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The Impact of digitalisation on work life balance: A study on higher education sector in India

Eftisham Parween[1*], Dr. Vidya Jha[2]

[1*]Research Scholar, Department of Business Administration Sarala Birla University, Ranchi Ph: 7004219458, Email id- eftishamparween10@gmail.com
[2]Assistant Professor Faculty of Business Administration Sarala Birla University, Ranchi Ph: 9771402003, Email id- vidya.jha@sbu.ac.in

Abstract
This study investigates the impact of digitalization on work-life balance in the higher education sector in India. With the rapid advancement of technology and its integration into academic workflows, understanding its effects on educators' personal and professional lives is crucial. The research employs a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews with faculty members from various Indian higher education institutions. The findings reveal both positive and negative impacts of digitalization on work-life balance, with increased flexibility and productivity offset by challenges such as extended working hours and difficulty in disconnecting from work. The study provides insights for policymakers and institutional leaders to develop strategies that harness the benefits of digitalization while mitigating its adverse effects on work-life balance.

Keywords: digitalization, work-life balance, higher education, India, technology integration

1. Introduction

The advent of digital technologies has transformed various sectors of the economy, and higher education is no exception. Digitalization, defined as the integration of digital technologies into everyday life, has significantly altered the way educators work, communicate, and manage their personal lives (Legner et al., 2017). In the context of higher education, this transformation has been particularly pronounced, with the adoption of learning management systems, online collaboration tools, and digital research platforms becoming increasingly commonplace.

While digitalization offers numerous benefits, such as increased efficiency and flexibility, it also presents challenges to maintaining a healthy work-life balance. The blurring of boundaries between work and personal life, constant connectivity, and the expectation of immediate responsiveness can lead to stress and burnout among faculty members (Adisa et al., 2017).

India, with its rapidly growing higher education sector and increasing digital adoption, provides a unique context for studying the impact of digitalization on work-life balance. The country has seen a significant push towards digital transformation in education, especially in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, which accelerated the adoption of online teaching and learning tools (Dhawan, 2020).

This study aims to explore the multifaceted impact of digitalization on work-life balance among faculty members in Indian higher education institutions. By examining both the opportunities and challenges presented by digital technologies, this research seeks to contribute to the growing body of literature on work-life balance in the digital age and provide insights for policymakers and institutional leaders in the higher education sector.

The primary research questions guiding this study are:

1. How has the increasing digitalization of higher education affected the work-life balance of faculty members in Indian institutions?
2. What are the key factors contributing to positive and negative impacts of digitalization on work-life balance?

3. How do faculty members perceive and manage the challenges associated with digital technologies in maintaining work-life balance?
4. What strategies can be implemented at institutional and individual levels to promote a healthy work-life balance in the context of increasing digitalization?

The following sections will provide a comprehensive review of relevant literature, outline the methodology employed in this study, present and analyze the findings, and discuss their implications for theory and practice.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Digitalization in Higher Education

Digitalization has become an integral part of higher education, transforming teaching, research, and administrative processes. Becker et al. (2018) define digitalization in higher education as the integration of digital technologies into all areas of education, fundamentally changing how education is delivered and how institutions operate. This transformation encompasses various aspects, including:

1. Online and blended learning: The adoption of learning management systems and virtual classrooms has enabled institutions to offer flexible learning options (Garrison & Kanuka, 2004).
2. Digital research tools: Advanced software and databases have revolutionized academic research, enabling more efficient data collection, analysis, and collaboration (Borgman, 2007).
3. Administrative processes: Digital platforms have streamlined administrative tasks, such as student enrollment, grading, and faculty management (Selwyn, 2014).
4. Communication and collaboration: Digital tools have facilitated seamless communication and collaboration among faculty, students, and staff (Schrum & Levin, 2015).

In the Indian context, digitalization in higher education has gained significant momentum, particularly in the last decade. The government's Digital India initiative and the National Education Policy 2020 have further emphasized the importance of digital transformation in education (Ministry of Education, Government of India, 2020).

2.2 Work-Life Balance in Academia

Work-life balance refers to the equilibrium between an individual's work responsibilities and personal life commitments (Greenhaus et al., 2003). In academia, maintaining this balance has long been a challenge due to the nature of academic work, which often extends beyond traditional working hours and includes research, teaching, and administrative duties (Kinman & Jones, 2008).

Several studies have explored work-life balance in higher education:

1. Toffoletti and Starr (2016) found that academic staff often struggle to maintain boundaries between work and personal life, leading to increased stress and potential burnout.
2. Currie and Eveline (2011) highlighted the gendered nature of work-life balance challenges in academia, with women often facing greater difficulties in managing professional and personal responsibilities.
3. Misra et al. (2012) emphasized the importance of institutional support and policies in promoting work-life balance among faculty members.

2.3 Impact of Digitalization on Work-Life Balance

The relationship between digitalization and work-life balance is complex and multifaceted. While digital technologies offer potential benefits for managing work and personal life, they also present new challenges:

1. Flexibility and autonomy: Digital tools can provide greater flexibility in when and where work is conducted, potentially improving work-life balance (Ter Hoeven & van Zoonen, 2015).
2. Increased productivity: Digital technologies can enhance efficiency in academic tasks, potentially freeing up time for personal activities (Parry & Battista, 2019).

3. Blurred boundaries: The constant connectivity enabled by digital devices can lead to work encroaching on personal time, making it difficult to disconnect (Derks et al., 2015).
4. Technostress: The pressure to keep up with rapidly evolving technologies and the expectation of constant availability can contribute to stress and burnout (Tarafdar et al., 2007).

In the context of Indian higher education, limited research has been conducted on the specific impact of digitalization on work-life balance. This study aims to address this gap by exploring the unique challenges and opportunities presented by digital transformation in the Indian academic landscape.

3. Methodology

This study employs a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis techniques to provide a comprehensive understanding of the impact of digitalization on work-life balance in Indian higher education.

3.1 Research Design

The research design consists of two main components:

1. Quantitative survey: A structured questionnaire was developed to collect data on faculty members' experiences with digitalization and its impact on their work-life balance.
2. Qualitative interviews: Semi-structured interviews were conducted with a subset of survey respondents to gain deeper insights into their perceptions and experiences.

3.2 Sampling and Participants

The study employed a stratified random sampling technique to ensure representation from various types of higher education institutions across India. The sample included faculty members from:

- Public universities
- Private universities
- Autonomous colleges
- Government colleges

A total of 500 faculty members were invited to participate in the survey, with 382 complete responses received (response rate: 76.4%). From this pool, 30 participants were randomly selected for follow-up interviews.

3.3 Data Collection

3.3.1 Quantitative Survey

The survey instrument was developed based on a review of relevant literature and validated scales. It included sections on:

1. Demographic information
2. Digital technology usage in academic work
3. Perceived impact of digitalization on work-life balance
4. Strategies for managing work-life balance in the digital age

The survey was administered online using a secure survey platform, ensuring participant anonymity and data confidentiality.

3.3.2 Qualitative Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted via video conferencing platforms. Each interview lasted approximately 45-60 minutes and explored themes such as:

1. Personal experiences with digitalization in academic work
2. Perceived benefits and challenges of digital technologies
3. Strategies for maintaining work-life balance
4. Suggestions for institutional support and policies

3.4 Data Analysis

3.4.1 Quantitative Data Analysis
Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical techniques. Python was used for data cleaning, analysis, and visualization.

3.4.2 Qualitative Data Analysis
Qualitative data from the interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The process involved:
1. Transcription of interviews
2. Initial coding of transcripts
3. Identification of recurring themes
4. Refinement and categorization of themes
5. Integration of themes with quantitative findings

3.5 Ethical Considerations
The study adhered to ethical guidelines for research involving human subjects. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and confidentiality and anonymity were ensured throughout the research process. The study received approval from the institutional ethics committee.

4. Results
4.1 Quantitative Findings
4.1.1 Demographic Profile
The sample consisted of 382 faculty members from various higher education institutions across India. Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the participants.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Survey Participants

Characteristic	Category	Percentage
Gender	Male	54.2%
	Female	45.8%
Age	25-35	28.5%
	36-45	39.3%
	46-55	22.8%
	56+	9.4%
Institution	Public	42.1%
	Private	37.7%
	Autonomous	12.3%
	Government	7.9%
Experience	0-5 years	18.6%
	6-10 years	27.2%

	11-20 years	36.4%
	20+ years	17.8%

4.1.2 Digital Technology Usage

The survey revealed high levels of digital technology adoption among faculty members. Figure 1 illustrates the frequency of usage for various digital tools in academic work.

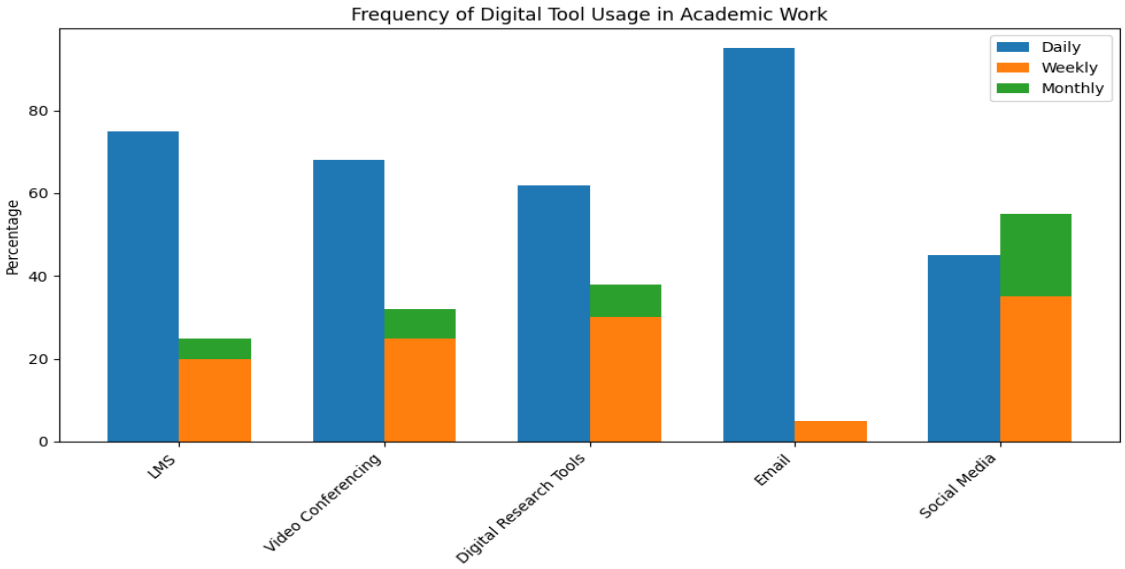

Figure 1: Frequency of Digital Tool Usage in Academic Work

4.1.3 Impact on Work-Life Balance

The survey assessed the perceived impact of digitalization on various aspects of work-life balance. Table 2 presents the mean scores for each aspect, rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Negative, 5 = Strongly Positive).

Table 2: Perceived Impact of Digitalization on Work-Life Balance Aspects

Aspect	Mean Score	Standard Deviation
Work flexibility	4.12	0.86
Productivity	3.98	0.92
Work-home boundaries	2.76	1.14
Stress levels	2.54	1.08
Personal time	2.87	1.05
Overall work-life balance	3.21	0.98

4.1.4 Factors Influencing Work-Life Balance

A multiple regression analysis was conducted to identify factors significantly influencing overall work-life balance. The results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Multiple Regression Results for Factors Influencing Work-Life Balance

Factor	Coefficient	p-value
Digital technology proficiency	0.32	<0.001
Institutional support	0.28	<0.001
Age	-0.15	0.012
Gender (Female)	-0.18	0.008
Workload	-0.24	<0.001
R-squared	0.42	
Adjusted R-squared	0.41	

4.2 Qualitative Findings

Thematic analysis of the interview data revealed several key themes related to the impact of digitalization on work-life balance:

4.2.1 Increased Flexibility and Productivity

Many participants reported that digital technologies had increased their flexibility in managing work tasks and improved productivity. For example:

"I can now grade assignments and respond to student queries from anywhere, which allows me to better balance my work and personal commitments." (Participant 7, Female, 38)

4.2.2 Blurred Boundaries Between Work and Personal Life

A recurring theme was the challenge of maintaining clear boundaries between work and personal life due to constant connectivity:

"The expectation to be always available and responsive, even during evenings and weekends, has made it difficult to truly disconnect from work." (Participant 15, Male, 45)

4.2.3 Technostress and Digital Overload

Several participants expressed feelings of stress and overwhelm related to keeping up with rapidly evolving digital technologies:

"The constant need to learn new tools and platforms, on top of regular academic duties, has added significant stress to my work life." (Participant 23, Female, 52)

4.2.4 Generational Differences in Adaptation

Younger faculty members generally reported easier adaptation to digital technologies, while older participants expressed more challenges:

"As someone who didn't grow up with these technologies, it's been a steep learning curve. It sometimes feels like the younger faculty have an advantage." (Participant 9, Male, 58)

4.2.5 Institutional Support and Policies

Many participants emphasized the importance of institutional support in managing the challenges of digitalization:

"Having clear policies about after-hours communication and digital expectations would greatly help in maintaining a healthier work-life balance." (Participant 18, Female, 41)

5. Discussion

The findings of this study reveal a complex relationship between digitalization and work-life balance in the Indian higher education sector. While digital technologies offer significant benefits in terms of flexibility and productivity, they also present challenges related to boundary management and technostress.

5.1 Positive Impacts of Digitalization

The quantitative results indicate that faculty members perceive digitalization as having a positive impact on work flexibility ($M = 4.12$, $SD = 0.86$) and productivity ($M = 3.98$, $SD = 0.92$). This is consistent with previous research highlighting the potential of digital technologies to enhance work efficiency and provide greater autonomy in managing work tasks (Ter Hoeven & van Zoonen, 2015). The qualitative findings further support this, with many participants reporting improved ability to manage their work schedules and complete tasks more efficiently. This flexibility can be particularly beneficial in the academic context, where work often extends beyond traditional office hours (Kinman & Jones, 2008).

5.2 Challenges to Work-Life Balance

Despite the benefits, the study also reveals significant challenges to maintaining work-life balance in the digital age. The lower mean scores for work-home boundaries ($M = 2.76$, $SD = 1.14$) and personal time ($M = 2.87$, $SD = 1.05$) suggest that faculty members struggle with separating work and personal life in the digital environment.

This aligns with the concept of "work-life blending" proposed by Kossek and Lautsch (2012), where the boundaries between work and personal life become increasingly permeable due to technology. The qualitative data provides rich insights into this phenomenon, with participants expressing difficulty in "switching off" from work and feeling pressure to be constantly available.

5.3 Technostress and Digital Overload

The relatively low mean score for stress levels ($M = 2.54$, $SD = 1.08$) indicates that digitalization is contributing to increased stress among faculty members. This finding is consistent with research on technostress, which refers to the stress experienced by individuals due to their use of information and communication technologies (Tarafdar et al., 2007).

The qualitative data reveals that this stress is often related to the rapid pace of technological change and the pressure to continually adapt to new digital tools and platforms. This is particularly challenging for older faculty members, as highlighted in the interviews, suggesting a need for targeted support and training programs.

5.4 Factors Influencing Work-Life Balance

The regression analysis (Table 3) provides insights into the factors significantly influencing work-life balance in the context of digitalization. Digital technology proficiency ($\beta = 0.32$, $p < 0.001$) and institutional support ($\beta = 0.28$, $p < 0.001$) emerge as the strongest positive predictors of work-life balance. This underscores the importance of digital literacy and organizational support in helping faculty members navigate the challenges of digitalization.

The negative association between age and work-life balance ($\beta = -0.15$, $p = 0.012$) aligns with the qualitative findings on generational differences in adaptation to digital technologies. This highlights the need for age-sensitive approaches to digital integration in higher education.

The gender difference in work-life balance ($\beta = -0.18$, $p = 0.008$ for females) is consistent with previous research indicating that women in academia often face greater challenges in managing work

and personal responsibilities (Currie & Eveline, 2011). This suggests a need for gender-sensitive policies and support systems in the digital academic environment.

5.5 Theoretical Implications

This study contributes to the growing body of literature on work-life balance in the digital age, particularly in the context of higher education. The findings support and extend existing theories on work-life boundary management (Ashforth et al., 2000) by highlighting the unique challenges posed by digitalization in academia.

The results also contribute to the understanding of technostress in the academic context, extending previous work by Tarafdar et al. (2007) by identifying specific sources of technology-related stress among faculty members in Indian higher education institutions.

5.6 Practical Implications

The findings of this study have several practical implications for higher education institutions and policymakers:

1. Digital literacy programs: Institutions should invest in comprehensive digital literacy programs to enhance faculty members' proficiency with digital tools and reduce technostress.
2. Clear digital communication policies: Developing and implementing policies regarding after-hours communication and digital expectations can help faculty members maintain clearer work-life boundaries.
3. Age-sensitive support: Tailored support and training programs should be developed to address the specific needs of older faculty members in adapting to digital technologies.
4. Gender-sensitive initiatives: Institutions should consider the gendered nature of work-life balance challenges when developing support systems and policies related to digitalization.
5. Promoting digital well-being: Awareness programs on digital well-being and strategies for managing technology use can help faculty members maintain a healthier work-life balance.

6. Conclusion

This study provides a comprehensive examination of the impact of digitalization on work-life balance among faculty members in Indian higher education institutions. The findings reveal both opportunities and challenges presented by digital technologies in the academic context.

While digitalization offers increased flexibility and productivity, it also contributes to blurred work-life boundaries and technostress. The study highlights the importance of digital proficiency, institutional support, and consideration of individual factors such as age and gender in managing the work-life balance challenges associated with digitalization.

Future research could explore longitudinal changes in work-life balance as digitalization continues to evolve in higher education. Additionally, comparative studies across different cultural contexts could provide valuable insights into the role of cultural factors in shaping the relationship between digitalization and work-life balance in academia.

As higher education continues to embrace digital transformation, it is crucial for institutions and policymakers to develop strategies that harness the benefits of digitalization while mitigating its potential negative impacts on faculty members' work-life balance. By doing so, they can create a more sustainable and supportive academic environment in the digital age.

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