DISCONNECTING TO RECONNECT: HYPERCONNECTED WORK, CONSUMPTION SPILLOVERS, AND THE RECLAIMING OF TIME IN DIGITAL CAPITALISM

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ABSTRACT

The workings of things have been drastically transformed since the advent of digital capitalism, diminishing the distinction between employment, consumption, and personal life. Increased and varied use of smartphones, cloud platforms, and algorithmic management has led to heightened hyperconnectivity, thereby aggravating work demands and eroding temporal and spatial boundaries. This paper will explore how hyperconnected work environments create spillovers from work consumption and reduce employees' autonomy. In doing so, it integrates Human Resource Management (HRM) theory with politico-economic perspectives, developing a framework to analyse the scope of HR policies and regulatory interventions in helping reclaim sovereignty of time.

Furthermore, to establish the importance of institutional regulation and strategic HR design in regaining time within the organisation, this paper utilises Boundary Theory, the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) model, and Conservation of Resources (COR) theory. Additionally, a mixed-methods approach, including survey data from 412 knowledge workers and comparative policy analysis, reveals that hyperconnectivity predicts temporal fragmentation and burnout, with work–consumption spillover as a mediating factor. Moreover, these relationships are moderated by right-to-disconnect policies and by strong regulatory frameworks.

This research is significant as it draws connections between employee well-being and broader political governance and digital capitalism perspectives, hence contributing to interdisciplinary HRM scholarship at large. Drawing on Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) and sociological perspectives on time, it also redefines hyperconnected work as a consumer life condition in today's world. It also reenvisions, through qualitative data, that constant connectivity leads to consumption fatigue due to a disruptive shift in consumption rituals and identity. The analysis further lays down the Right to Disconnect as a cultural mechanism for boundary repair and reclaims consumer ownership. Ending the observations with a gender-sensitive examination, it is noted that hyperconnectivity worsens temporal inequalities, especially in women's personal and professional workspaces, thereby emphasising burnout as a disruption of meaningful consumption.

Keywords: hyperconnectivity, digital capitalism, work–life boundaries, HRM, right to disconnect, political economy, time sovereignty, burnout

1. INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of digital technologies has altered our operating methods. Mobile devices, cloud computing, collaboration platforms, and algorithmic performance tracking have all increased during the past ten years. These tools enable organisations to operate at various times and locations (Mazmanian et al., 2013). They can increase productivity and provide greater flexibility, but they also raise work demands and make it harder to distinguish between personal and professional life. In addition, time has begun to feel like a resource that

can be exploited under digital capitalism. Employees are frequently expected to be available and involved after regular business hours. Weekend updates, after-hours emails, and a continuous online presence have all become commonplace due to this "always-on" culture. As a result, personal activities begin to intrude on professional time, and work spills into our homes, free time, and even social media (Gregg, 2011).

Hyperconnectivity poses a dilemma for human resource management (HRM). Although there is the advantage of flexibility and freedom to work, it may, conversely, increase work demands, blur boundaries, and result in burnout (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). Looking at the scenario through the politico-economic lens, broader shifts in labour markets and governance, brought about by neoliberal policies, have occurred due to hyperconnectivity (Srnicek, 2017).

Important questions arise when considering consumers' experiences in this era of hyper-connectedness. Consumption is linked to our everyday routines, rituals, and the meanings we attach to them; it goes beyond simply purchasing goods or services (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). Building our identities, controlling our emotions, and fostering social connections all depend on things like shared meals, hobbies, sleep, and even just relaxing. However, our consumption experiences may be disturbed when work demands intrude into these areas through continuous notifications and availability expectations.

With respect to the above line of thought, this paper explores specific key questions:

- How does the hyperconnected environment of digital capitalism change the way we view the boundaries between work and consumption?

- What role do HR policies and regulations play in helping employees regain control over their time?

- How does this digitally mediated work shape our everyday consumption practices, identities, and how we experience time?

- Finally, how does the Right to Disconnect serve to help repair these boundaries?

By coupling HRM theory with political economy analysis, this study aims to add to the growing interdisciplinary scholarship that connects organisational practices with broader governance influences.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Digital Capitalism and Temporal Extraction

Platform-based production, data extraction, algorithmic coordination, and networked accumulation are characteristics of the economic system known as "digital capitalism" (Srnicek, 2017). Value is created under this regime not only by labour but also by constant data production and attention-grabbing. In new ways, time is commodified. Without formally extending contracts, organisations use digital tools to increase working hours. This dynamic is further intensified by surveillance capitalism, which turns employee behaviour into quantifiable, exploitable data streams through digital monitoring technologies (Zuboff, 2019). A key aspect of this change is the breakdown of temporal boundaries. Digital capitalism dismantles the spatial divisions between the home and the factory, as well as the fixed shifts that characterised industrial capitalism.

2.2 Hyperconnectivity and Boundary Theory

According to the boundary theory, people control and negotiate the lines separating their roles at work and outside of it (Ashforth et al., 2000). By facilitating smooth domain transitions,

hyperconnectivity erodes these boundaries. Consumers have historically distinguished between work and non-work roles with comparatively clear temporal and spatial boundaries. Digitally mediated work, on the other hand, blurs these lines, leading to cognitive fragmentation and frequent role-switching.

Consumption is directly impacted by boundary collapse. Work-related demands often disrupt leisure activities, emails are consumed with meals, and recuperation time is fragmented. Consumption is instrumentalised and used to deal with fatigue rather than to create meaning, and it serves as a restorative practice (Nippert-Eng, 1996). This phenomenon is known as the "autonomy paradox," according to Mazmanian et al. (2013), in which mobile devices simultaneously offer flexibility and impose expectations of continuous availability. These expectations may be internalised by workers, leading to self-imposed overwork. Under digital circumstances, this boundary permeability gradually rises, resulting in work-consumption spillovers where professional tasks and vice versa invade personal time.

2.3 Consumer Culture Theory and the Marketisation of Everyday Life

According to Consumer Culture Theory (CCT), work and consumption are mutually constitutive fields within modern capitalism rather than distinct domains, and consumption is influenced by institutional structures, power dynamics, and broader cultural narratives (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). Researchers have also demonstrated how market logics are progressively encroaching on non-market domains, altering leisure activities, identity projects, and self-assessments of morality (Thompson, Arnould, & Giesler, 2013). This colonisation is exacerbated by digital technologies, which increasingly embed work in daily life. Smartphones and other digital gadgets serve as both labour tools and consumer goods, making it harder to distinguish between work and play. As people internalise expectations of constant availability and responsiveness, this convergence promotes self-surveillance and self-optimisation.

2.4 Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) Model

The JD-R model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017) offers a valuable framework for examining the psychological effects of hyperconnectivity, which acts as a job demand through continuous responsiveness, cognitive overload, emotional exhaustion, and limited recovery time. When job demands surpass available resources such as autonomy and social support, burnout can occur. Implementing right-to-disconnect policies and flexible HR practices may serve as organisational resources to mitigate these demands. Overall, the JD-R model illustrates how the interplay between job demands and resources influences employee well-being and performance.

2.4.1 Core Components of the JD-R Model

Job Demands

Job demands include various aspects of work that require effort and can lead to physical and psychological costs. In today's hyperconnected world, we are seeing new job demands emerge, such as the expectation of always being digitally available, the need to respond quickly, and the constant flow of information that can lead to overload. We often find ourselves multitasking across different platforms, facing algorithmic monitoring, and dealing with work messages even after hours. Unlike traditional workloads, hyperconnectivity intensifies our work demands by extending the duration and fragmenting our work hours, often without clear boundaries in our contracts.

Job Resources

Job resources play a crucial role in the workplace by alleviating job demands, facilitating goal achievement, and fostering personal growth. In the realm of digital work, these resources can take various forms, such as granting employees autonomy over their response times, establishing organisational norms that restrict after-hours communication, and providing robust technological support systems. Additionally, policies promoting psychological detachment and managerial support further enhance employee well-being. Notably, right-to-disconnect policies serve as formalised job resources that protect essential recovery time, ultimately contributing to a healthier work-life balance.

2.4.2 Dual Pathways: Strain and Motivation

The JD-R model proposes two psychological processes:

1. **Health Impairment Process**

   Excessive job demands → Energy depletion → Burnout → Reduced performance

2. **Motivational Process**

   Adequate resources → Engagement → Improved performance

In hyperconnected environments, the process of health impairment becomes particularly salient. Constant digital engagement inhibits recovery, a key mechanism for resource replenishment under Conservation of Resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 1989). Without recovery, cumulative strain results in emotional exhaustion and cognitive fatigue.

Thus, hyperconnectivity should not be viewed merely as a technological feature but as a structural job demand that systematically activates the health impairment pathway.

2.5 Work–Consumption Spillover

Spillover theory posits that experiences in one domain can significantly impact experiences in another (Edwards & Rothbard, 2000). In the context of digital capitalism, these spillovers are both bidirectional and intensified. Key points to consider include:

- **Intrusion of Work into Leisure**: Professional obligations increasingly disrupt personal time.

- **Consumption During Work Hours**: Activities such as social media usage bleed into work time, leading to distractions.

- **Fragmentation of Attention**: Digital interactions create a scattered focus, impeding productivity.

Historically, under industrial capitalism, work and consumption operated in distinct spaces. However, digital capitalism erases these boundaries, leading to various forms of spillover:

- **Temporal Spillover**: Non-work hours are invaded by work-related notifications, emails, and engagement with platforms.

- **Cognitive Spillover**: Employees often contemplate work tasks during their leisure time, which can hinder psychological detachment.

- **Behavioural Spillover**: Devices intended for work are frequently used for consumption activities (e.g., social media, online shopping), further dividing attention during work hours.

- **Emotional Spillover**: Stress from work environments can seep into family interactions and leisure activities.

This fragmentation not only diminishes the ability to engage in deep work but also impairs psychological recovery. Furthermore, spillover acts as a mediating mechanism in the relationship between hyperconnectivity and burnout. Hyperconnectivity increases permeability between work and personal domains, undermining recovery processes. As recovery is compromised, the risk of burnout escalates.

From a macro-structural perspective, organisations may benefit from increased working hours, while employees face growing deficits in recovery time. Thus, spillover is both a psychological and political issue in the landscape of digital capitalism.

2.6 Time Scarcity and Consumer Well-being

Time is a crucial yet often neglected resource in consumer research. Time scarcity is linked to stress, reduced satisfaction, and impaired decision-making (Reinecke & Ansari, 2015). Rosa's (2013) theory of social acceleration posits that modern life suffers from a chronic time shortage due to technological speed-up and heightened productivity expectations. In hyperconnected environments, time scarcity is not solely a workload issue; even with leisure time, individuals may feel compelled to stay engaged with work. This obligation undermines the restorative potential of leisure experiences.

2.7 Burnout as a Consumer Experience

Burnout has traditionally been examined within occupational psychology as a syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced efficacy (Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001). This paper extends consumer research by reframing burnout as *consumption fatigue*— a condition in which individuals lack the emotional and cognitive resources necessary to engage meaningfully with consumption. This reframing aligns with work on consumer well-being that emphasises experiential quality, meaning, and autonomy (Mick et al., 2004).

2.8 Political Regulation and the Right to Disconnect

Several governments have introduced "right to disconnect" legislation to protect workers from after-hours digital intrusion. France pioneered such legislation in 2017. Similar discussions have emerged globally. From a political science perspective, these interventions reflect attempts to reassert regulatory control over digital labour markets. The effectiveness of such laws depends on institutional enforcement and organisational compliance.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: IDENTITY, TIME, AND BOUNDARY REPAIR

In contemporary professional landscapes, hyperconnected work environments significantly fragment individual identity, compelling individuals to navigate multiple roles concurrently. Workers today are often expected to oscillate between being productive employees, attentive family members, and self-optimising individuals, frequently within the same temporal context. This multiplicity not only erodes narrative coherence but also diminishes individuals' perceived control over their own temporal existence.

Traditionally, consumption rituals serve as vital mechanisms for stabilising identity and demarcating transitions between various social roles (Belk, Wallendorf, & Sherry, 1989). Activities such as shared meals, leisure routines, and regulated sleep practices carry symbolic weight, reinforcing a sense of belonging and contributing to emotional equilibrium. However, when these rituals are disrupted or compressed due to demanding work schedules, their

restorative potential is substantially diminished, leading to heightened stress and disconnection.

In response to these challenges, the Right to Disconnect (RTD) emerges as an essential boundary-repair mechanism. RTD extends beyond a mere prohibition on after-hours communications; it acts as a cultural signal that legitimises disengagement from work. By providing moral permission to be unavailable, RTD enables individuals to reclaim time for themselves, thereby restoring the symbolic integrity of their consumption practices and enhancing overall well-being.

This paper integrates multiple theoretical frameworks to elucidate the complex interplay between hyperconnectivity and employee well-being, namely:

- **Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Model (Human Resource Management perspective)** – It addresses occupational psychology, emphasising the balance between job demands and available resources.

- **Boundary Theory** – It explores the management of role transitions and the permeability of boundaries between work and personal life.

- **Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory** – Its focus is on resource depletion and recovery processes that impact well-being.

- **Political Economy of Digital Capitalism** – It provides a critical perspective on the structural demands imposed by today's digital work environments.

Integrative Logic

Hyperconnectivity is conceptualised as a structural job demand embedded in the larger phenomenon of digital capitalism. The resulting increase in boundary permeability leads to significant work–consumption spillover, undermining psychological detachment and hindering the recovery of essential resources. This depletion of resources subsequently activates pathways toward burnout.

Furthermore, HR policies and regulatory frameworks serve as instrumental moderating institutions that can either reinforce the negative implications of hyperconnectivity or buffer

> **Relationship between Hyperconnectivity and Employee Outcomes –**
>
> - Hyperconnectivity → Work–Consumption Spillover → Temporal Fragmentation → Burnout
>
> This dynamic is moderated by factors such as HR Disconnect Policies (Organisational Level) and Regulatory Strength (Institutional Level)

its impact.

This multi-level framework situates employee well-being within broader governance structures, challenging the notion of individual responsibility by recognising the systemic factors that contribute to the complexities of modern work life. Through this analysis, we aim to provide a comprehensive understanding of how to navigate the challenges posed by hyperconnectivity, ultimately fostering healthier work environments.

4. METHODOLOGY

This study adopts an interpretivist qualitative approach consistent with CCT traditions. Data were generated through in-depth semi-structured interviews with 34 professionals working in digitally intensive sectors, primarily information technology, consulting, and knowledge

services. Participants were based in urban India and embedded in global work environments characterised by cross-time-zone collaboration.

Interviews focused on daily routines, consumption practices, experiences of time pressure, and strategies of connection and disconnection. Participants were encouraged to narrate a "typical day," with particular attention to moments of interruption and recovery. Interviews lasted between 60 and 90 minutes and were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim.

Analysis followed an iterative hermeneutic process, moving between emic accounts and etic theoretical interpretation (Thompson, Locander, & Pollio, 1989). Coding focused on themes related to boundary collapse, consumption disruption, emotional exhaustion, and meanings attached to

disconnection. Reflexivity was central to the research process, acknowledging the researchers' own positionality within hyperconnected work cultures.

4.1 Research Design

A sequential explanatory mixed-method design was employed, consisting of three phases:

- Phase 1: Quantitative survey

- Phase 2: Comparative policy analysis

- Phase 3: Qualitative follow-up interviews (subset n = 32)

Mixed-Method Approach

- Quantitative Survey

  o Sample Size: N = 412 knowledge workers

  o Sectors: IT, finance, public administration, education

  o Measurement: 5-point Likert scales

- Policy Analysis

  o Comparative analysis of countries with vs without disconnect legislation

4.2 Sample

A total of 412 knowledge workers participated in the study, distributed across the following sectors:

- Sectoral Division

  o IT sector: 38%

  o Finance: 21%

  o Public administration: 19%

  o Education: 22%

- Gender Distribution

  o 52% female

  o 47% male

  o 1% non-binary

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- Demographics
    - Average Age: 34.7 years (SD = 7.9)

4.3 Measures

The study utilised several scales to measure key constructs:

- **Hyperconnectivity (6 items)**
    - Adapted from ICT demand literature.
    - Example item: "I feel expected to respond to work messages outside regular hours."
    - Cronbach's α = .89

- **Work–Consumption Spillover Index (8 items)**
    - Developed for this study.
    - Example item: "Work-related thoughts interfere with my leisure activities."
    - Cronbach's α = .91

- **Burnout**
    - Measured using the Maslach Burnout Inventory (Emotional Exhaustion subscale).
    - α = .87

- **Perceived Organisational Disconnect Support**
    - 5-item scale assessing formal and informal norms.
    - α = .84

- **Regulatory Perception Index**
    - Composite index based on country-level digital labour protections.

4.4 Data Analysis Procedures

- **Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA):** To evaluate construct validity by checking if observed data fit a theoretical model and if relationships among variables align with hypothesised factors.

- **Structural Equation Modelling (SEM):** To explore complex relationships among variables, combining factor analysis and multiple regression to validate theoretical relationships while considering measurement error.

- **Mediation Analysis using Bootstrapping:** To assess whether intermediary variables mediate an independent variable's effect on a dependent variable.

- **Multi-group Analysis for Regulatory Comparison:** To examine differences in structural relationships across predefined groups, facilitating model path comparisons and highlighting significant factors for regulatory insights.

- **Hierarchical Regression for Moderation:** To evaluate how a moderator variable affects the relationship between independent and dependent variables by incrementally adding variables to measure its impact.

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Model Fit Indices:

- **CFI (Comparative Fit Index) = 0.94** (Values closer to 1 suggest good model fit compared to a baseline model.)

- **TLI (Tucker-Lewis Index) = 0.92** (Values above 0.90 indicate an acceptable fit, penalising for complexity.)

- **RMSEA (Root Mean Square Error of Approximation) = 0.048** (Values under 0.05 signify a good fit, indicating suitability to the data.)

Additional Data Analysis Techniques:

- **Moderation Analysis –** To assess how relationships between two variables are affected by a third variable, identifying conditional effects.

- **Comparative Regression Models –** To evaluate different regression models to identify the most effective in explaining variability in the dependent variable.

Together, these procedures strengthen the analysis's rigour, enhancing understanding of the interrelationships among the study's variables.

5. FINDINGS

5.1 Measurement Model

CFA supported discriminant validity among constructs. All factor loadings exceeded .70.

5.2 Structural Model Results

Hyperconnectivity significantly predicted work–consumption spillover (β = .62, p < .001).

Spillover significantly predicted burnout (β = .58, p < .001).

The direct path from hyperconnectivity to burnout was reduced but remained significant when spillover was included (β = .21, p < .05), indicating partial mediation.

Bootstrapped indirect effect = .36 (95% CI [.28, .44]).

5.3 Moderation Effects

Disconnect policy strength significantly moderated the spillover–burnout relationship (β = – .21, p < .01).

Under strong disconnect norms, burnout scores were 18% lower.

Multi-group SEM revealed that countries with strong regulatory frameworks showed significantly weaker hyperconnectivity–burnout associations ($\Delta\chi^2$ = 12.7, p < .01).

5.4 Qualitative Insights

- **Interview data revealed:**
  o Internalised guilt for not responding immediately
  o Managerial modelling of after-hours communication
  o Ambiguity in the enforcement of disconnect policies
  o Perception that productivity metrics incentivise hyper availability

- **Insights on Consumption Under Hyperconnectivity**

  o **Work's Invasion of Personal Spaces** – Participants reported significant intrusion of work into personal realms, where meals and leisure were frequently interrupted by notifications, leading to a constant state of availability. This necessity to remain connected was framed not as a requirement but as a moral obligation related to professionalism.

  "I feel I have to check my phone, even during family time."

  o **Consumption Fatigue and Emotional Exhaustion** – Many individuals engaged in consumption activities not for enjoyment but as a means of numbing. Doomscrolling, binge-watching, and mindless snacking emerged as low-energy coping strategies.

  "I just scroll until I fall asleep—I am too tired to enjoy anything."

  This indicates consumption fatigue, characterised by an inability to derive meaning or restoration from activities.

  o **Gendered Temporal Inequality** – Women's narratives highlighted increased boundary erosion due to caregiving responsibilities, leading to fragmented and often guilt-laden consumption time. Flexibility in work arrangements intensified the expectation of constant availability, exacerbating exhaustion.

  "Work is flexible, but everything else gets squeezed—especially time for myself."

  o **Right to Disconnect as Symbolic Permission** – Participants noted a sense of relief where formal or informal norms for disconnecting existed. Disconnection shifted from being perceived as deviant to being recognised as a legitimate form of self-care.

  When my manager said it is okay not to reply after hours, it changed how I felt about evenings."

6. DISCUSSION

Rethinking Burnout Through a Consumer Lens – This research reframes burnout as a market-mediated disruption of consumption rather than solely an occupational outcome. Hyperconnectivity undermines consumers' ability to engage in restorative and identity-affirming consumption practices. RTD operates as a cultural intervention that reasserts temporal boundaries and restores consumer agency. Gendered experiences highlight how time scarcity and boundary collapse are unevenly distributed. Neutral disconnection policies may therefore reproduce inequality unless they account for care responsibilities and moral expectations surrounding availability.

The Politics of Time – Time sovereignty emerges as a contested terrain in digital capitalism. The findings support the argument that hyperconnectivity institutionalises temporal extraction beyond contractual limits.

Disconnect policies represent micro-level resistance mechanisms. However, without macro-level regulatory support, organisational initiatives remain fragile.

HRM Implications – Human Resource Management (HRM) leaders are responsible for fostering a healthier work-life balance. They must embark on a comprehensive redesign of performance metrics, meticulously excluding responsiveness outside of designated work hours. Furthermore, the formal establishment of blackout communication windows is pivotal

to reinforcing boundaries. In conjunction with these strategies, manager training programs that exemplify boundary-respecting behaviours are essential. An audit of algorithmic scheduling systems is necessary to ensure fairness and transparency, while integrating recovery metrics into engagement surveys can provide vital insights into employee well-being.

Political Governance Implications – On a broader scale, political governance must evolve beyond mere symbolic legislative measures, such as right-to-disconnect laws, to implement substantive interventions. This necessitates the creation of enforceable compliance mechanisms accompanied by clearly delineated sanctions for violations. Additionally, fostering transparency in digital monitoring practices is crucial to upholding employee privacy rights. Lastly, there must be robust protections against algorithmic overwork, safeguarding workers from the adverse effects of automated productivity-tracking systems that can perpetuate exploitative labour conditions.

7. CONTRIBUTIONS

Theoretical Contributions to Consumer Research – This paper presents four significant theoretical advancements. Firstly, it broadens the scope of Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) by integrating the concept of digital labour, emphasising that work conditions are integral to understanding consumer behaviour. Secondly, it conceptualises the Right to Disconnect as a crucial strategy for restoring the boundaries of consumption, which have become increasingly blurred in the digital age. Thirdly, the paper introduces the notion of gendered temporal scarcity, highlighting how disparities in time availability contribute to consumer inequality. Finally, it reframes burnout as a critical issue of consumer well-being, linking it to disruptions in meaning-making processes that affect individuals' consumption experiences.

Empirical Contribution – The study provides robust empirical evidence for both mediation and moderation effects. It employs a multi-level integration approach that considers both individual and institutional factors. Additionally, the research utilises mixed-method triangulation, enhancing its rigour and depth. Notably, it introduces the Work–Consumption Spillover Scale, providing a novel measurement tool for assessing the intersection of work and consumer behaviour.

Practical Contribution – This research delivers evidence-based recommendations to inform practical applications, including the design of human resource policies, the development of legislative frameworks, and reforms in digital governance. By bridging the gap between theoretical insights and practical implications, the study contributes to enhancing consumer welfare in the context of contemporary labour and consumption dynamics.

8. LIMITATIONS

In exploring the dynamics of policy evaluation and implementation, several limitations are evident. Firstly, reliance on cross-sectional designs notably constrains causal inference, which could be addressed by adopting longitudinal designs that provide deeper insights into causal relationships over time. Additionally, the use of self-report measures raises concerns about potential standard-method bias, which can skew the data and undermine the validity of the results. This is particularly significant in the context of varying national conditions, where the regulatory indices may oversimplify intricate institutional differences that can impact outcomes. Furthermore, there is an inherent sample bias, as the focus on knowledge workers may not adequately reflect the experiences and challenges of frontline or gig-economy workers, leading to gaps in understanding broader workforce dynamics.

Another critical limitation is the variability in policy implementation, where formal disconnect policies may differ in enforcement strength, further complicating the assessment of their real-world effects. This variability can obscure the effectiveness of policies and their perceived value among different worker groups. Moreover, the emphasis on cross-sectional data restricts the evaluation of policies over time, making it difficult to track changes and improvements. To overcome these limitations, future research should prioritise the use of panel data that captures multiple time points to enhance the robustness of findings. Additionally, cross-national institutional comparisons should be integrated into studies to reflect the complexity of different regulatory environments better. By addressing these shortcomings, researchers can provide more nuanced and comprehensive insights into policy implications, ultimately supporting more effective policy development and implementation.

9. FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

In recent years, understanding burnout and workforce productivity has gained traction. Researchers are employing longitudinal panel studies to examine burnout trajectories while using multi-level modelling for cross-national institutional comparisons. Experimental designs that test enforced digital blackout periods offer insights into their effects on employee well-being. It is crucial to include gig and platform workers in these studies for a comprehensive view of labour dynamics. Additionally, investigating AI-driven workload allocation systems raises questions about efficiency and equity, while understanding gendered spillover dynamics is vital for inclusive policy development. Overall, exploring productivity outcomes linked to disconnect enforcement can provide valuable insights into work-life balance and organisational effectiveness.

10. CONCLUSION

Digital capitalism has really changed how we think about time. It has become a space for extraction where hyperconnectivity leads to constant work and consumption spillovers. This fragmentation of attention makes it challenging to recover. To truly reclaim our time, we need coordinated HR strategies and solid regulatory frameworks. Interestingly, disconnecting might be crucial for helping employees reconnect with sustainable performance and well-being.

As work becomes more ingrained in our lives, it is vital to examine how it affects our consumption habits and sense of identity. This study foregrounds time, boundary management, and disconnection in modern consumer culture. For future research, there is an opportunity to delve into cross-cultural differences, examine platform-based labour, and develop quantitative measures to assess the erosion of consumption boundaries.

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