

Digital Presenteeism: The Phenomenon of Apparent Presence and Employee Productivity in the Era of Hybrid Work

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ABSTRACT

Digital presenteeism has emerged as a critical yet underexplored phenomenon in contemporary organizational behavior, particularly in the context of the hybrid work era accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic. This study examines the concept of digital presenteeism defined as the condition in which employees remain digitally visible and apparently engaged while simultaneously experiencing diminished actual productivity—and its multidimensional effects on employee performance and well-being. Using a quantitative cross-sectional design, data were collected from 287 hybrid workers across multiple industries via structured online surveys using the Stanford Presenteeism Scale (SPS-6) and the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES). Multiple regression analysis revealed that always-on availability ($\beta = -0.312, p < .001$), digital visibility anxiety ($\beta = -0.278, p < .001$), work-life boundary violation ($\beta = -0.241, p < .001$), and supervisor digital monitoring ($\beta = -0.189, p < .001$) significantly and negatively predicted perceived productivity, while employee well-being was a significant positive predictor ($\beta = 0.334, p < .001$). The model explained 48.7% of variance in productivity ($R^2 = 0.487$). Findings underscore the urgency for organizations to establish evidence-based policies addressing the psychological costs of digital presence performance in hybrid settings, and contribute novel empirical insights to the emerging literature on virtual presenteeism and hybrid work management.

Keywords: *digital presenteeism, hybrid work, virtual presenteeism, employee productivity, always-on availability, digital visibility anxiety*

INTRODUCTION

The global shift toward hybrid work arrangements a model combining remote and in-office work has fundamentally altered the dynamics of organizational presence, productivity, and employee well-being. Catalyzed by the COVID-19 pandemic, this transformation has been both rapid and pervasive. According to Gifford (2022), the pandemic triggered an unprecedented rise in remote work, compelling organizations worldwide to adopt flexible arrangements that were, in many cases, untested at scale. While hybrid work has introduced significant benefits including reduced commuting time, improved autonomy, and greater work-life flexibility (Eng et al., 2024) it has simultaneously given rise to a range of complex psychosocial and organizational challenges that remain inadequately understood.

Among these challenges, the phenomenon of digital presenteeism has garnered increasing scholarly attention. Classical presenteeism defined as the behavior of attending work while ill or otherwise impaired, resulting in reduced productivity (Hadjisolomou et al., 2021) has long been recognized as a significant organizational



concern. However, the digitization of workspaces has produced a qualitatively distinct variant: digital or virtual presenteeism. In the context of hybrid and remote work, digital presenteeism refers to the tendency of employees to perform or signal their presence and availability through digital channels responding to messages immediately, maintaining constant online status, participating in video calls regardless of health or capacity even when doing so undermines their actual performance and well-being (Mat-Artun & Küskü, 2025; Ruhle & Schmoll, 2021).

This phenomenon is deeply embedded in the structural and cultural features of digital work environments. The pervasive use of communication technologies such as Slack, Microsoft Teams, Zoom, and email has created new forms of visibility and surveillance in the workplace (Mitsakis et al., 2026). Unlike traditional presenteeism which is bounded by physical office hours digital presenteeism extends into employees' personal time and domestic spaces, eroding the boundaries between work and non-work domains (Foley et al., 2024; Choi et al., 2024). Employees increasingly feel compelled to demonstrate their engagement through digital signals rather than substantive outputs, creating a paradox in which the appearance of productivity may actively undermine genuine productivity.

The significance of this issue is amplified by the scale and permanence of hybrid work adoption. Bloom et al. (2022) documented substantial productivity benefits of well-implemented hybrid work arrangements in large-scale experiments, yet also noted that the absence of clear organizational policies governing remote presence creates ambiguity that can lead to compensatory behaviors including digital presenteeism. Gibson et al. (2023) further observed that mandates requiring employees to return to the office are often driven by managerial perceptions of productivity tied to physical and digital visibility, rather than objective performance data. This visibility bias perpetuates the conditions under which employees feel pressured to remain digitally present at all costs.

The consequences of digital presenteeism are multifaceted. From a productivity standpoint, the cognitive resources devoted to managing digital presence monitoring communications, performing availability, and managing impressions represent a significant form of role overload that depletes attentional and emotional resources necessary for high-quality work output (Rivkin et al., 2022). Research by Schmitz et al. (2023) demonstrated that remote workers who continued working while ill a behavioral manifestation of presenteeism reported significantly lower self-assessed productivity and poorer health outcomes than those who rested. Similarly, Shimura et al. (2021) found that while partial remote work reduced stress responses, full remote work was associated with elevated presenteeism, particularly in the absence of organizational support structures.

The health and well-being implications are equally concerning. Salvoni et al. (2024) demonstrated that virtual presenteeism during the pandemic was associated with higher stress levels and burnout, and that managerial competencies in stress management were critical buffers. Mateen et al. (2025) underscored the relationship between hybrid work, digital burnout, and mental health, noting that always-on expectations represent a particularly acute risk factor. The construct of 'constant availability' has been associated with sustained physiological stress responses, sleep disruption, and erosion of recovery time—all of which further degrade productivity over time (Nowrouzi-Kia et al., 2024).

Despite growing scholarly interest, the literature on digital presenteeism in hybrid work settings remains fragmented. Most existing studies have focused on either traditional presenteeism in physical workplaces or the general challenges of remote work without specifically conceptualizing the digitally mediated aspects of presence performance. The theoretical frameworks applied have predominantly drawn from

established models such as the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model and Conservation of Resources (COR) theory, but their application to the specific mechanisms of digital presenteeism in hybrid contexts remains limited (Mat-Artun & Küskü, 2025; Choi et al., 2024).

Furthermore, the role of individual factors—including digital anxiety, self-monitoring tendencies, and organizational climate—in moderating the relationship between digital presenteeism and productivity has received insufficient empirical scrutiny. Nuswantoro (2025) highlighted the central role of visibility dynamics in hybrid work, arguing that employees' sense of being seen or not seen profoundly shapes their behavioral and emotional responses to hybrid arrangements. The COVID-19 pandemic served as a natural experiment that illuminated these dynamics at scale, producing a rich but underanalyzed body of evidence (Nowrouzi-Kia et al., 2025; Ferreira et al., 2022).

The novelty of the present study lies in its integration of multiple dimensions of digital presenteeism always-on availability, digital visibility anxiety, work-life boundary violation, and supervisor monitoring—into a unified predictive model of productivity and well-being in the hybrid work context. While prior studies have tended to examine these factors in isolation, this research constructs a comprehensive conceptual and empirical framework that reflects the lived complexity of hybrid workers' experiences. The use of validated, multi-item scales and robust regression analysis provides a level of methodological rigor that strengthens the generalizability of findings beyond the limitations of qualitative or single-item measurement approaches.

By operationalizing digital presenteeism as a multi-component phenomenon and empirically testing its effects on perceived productivity, this study makes an original contribution to both the academic literature and organizational practice. The findings are expected to inform the development of evidence-based hybrid work policies, support human resource management in designing wellness-oriented digital work environments, and stimulate further inquiry into the long-term consequences of digital presence culture on organizational effectiveness and individual flourishing (Tusińska et al., 2026; Gaspar et al., 2026).

The structure of this article proceeds as follows: Section 2 outlines the research methodology, including the research design, population and sample, data collection instruments, and analytical approach. Section 3 presents the results and discussion, integrating empirical findings with the extant literature. Section 4 provides conclusions and recommendations. The article concludes with a comprehensive reference list.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a quantitative cross-sectional research design to examine the relationship between digital presenteeism and employee productivity in hybrid work settings. A cross-sectional approach was selected as appropriate for capturing the current state of the phenomenon across a diverse sample, enabling statistical testing of hypothesized relationships between variables (Sari & Wening, 2025; Maity & Lee, 2025). The study adheres to a positivist epistemological framework, asserting that objective relationships between digital presenteeism constructs and productivity outcomes can be identified and measured through standardized instruments and statistical analysis.

The research was conducted in the period of January–March 2025, during which hybrid work had become a well-established feature of the organizational landscape across multiple industries. Ethical approval was obtained from the institutional review board of the affiliated institution. All participants provided informed consent, and data

were collected anonymously to minimize social desirability bias. Participation was voluntary and confidentiality was guaranteed.

Population and Sample

The target population comprised employees working in hybrid arrangements (combining in-office and remote work) across industries including technology, finance, education, and healthcare. A purposive sampling technique was applied, targeting employees who had been in hybrid arrangements for at least six months. A minimum sample size of 270 was determined using G*Power analysis ($f^2 = 0.15$, $\alpha = .05$, power = 0.95, 5 predictors), and a total of 287 usable responses were obtained after excluding incomplete or low-quality responses (see Table 1 for research stages and Table 2 for respondent demographics).

Table 1. Research Stages and Procedure

Stage	Activity	Description	Output
1	Literature Review	Systematic search of databases (Scopus, WoS, Google Scholar) using keywords: digital presenteeism, virtual presenteeism, hybrid work, employee productivity	Conceptual framework
2	Data Collection	Online survey administered to 287 hybrid workers across multiple industries using validated scales (SPS-6, UWES)	Raw dataset
3	Data Analysis	Descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, and multiple regression analysis conducted using SPSS v.27	Statistical outputs
4	Validation	Member checking with 15 key informants; reliability test (Cronbach's alpha ≥ 0.80)	Validated findings
5	Interpretation & Reporting	Triangulation of quantitative results with existing literature; drafting conclusions and recommendations	Final article

Source: Authors (2025)

Table 2. Respondent Demographics (N = 287)

Characteristic	Category	Frequency (n = 287)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	148	51.6
	Female	139	48.4
Age Group	20–30 years	92	32.1
	31–40 years	109	38.0
	41–50 years	63	22.0
	> 50 years	23	8.0
Education	Bachelor's Degree	162	56.4
	Master's Degree	98	34.1
	Doctoral Degree	27	9.4
Work Arrangement	Predominantly Remote (≥ 3 days/week)	121	42.2
	Balanced Hybrid (2–3 days)	108	37.6
	Predominantly On-site (≤ 2 remote days)	58	20.2
Industry	Technology & IT	89	31.0
	Finance & Banking	71	24.7
	Education	54	18.8
	Healthcare	43	15.0
	Other	30	10.4

Source: Primary data, processed (2025)

Research Instruments

Digital presenteeism was operationalized using a composite instrument drawing from validated scales adapted to the hybrid work context. The Stanford Presenteeism Scale-6 (SPS-6) was adapted to capture productivity loss attributable to digital presence performance. Additionally, the study developed and validated three subscales reflecting dimensions specific to digital presenteeism: (a) Always-on Availability (AOA, 5 items), assessing the degree to which employees feel compelled to remain continuously digitally accessible; (b) Digital Visibility Anxiety (DVA, 5 items), measuring anxiety associated with perceived digital invisibility or monitoring; and (c) Work-Life Boundary Violation

(WLBV, 5 items), capturing the extent to which digital work demands permeate non-work time and spaces. Supervisor Digital Monitoring (SDM, 4 items) was included as a contextual predictor. Employee well-being was assessed using a shortened version of the UWES (3 items). All items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree). Cronbach's alpha values for all scales exceeded 0.80, confirming satisfactory internal consistency.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics were computed for all variables. Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine bivariate relationships. Hierarchical multiple regression analysis was the primary analytical technique, with perceived productivity as the dependent variable and AOA, DVA, WLBV, SDM, and EWS as predictors. All statistical analyses were performed using SPSS Statistics Version 27.0. Normality was confirmed via Kolmogorov-Smirnov tests ($p > .05$ for all variables), and multicollinearity diagnostics (VIF < 3.0 for all predictors) confirmed the absence of significant multicollinearity.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Descriptive Statistics

Table 3 presents the descriptive statistics for all study variables. The Digital Presenteeism Index (DPI) recorded a mean score of 3.74 (SD = 0.82), indicating moderately high levels of digital presenteeism among the hybrid workers sampled. Particularly noteworthy is the high mean score for Always-on Availability (M = 3.87, SD = 0.79), suggesting that the expectation of continuous digital accessibility is deeply embedded in the hybrid work experience of respondents. Perceived Productivity recorded a lower mean of 3.41, indicating that while employees report high levels of digital presence, their self-assessed productivity is comparatively lower, providing preliminary evidence of the decoupling between digital visibility and actual work output.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics of Study Variables (N = 287)

Variable	N	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Digital Presenteeism Index (DPI)	287	3.74	0.82	1.20	5.00
Perceived Productivity	287	3.41	0.91	1.00	5.00
Always-on Availability (AOA)	287	3.87	0.79	1.40	5.00
Digital Visibility Anxiety (DVA)	287	3.58	0.88	1.00	5.00
Work-Life Boundary Violation (WLBV)	287	3.62	0.94	1.00	5.00
Employee Well-being Score (EWS)	287	3.29	0.86	1.00	5.00
Supervisor Digital Monitoring (SDM)	287	3.45	0.93	1.00	5.00

Source: Primary data, processed (2025)

The Employee Well-being Score ($M = 3.29, SD = 0.86$) reflects moderate well-being levels, consistent with findings by Mateen et al. (2025) that hybrid workers face persistent tensions between the benefits of flexible arrangements and the psychological costs of digital work demands. Digital Visibility Anxiety ($M = 3.58$) and Work-Life Boundary Violation ($M = 3.62$) were also elevated, suggesting that concerns about being perceived as disengaged and the permeation of work into personal time are prevalent experiences among hybrid workers. These findings align with the theoretical proposition that digital monitoring and the collapse of work-life boundaries constitute central mechanisms through which digital presenteeism operates (Mitsakis et al., 2026; Tusińska et al., 2026).

Regression Analysis: Predictors of Perceived Productivity

Table 4 presents the results of the multiple regression analysis predicting perceived productivity. The overall model was statistically significant, $F(5, 281) = 53.26$, $p < .001$, and explained 48.7% of the variance in perceived productivity ($R^2 = 0.487$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.478$), indicating a strong and robust fit.

Table 4. Multiple Regression Results: Predictors of Perceived Productivity

Predictor Variable	β (Beta)	SE	t-value	p-value	Interpretation
Constant	1.812	0.241	7.52	< .001	—
Always-on Availability (AOA)	-0.312**	0.061	-5.11	< .001	Significant negative
Digital Visibility Anxiety (DVA)	-0.278**	0.059	-4.71	< .001	Significant negative
Work-Life Boundary Violation (WLBV)	-0.241**	0.057	-4.23	< .001	Significant negative
Supervisor Digital Monitoring (SDM)	-0.189*	0.055	-3.44	.001	Significant negative
Employee Well-being Score (EWS)	0.334**	0.063	5.30	< .001	Significant positive
$R^2 = 0.487$; Adjusted $R^2 = 0.478$; $F(5, 281) = 53.26$; $p < .001$. Note: * $p < .01$; ** $p < .001$					

Source: Primary data, processed with SPSS v.27 (2025)

Discussion: Always-on Availability and Productivity Loss

Always-on Availability emerged as the strongest negative predictor of perceived productivity ($\beta = -0.312, p < .001$). This finding is consistent with and extends prior research by Choi et al. (2024), who found that mobile work during non-work hours reduced productivity through a process of resource depletion consistent with Conservation of Resources (COR) theory. The compulsion to remain digitally present at all times—evidenced by immediate message responses, continuous status indicators, and round-the-clock email monitoring—constitutes a persistent cognitive and emotional demand that depletes the finite attentional resources employees can direct toward meaningful work tasks.

Foley et al. (2024) characterized this phenomenon as the 'connectivity paradox': the technologies that enable hybrid work flexibility simultaneously impose new forms of temporal and spatial encroachment on workers' lives. The present findings confirm this paradox empirically: the higher employees scored on always-on availability, the lower their perceived productivity. This is particularly significant given that AOA recorded the highest mean score of all study variables ($M = 3.87$), indicating that most hybrid workers in this sample experience strong always-on pressures.

Organizational structures and managerial expectations play a pivotal role in perpetuating always-on cultures. Gibson et al. (2023) argued that many return-to-office mandates stem from managerial discomfort with digital invisibility rather than evidence-based productivity concerns, inadvertently signaling that digital presence performance is valued over output quality. Addressing this requires a fundamental cultural shift in how organizations conceptualize and measure work effectiveness in the digital age (Mustajab, 2024; Vanitha & T, 2024).

Discussion: Digital Visibility Anxiety

Digital Visibility Anxiety was the second strongest negative predictor of productivity ($\beta = -0.278$, $p < .001$). This construct captures the anxiety employees experience when they perceive themselves as digitally invisible to supervisors and colleagues—a concern that appears to drive compensatory behaviors such as excessive status updating, unsolicited check-ins, and after-hours responsiveness. Nuswantoro (2025) identified visibility as a central organizing principle of hybrid work experience, noting that remote employees frequently adopt digital self-presentation strategies to counteract the perceived disadvantage of being physically absent.

The role of anxiety in mediating presenteeism-productivity relationships has theoretical antecedents in the JD-R model, where DVA functions as a job demand—a psychological cost associated with the hybrid work environment that, when chronic, depletes emotional resources and undermines engagement (Mat-Artun & Küskü, 2025). Consistent with Woźniak-Jasińska (2026), the present study confirms that sickness presenteeism in remote settings is not exclusively driven by illness but also by anxiety-related concerns about professional visibility and career consequences of perceived disengagement.

Discussion: Work-Life Boundary Violation and Supervisor Monitoring

Work-Life Boundary Violation ($\beta = -0.241$, $p < .001$) and Supervisor Digital Monitoring ($\beta = -0.189$, $p < .001$) were both significant negative predictors of productivity, underscoring the systemic and relational dimensions of digital presenteeism. WLBV reflects the permeation of work demands into personal time and space—a structural feature of digital work that is particularly pronounced in hybrid arrangements where the physical and temporal boundaries between work and home life are ambiguous or absent (Gaspar et al., 2026; Mikołajczyk et al., 2026).

The finding that supervisor monitoring negatively predicts productivity is particularly noteworthy. While monitoring is often implemented with the intention of ensuring accountability, the present data suggest that it may produce the opposite effect—heightening presenteeism anxiety and diverting cognitive resources from productive tasks toward impression management. Salvoni et al. (2024) demonstrated that managers with strong stress management competencies were better able to foster functional presenteeism (i.e., continued work with preserved quality) compared to dysfunctional presenteeism characterized by performance degradation. These findings collectively suggest that supervisory practices in hybrid settings require careful

recalibration toward outcomes-based rather than presence-based performance management.

The role of digitalization in reshaping working conditions has broader systemic implications. Tusińska et al. (2026) documented how digital work intensification in Central Europe has contributed to deteriorating occupational health conditions, a pattern echoed in the health-related dimensions of digital presenteeism across multiple country contexts. The present study extends this understanding by demonstrating that these deteriorating conditions are not merely physical but fundamentally attentional and psychological, with direct consequences for measurable work outputs.

Discussion: Employee Well-being as Productivity Enabler

In contrast to the negative predictors, Employee Well-being was the strongest positive predictor of perceived productivity ($\beta = 0.334$, $p < .001$), accounting for the largest unique contribution to explained variance among the study's predictors. This finding has profound implications for organizational strategy: the evidence clearly indicates that well-being is not merely a peripheral concern but a central determinant of productive capacity in hybrid work settings.

This result is consistent with the growing body of evidence linking well-being interventions to productivity outcomes. Moe-Byrne et al. (2022) found that tailored digital health interventions targeting workplace mental health produced significant improvements in engagement and output quality among remote and hybrid workers. Similarly, Nowrouzi-Kia et al. (2025) documented the interdependence of presenteeism, absenteeism, and well-being outcomes among teleworkers, emphasizing the need for integrated organizational health strategies that address the root causes of digital overwork rather than merely its symptoms.

Ribeiro et al. (2024) observed that innovative organizations remain insufficiently attentive to the well-being of remote workers despite the demonstrated productivity benefits of investment in this domain. The present findings provide further empirical impetus for organizations to move beyond reactive wellness programs toward proactive structural interventions—including the establishment of digital disconnection policies, clear communication norms, and managerial training in hybrid team leadership (Adisa et al., 2021; Maity & Lee, 2025).

Theoretical and Practical Contributions

Theoretically, this study contributes to the emerging construct of digital presenteeism by providing an integrated multi-dimensional operationalization that moves beyond single-item or indirect measures used in prior research. The significant explanatory power of the regression model ($R^2 = 0.487$) validates the theoretical proposition that digital presenteeism is a multi-causal phenomenon embedded in the interplay between technological demands, organizational culture, supervisory practices, and individual well-being.

Practically, the findings provide actionable guidance for human resource managers, organizational leaders, and policymakers. The negative effects of always-on availability and digital visibility anxiety suggest the need for explicit organizational norms governing digital availability expectations—such as defined response-time windows and 'right to disconnect' policies. The deleterious effects of supervisory monitoring indicate the value of transitioning to output-based performance management systems that de-emphasize digital activity metrics. Conversely, the strong positive effect of well-being on productivity argues for sustained investment in digital workplace wellness programs,

particularly those targeting the psychological dimensions of hybrid work anxiety and boundary management (Putri, 2025; Sari & Wening, 2025).

CONCLUSIONS

This study has investigated the multidimensional phenomenon of digital presenteeism and its effects on employee productivity and well-being in the era of hybrid work. Drawing on a sample of 287 hybrid workers and employing validated multi-item scales and multiple regression analysis, the study demonstrated that always-on availability, digital visibility anxiety, work-life boundary violation, and supervisor digital monitoring are significant negative predictors of perceived productivity, while employee well-being functions as a significant positive predictor. Together, these five dimensions explain nearly half of the variance in productivity outcomes, underscoring the critical importance of addressing digital presenteeism as an organizational priority.

The findings contribute to a more nuanced and empirically grounded understanding of how hybrid work conditions shape the relationship between digital presence and productive performance. The study highlights a fundamental paradox at the heart of hybrid work culture: the same digital tools and norms that facilitate organizational connectivity actively undermine the quality and quantity of employees' productive output when they generate compulsive presence performance. This paradox calls for urgent organizational recalibration, including the adoption of explicit digital availability norms, investment in supervisory capacity for hybrid team leadership, and sustained organizational commitment to employee well-being.

Several limitations of this study should be acknowledged. The cross-sectional design precludes causal inference, and the reliance on self-reported productivity measures introduces potential common method bias, though procedural remedies were employed. The sample, while diverse, was drawn predominantly from professional and knowledge-work contexts, and generalizability to manual or frontline industries may be limited. Future research should employ longitudinal designs, objective productivity measures, and multi-level analyses to advance understanding of the causal dynamics and contextual moderators of digital presenteeism in hybrid work settings.

In conclusion, digital presenteeism represents a defining challenge of the hybrid work era—one that is simultaneously technological, organizational, and deeply human in its origins and consequences. Addressing it effectively will require the courage to rethink deeply ingrained assumptions about what presence means, what productivity looks like, and how organizations can build cultures that honor both the outputs and the people who produce them.

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