility and innovation. They value work-life balance, mental well-being, inclusivity, and opportunities for personal and professional growth. Generation Z constitutes a substantially growing workforce in the present world; thus, capturing their behaviours, challenges, and expectations in the workplace is a valuable window into the future.

Rationale of the Study

Psychological Basis:

Prolonged exposure to digital environment leads to stress, anxiety, cognitive overload, sleep disturbances and burnout.
Organizational Basis:

Excessive digital demands and burnout may reduce productivity, organizational commitment, innovation, and employee engagement.

Social Basis:

Increased reliance on virtual communication may contribute to social isolation, weakened interpersonal relationships, reduced team cohesion, and work–life imbalance.

Physiological Basis:

Prolonged screen use is associated with eye strain, headaches, sleep problems, musculoskeletal discomfort, fatigue, and reduced physical activity.

Literature Review

A thorough review of the literature shows a complete evolution of the traditional burnout (Freudenberger, 1974; Maslach & Jackson, 1981) to "technostress" and "digital fatigue" in modern workplaces (Tarafdar et al., 2007; Wiederhold, 2020). The pandemic-era research highlights the negative effect of forced digitalization (Oakman et al.,2020; Ipsen et al.,2021; Sharma et al., 2022), but recent studies (2024-2026) revealed the existence of a productivity paradox. Remote work fosters autonomy, yet relentlessly switching tools and blurred boundaries create significant exhaustion (Lahiri and Nath, 2023). Prolonged digital communication decreases creativity, attentional issues and productivity (Mark et al., 2018; Bailenson, 2021; Fauville et al., 2021; Shrestha, 2022). Gen Z, being digital natives, seamlessly adapt to these workspaces (Srivastava and Srivastava, 2017; Gabrielova & Buchko, 2021), yet empirical data from the Deloitte 2026 survey found that 58% of these employees experience burnout due to constant alerts. Studies have also elucidated how women experience greater psychological strain due to traditional gender expectations and boundary spanning (Allen et al., 2021; Shrestha et al., 2024). While technostress is linked to burnout (Sharma & Tiwari, 2023), the intersection of collectivistic cultures in India and remote boundaries is underexplored.

Research Gap

The review of literature indicates the presence of substantial research on all aspects of digital burnout and performance; however, there remains limited research specifically examining the relationship between digital fatigue and work performance among Gen Z employees working in a remote setting, particularly within the Indian organizational context. Therefore, the present study seeks to address this gap by investigating this and contributing to the growing literature on occupational well-being in a digitally driven workplace

Research Objectives

- To comparatively analyse the difference between male and female Generation Z employees engaged in remote work settings in the IT sector with respect to digital fatigue.
- To critically evaluate the difference between male and female Generation Z employees working remotely in the IT sector with maintenance of work performance.
- To examine the relationship between digital fatigue and work performance among Generation Z employees working remotely in the IT sector.

Research Methodology

Title of the study - Screen Burnout: Examining the Effect of Digital Fatigue on Work Performance of Generation Z employees working in a remote

setting.

Research Design

The present study incorporates a cross-sectional quantitative design.

Operationalisation of Concepts

Digital fatigue –

Digital fatigue specifies emotional, psychological, cognitive and physical exhaustion as an effect of prolonged exposure to digital devices, online communication platforms and virtual work environments. Symptoms such as low concentration, burnout, eye strain, irritability, amotivation and low attentional efficiency are attributed to the presence of digital fatigue, also commonly called screen burnout. The study depicts the exhaustive outcome of screen exposure for Gen Z employees working in a remote work setting.

Work Performance –

It is an indicator of the efficiency and effectiveness of an employee while fulfilling their job responsibilities, including meeting deadlines and achieving the strategic goal. The present study denotes work performance as the fulfilment of the responsibilities related to work of the Gen Z employees working in a remote setting

Generation Z/ Gen Z Employees working in a remote setting –

the term Generation Z, popularly known as Gen Z, is ascribed to individuals born approximately between 1997 and 2012. The present study considers employees within the age range of 21-28 years who are engaged in a remote work setting i.e full time work from home.

Sample Characteristics and Data Collection -

Selection criteria:

The present sample consists of male and female Generation Z employees engaged in remote work settings in the IT sector. The respondents will be selected following certain criteria, which are listed below:

- Employees belonging to the age range of 21 to 28 years will be considered as subjects.
- Respondents must have been engaged in remote work for at least the previous six months.
- Both male and female respondents will be included in the sample.
- Respondents must possess regular occupational screen exposure due to remote work.

Sample Location -

The present study was conducted among Generation Z employees working remotely in eastern regions of India, primarily within the Information Technology (IT) sectors.

Sample Size –

106 Gen Z employees, among them 55 were females and 51 males who were engaged in remote work arrangements and belonged to the eastern region of India, were taken as the total sample.

Sampling Technique –

The study pertained to a purposive sampling technique where respondents were intentionally selected based on the said inclusion criteria relevant to the objectives of the study.

Data Type –

The study is based on primary data collection from the respondents through questionnaires and demographic schedules.

Data Collection Period –

It was conducted over a period of approximately 30 days during May in the year 2026 through online mode using Google Forms.

Data Analysis Tools:

Prior to Hypothesis testing, foundational statistical assumptions for parametric tests, including the normality of data distribution and homogeneity of variances, were tested and successfully met.

General Informational Schedule -

The General Information Schedule contain items regarding demographic and occupational details of the respondents. The schedule includes information regarding:

(i) Name/ initials
(ii) Age
(iii) Gender
(iv) Highest Educational qualification
(v) Current Occupation and Industry
(vi) Nature of employment
(vii) Work experience
(viii) Average daily screen time for work
(ix) Number of breaks taken during work
(x) Primary Device used for work
(xi) Dedicated workspace at home
(xii) Level of distractions at work

Digital Fatigue -

The Digital Fatigue was assessed using the Digital fatigue was assessed using the Zoom Exhaustion & Fatigue (ZEF) Scale (Fauville et al., 2021), a 15-item Likert-type questionnaire evaluating visual, social, emotional, and motivational exhaustion (Cronbach's alpha = 0.95). The Questionnaire assesses the level of burnout and exhaustion experienced as a result of prolonged digital engagement during remote work. Higher scores obtained on this indicate higher levels of digital fatigue.

Work Performance -

Work Performance was measured utilizing the Individual Work Performance Questionnaire (IWPQ), a standardized 5 point Likert-type scale (Cronbach's alpha ranging from 0.78 to 0.85), developed by Koopmans et al. (2013). It assesses the employees' perceived level of performance while working in a remote setting, with higher scores obtained indicating better performance.

Administration of the tools –

Data collection has primarily taken place through the online mode owing to the remote nature of the respondents. The Google Form consists of an informed consent form followed by a general information schedule, ZEF scale and IWPQ. The Google link was circulated through email, LinkedIn, and WhatsApp. Also, before administration of the questionnaires, the respondents were informed regarding the purpose of the study, voluntary participation, confidentiality of responses, academic use of data and the Right to withdraw from the study at any stage. Instructions were provided in the form of simple statements before each section, and all items were marked as “required” to avoid missing responses.

Scoring and Tabulation –

After scrutiny, the collected data were tabulated and scored accordingly. The information from the general information schedule was checked with the measures of central tendency and/or percentages. For digital fatigue and work performance, respective scoring keys were used to score the responses. Higher scores on the digital fatigue measure indicated greater digital fatigue, whereas higher scores on the work performance measure indicated better work performance.

Statistical analysis of the data –

The general characteristics of the respondents were assessed through descriptive statistics such as measures of central tendency and dispersion. Means and standard deviations were computed for the total scores of both digital fatigue and work performance questionnaires. The males and females were compared using one-way ANOVA, and lastly, the Pearson product-moment correlation was used to determine the relationship between digital fatigue and work performance among the Gen Z employees working in a remote setting. The obtained results were interpreted in the light of the objectives and hypotheses of the study.

Hypotheses

- *Hypothesis 1 - H_0:* There is no significant relationship between digital fatigue and work performance among Generation Z employees working in a remote setting.
- *Hypothesis 2 - H_0:* There is no significant difference between males and females on Digital Fatigue of the Generation Z employees working in a remote setting.
- *Hypothesis 3 (a) H_0:* There is no significant difference between males and females in Employee Performance of the Generation Z employees working in a remote setting

Analysis & Discussion

Demographic Analysis –

The general characteristics of the sample, i.e., the IT sector employees who are Gen Z working from remote settings, are displayed in the following table.

Table 1: General Characteristics of Generation Z employees working remotely in India

Variables	Category / Metric	Descriptive Statistic (N=106)
Sample Size	Total Participants (N)	106
Age	Mode Value	26 Years
Gender Distribution	Male	48.11% (n = 51)
	Female	51.89% (n = 55)
Educational Qualification	Graduates	46.23% (n = 49)
	Postgraduates	53.77% (n = 57)
Work Screen Time	Daily Average	8.25 Hours
Workplace Intermissions	Average Daily Breaks	3 Breaks
Cognitive Interferences	Distraction Level (Scale 1–5)	2.80

Age and Generational Cohort

The sample reflects Gen Z professionals working in the IT sector in the remote work setting. The mode value is 26 years, which constitutes Gen Z individuals who have faced the global shift of remote working during COVID 19.

Gender Distribution

The females comprised 51.89% (n = 55) and males 48.11% (n = 51). The equal distribution nullifies the skewed biases and gives a true insight towards how both males and females manage working from home.

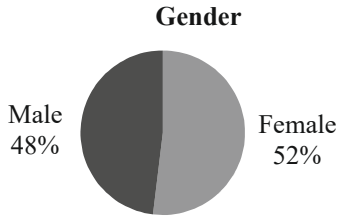


Figure 1: Diagram representing the distribution of Generation Z employees regarding gender

Educational Qualification -

the profile of the cohort revealed a highly qualified segment of the workforce where the majority had postgraduate degrees.

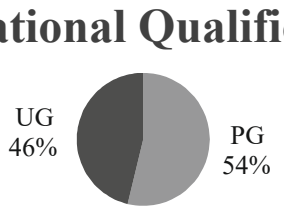


Figure 2: Diagram representing the distribution of Generation Z employees regarding educational qualification

Average daily working screen time –

The data reflected that the Gen Z remote working IT employees endured an average of 8.25 hours of working screen time daily, which indicates compliance with the standard shift of 8.0 hours. However, due to the nature of the work setting, the boundaries and work-life balance get blurred, resulting in a sedentary lifestyle.

Frequency of Work Breaks –

The respondents take 3 breaks on average. The average work hours of 8.25 hours with three breaks indicate that employees roughly undertake 2 – 2.5 hours of continuous screen time at a given point in time. While it suggests an uninterrupted focus, it also signals towards a vulnerability to cognitive fatigue as the modern guidelines of occupational health standards strongly advocate for frequent, micro breaks to preserve optical and neurological health.

Subjective levels of Workplace Distraction –

The self-reported level of distractions among the remotely working employees sits at a mean of 2.80 out of 5.00. The data was taken on a Likert scale ranging from 1 for low distraction to 5 for higher distraction. The score indicates that distractions are kept at a moderate level and are managed constructively. Despite domestic or digital

interruptions such as household chores, family dynamics and phone notifications, GenZs have successfully compartmentalised their home environments to maintain professional concentration.

Descriptive Analysis-

The Mean and Standard Deviation of the primary continuous variables, i.e., digital burnout and employee performance were computed.

Table 2 : Descriptive Statistics of the overall questionnaire of digital burnout and Employee Performance

Variable	Mean	Sd
Digital Burnout	43.90	9.59
Employee Performance	37.88	7.92

Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics of the overall scores obtained on the measures of digital burnout and employee performance among Gen Z employees working remotely. The mean score for digital burnout was found to be 43.90 with a standard deviation of 9.59, indicating a comparatively moderate to high level of digital burnout among the participants. In the case of employee performance, the mean score was 37.88 with a standard deviation of 7.92. The findings suggest that the participants generally maintained a moderate level of work performance despite experiencing digital burnout. The standard deviation scores indicate variation in performance levels among employees, although the variability was comparatively lower than that observed for digital burnout.

Existing literature indicates that prolonged screen engagement blurs work-life boundaries and contributes significantly to digital fatigue and exhaustion in remote work settings, yet Gen Z employees continue to maintain stable work performance. This can be attributed to Gen Z having the advantage of being digital natives who are intuitively adaptable and competent in a technological environment. Previous research findings strongly support the results, highlighting that burnout doesn't contribute to immediate impairment in job performance, particularly among young employees who are well equipped with adaptive coping strategies and productivity-maintenance behaviours in professional environments. (Demerouti et al.,2014)

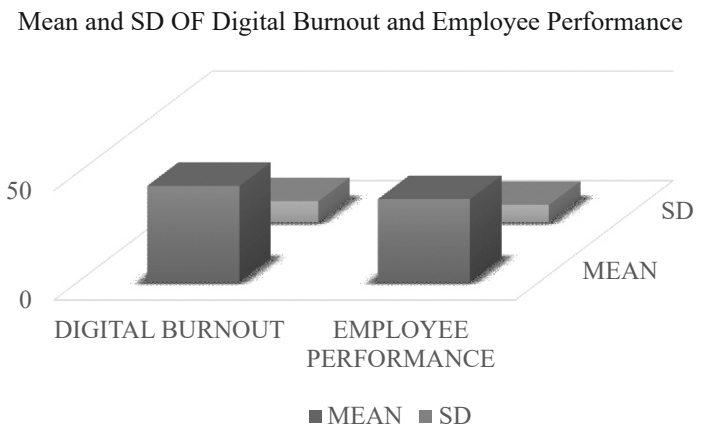


Figure 3: Diagram representing the mean and SD of the Digital Burnout and Employee Performance of the Generation Z employees.

Comparative Analysis –

The digital burnout and performance of males and females were analysed through one-way ANOVA.

Table 3: Differences between males and females on Digital Burnout and Employee Performance among Generation Z Employees who are working in a remote work setting.

VARIABLE	MEAN		STANDARD DEVIATION		F test (One-way ANOVA)
	Female	Male	Female	Male	
Digital Burnout	46.11	41.51	9.75	8.90	6.397**
Employee Performance	38.02	37.73	6.23	9.48	0.036*

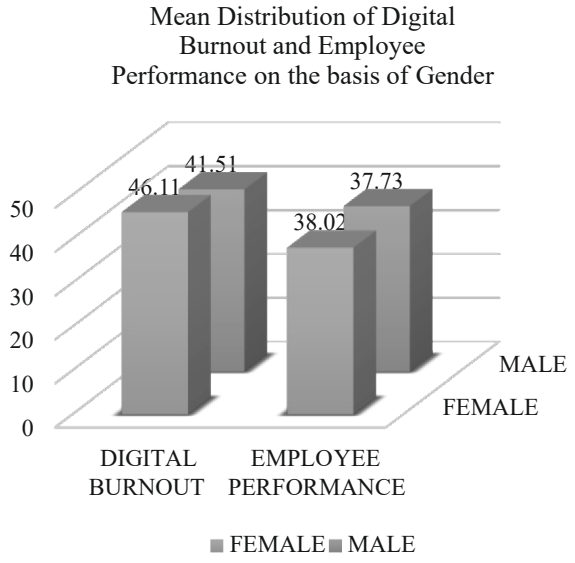
Not significant; Significant at 0.05 level***

Table 3 indicates significant gender-based differences in the domain of digital burnout among Generation Z employees working remotely. Females scored higher on digital burnout (M = 46.11, SD = 9.75) than males (M = 41.51, SD = 8.90). The obtained F value (F = 6.397) shows a statistically significant gender difference in the domain of digital burnout. Hypothesis 2, which states that there is no significant difference between males and females on Digital Fatigue of the Generation Z employees working in a remote setting, is rejected, and thus the alternative hypothesis is accepted. It signifies that females experience cognitive strain and emotional fatigue in a greater way while working from homes.

In contrast, the mean scores for employee performance were relatively similar for females (M = 38.02, SD = 6.23) and males (M = 37.73, SD = 9.48), with the obtained F-value (F = 0.036) indicating the absence of a statistically significant gender difference in employee performance. The findings accept the null hypothesis 3 that states there is no significant difference between males and females in employee performance of the Generation Z employees working in a remote setting.

Existing research highlights and substantially supports the findings that women in remote work settings frequently encounter greater work-life imbalance and blurred boundaries as compared to men. This can be attributed to the social differences in gender role expectations and how the simultaneous management of job and domestic responsibilities tremendously puts an overwhelming pressure on the cognition and emotions of working women, thereby increasing burnout levels. (Allen et al., 2014; Kossek et al., 2006; Shockley et al., 2021). Post covid research also reported females to be vulnerable to emotional exhaustion and technostress. (Molino et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2021). Research by Shockley et al. (2021) exclaimed that women experience greater work-family conflict and psychological strain during remote work arrangements.

Furthermore, socio-cultural role expectations within collectivistic cultures like India glorify women as an embodiment of balance and resilience who can juggle multiple responsibilities of society, family and their occupation simultaneously. Hence, they are prone to experience higher burnout, but nonetheless, their performance shows no signs of difference as compared to men. The results clearly portray no significant difference between males and females in terms of work performance.



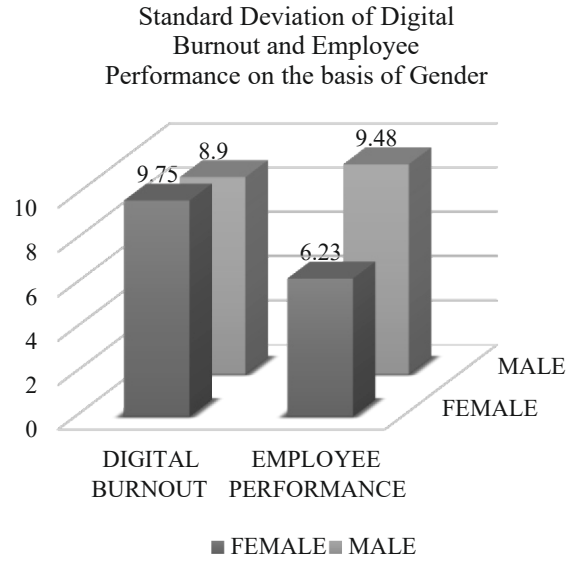


Figure 4&5: Diagram representing gendered comparison of mean and SD, respectively, of the Digital Burnout and Employee Performance of the Generation Z employees working remotely

Correlational Analysis –

The Pearson product-moment correlation was administered to the total scores of the two variables, namely digital burnout and employee performance.

Table 4: Relationship between Digital Burnout and Employee Performance among Generation Z employees working in a remote setting

Variables	Coefficients Of Correlation
Digital Burnout and Employee Performance	-0.227*

**significant at 0.05 level*

Table 4 expounds the relationship between digital burnout and employee performance among Generation Z employees working in a remote setting and presents a significant negative correlation, where r = -0.227. Thus, hypothesis 1, i.e., there is no significant relation between digital fatigue and work performance among Generation Z employees working in a remote setting, is rejected.

Therefore, with the increase in digital burnout, performance tends to decrease. Although the correlation is relatively low, the negative direction implies that higher levels of digital exhaustion, mental fatigue, emotional depletion, and digital overload are associated with lower levels of work performance among remote employees.

Findings corroborate the existing literature that excessive stress and employee burnout result in low motivation, productivity and psychological well-being. Remote work settings, with their implications, also affect employees physically and psychologically. Post-pandemic studies of remote work environments show that the levels of burnout impair productivity, motivation and work quality. (Molino et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2021; Schaufeli, 2021). Well, with time passing and the adaptability of Gen Z, who are digital natives, this inconsistency has gradually lowered, as they are constantly battling against burnout and trying their

best to curb its effect on work performance. The weak magnitude of the correlation thus depicts this present scenario proficiently and highlights how coping strategies, organisational support, and increased psychological awareness among the Generation Z population are substantially paving the way forward towards greater adaptability to hybrid or newer modes of work.

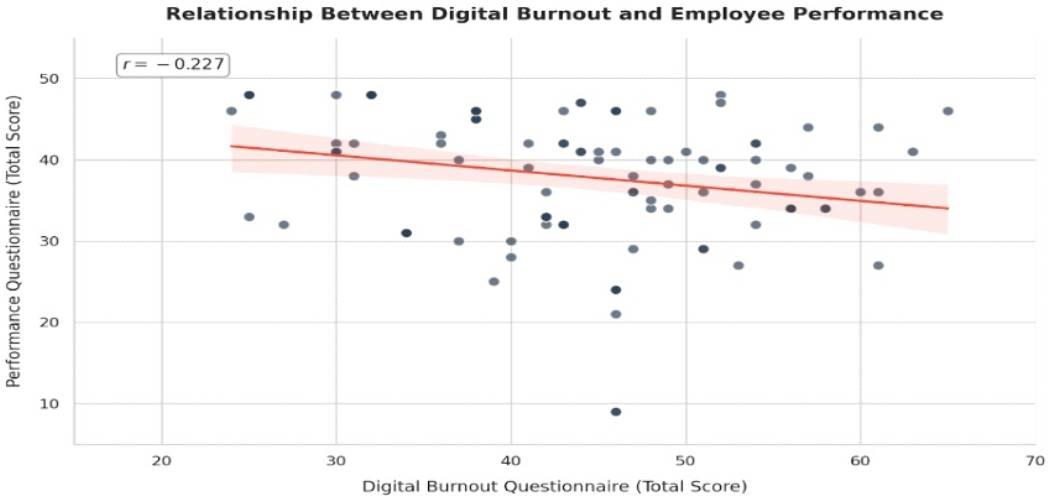


Figure 5: The Scatter Plot shows the Relationship between Digital Burnout and Employee Performance among Generation Z Employees working in a remote work setting.

Research Findings

Objective 1:

The findings highlighted that there is a significant gender difference in digital fatigue among Generation Z employees who are working in a remote work setting. The findings elucidate that women generally face work-life imbalance, impacting both their professional and personal spheres of life.

Objective 2:

The findings revealed that there was no statistically significant gender difference in work performance among Generation Z employees working remotely. Despite differences in the experience of digital fatigue, both male and female Generation Z employees were able to maintain relatively similar levels of work performance in remote work environments.

Objective 3:

The findings of the study revealed a statistically significant negative relationship between digital fatigue and work performance among Generation Z employees working remotely. Excessive usage of screens ultimately produces a negative influence on productivity, efficiency, concentration and motivation of the employees who are working from their homes.

Conclusion

The global shift from traditional work cultures to work-from-home cultures provided flexibility but created serious psychological and physical concerns. The study reported a significant negative correlation between the two variables and a gendered difference in burnout, with female employees experiencing greater strain. As digital natives, Gen Z continues to maintain their overall work performance, but organisations too must incorporate several optical and cognitive recovery

exercises with gender sensitive support. Ultimately, while technology is indispensable, it must not compromise human health.

Recommendations

The implications for organizations lie in managing digitally intensive work environments. Companies must keep in mind that employees' well-being is the pivotal point for organization productivity. Encouragement of regular breaks, arranging "no meeting" days or avoiding meeting bloat by ensuring a short meeting time of 15-20 minutes rather than an hour-long meeting. Implementation of the 20-20-20 rule, i.e., an eye rest exercise of looking at something which is located 20 feet away for 20 seconds every 20 minutes of screen time exposure, can also aid in reducing the physiological effects of burnout. At the individual level, employees should undertake mindfulness-based stress reduction techniques, and they should ensure that after working hours, they spend screen-free hours with their family and friends.

Scope For Future Research

Future research must focus on a larger and more diverse sample to understand the variances of screen burnout affecting employees among different work sectors. Longitudinal designs can give a deeper understanding of the variables such as individual coping abilities, sleep quality, work-life balance, organizational support and emotional intelligence that cause technostress. Comparative studies across different generations can also give a preview of how the experience of digital fatigue and performance varies from traditional to contemporary workplaces. Additionally, advanced analytical techniques such as structural equation modelling (SEM) could be employed, along with effect size measures to enhance the statistical significance of these observed findings.

Limitations

Regardless of the contributions, there are a few limitations to this study. It was conducted on a small sample of Generation Z employees who were from the IT sectors of eastern India, which limits the generalizability of the results to all other age groups, occupational and geographical contexts. Self-report mechanisms were adopted that could have introduced response biases. Furthermore, the study was conducted in the Indian socio-cultural context, with a purposive sampling technique that inherently puts a limit on the generalisability to the global sphere. It primarily focuses on employees who are working from their homes in fully remote working conditions, so it may restrict the applicability to those who are in flexible or hybrid work settings.

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