Work Demand and Burnout Among Remote Workers: A Netnographic Analysis of Social Media Comments

Ricky Hendrawansyah Siregar[1], Dina Mariana[2*]

[1]Psikologi, Universitas Bina Darma, Palembang, Indonesia
[2] Department of Law, Universitas Sumatera Utara, Medan, Indonesia
*Correspondence: dinamariana.mail@gmail.com

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Abstract

This qualitative study investigates the dynamics between work demand and job burnout among remote workers by analyzing digital interactions and user-generated comments on social media platforms. Grounded in the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) theory, the research captures the authentic, uninhibited experiences of individuals navigating Work From Home (WFH) and Work From Anywhere (WFA) environments. Using a netnographic design, data were collected from 450 public comments across 12 viral posts discussing remote work on LinkedIn, X (formerly Twitter), and Instagram between January 2024 and June 2024. The qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis assisted by NVivo 14. The findings reveal three core themes of work demands driving burnout: (1) techno-stress and digital hyper-connectivity, (2) boundary blurring between personal and professional life leading to extended working hours, and (3) isolation and lack of social support. These demands primarily manifested as emotional exhaustion and depersonalization. The study underscores the critical need for organizational policies that enforce digital disconnection and structured workload boundaries to preserve remote employee well-being.

Keywords: *work demand; burnout; remote work; netnography; job demands-resources theory*

1. INTRODUCTION

The global transition toward remote work arrangements such as *Work From Home* (WFH) and *Work From Anywhere* (WFA) has fundamentally redefined the structure of the modern work landscape. Although locational flexibility was initially perceived as a benefit that enhances workers' quality of life, this dynamic brings complex psychological challenges within the domain of *Educational and Industrial Organizational Psychology*. Emerging evidence indicates that such physical freedom often comes at a high price: expectations of unlimited digital connectivity, escalating

workloads, and the blurring of boundaries between personal and professional space. As a consequence, complaints of extreme physical and mental exhaustion (*burnout*) have become a dominant narrative among remote workers.

Prior empirical work has emphasized that levels of stress and emotional exhaustion among remote workers are strongly influenced by technology exposure and constant connectivity (Singh et al., 2022; Song & Gao, 2019). Within the *Job Demands-Resources* (JD-R) theory framework, *work demand* encompasses the physical, psychological, social, or organizational aspects of a job that require sustained effort and therefore have the potential to deplete an individual's physical and mental energy (Bakker et al., 2022; Demerouti et al., 2001). When *job demands* substantially exceed the available *job resources* and are not offset by adequate *job control*, workers are at high risk of experiencing *burnout* (Alarcon, 2011; Becker et al., 2022). Burnout not only reduces individuals' subjective well-being (Yang et al., 2023) but also triggers role conflict and professional isolation (Costin et al., 2023).

Although the literature on WFH and burnout has grown rapidly, most prior studies have relied on closed-ended quantitative survey questionnaires that are prone to *social desirability bias* (Yin & Xia, 2026). A *research gap* remains in understanding how remote workers naturally articulate, communicate, and resonate their workloads and psychological exhaustion in public digital spaces without the mediation of formal instruments (Bansal et al., 2023; Ulloa-López & Benavides, 2025). Social media has transformed into an arena of catharsis in which the discourse of burnout is collectively constructed and shared by communities of digital workers (Irawan, 2021; Wu et al., 2023).

Accordingly, this study aims to explore the dynamics of *work demand* and *burnout* among remote workers through a netnographic analysis of social media comments on viral WFH/WFA posts. The novelty of this study lies in its use of a digital qualitative methodology to capture workers' *lived experiences* and emotional nuances in real time within virtual environments (Addeo et al., 2019; Costello et al., 2017). The findings are expected to contribute theoretically to the development of JD-R theory in the era of digital work and to offer practical input for human resource management in formulating healthy and sustainable remote work policies.

2. METHOD

Study Design

This study employed a qualitative approach with a netnographic design—an adapted qualitative research method specifically developed to observe the culture, behavior, and social interactions within online communities (Bowler, 2014; Costello et al., 2017). Netnography enables researchers to conduct an in-depth investigation of public discourse on social media in order to understand the phenomena of *work*

demand and *burnout* in a naturalistic and contextual manner (Baptista, 2022; Lu & Lu, 2021).

Participants

The data were drawn from units of analysis comprising posts and user comments on three major social media platforms: LinkedIn, X (formerly Twitter), and Instagram. Content was selected using *purposive sampling* with the following inclusion criteria: (1) public posts containing viral topics or discussions related to WFH/WFA, *work-life balance*, or remote work flexibility published between January 2024 and June 2024; (2) comments in Indonesian or English from users who indicated their status as remote or hybrid workers; and (3) comments containing descriptions of personal experiences regarding workload and emotional dynamics during WFH/WFA. Exclusion criteria comprised spam comments, promotional or advertising content, and bot responses. In total, the analyzed data comprised 450 selected comment units from 12 viral threads or posts.

Measures

In this qualitative netnographic study, the instrument was the researcher (*human instrument*), supported by a *data extraction sheet* and a coding protocol based on the Job Demands-Resources framework (Bakker & De Vries, 2020). The validity of the data was strengthened through qualitative *trustworthiness*, encompassing *credibility* (through persistent monitoring of online discourse and triangulation across social media platform sources), *transferability* (through thick, contextual description), and *confirmability* (through an audit trail of the coding process).

Procedure

Data collection was carried out through five stages of qualitative netnography (Stevens & McGarry, 2022):

1. *Entrée*: Identifying viral threads and conversational contexts on LinkedIn, X, and Instagram using search keywords such as “#WFH,” “#RemoteWork,” “Burnout WFH,” “Kerja dari Rumah,” and “Work Demand.”
2. *Data Collection*: Capturing and downloading public text comments using digital data-extraction tools and recording the visual context of supporting posts.
3. *Data Analysis*: Importing the text data into NVivo 14 software to perform staged *thematic analysis* (open coding, thematic categorization, and the formation of overarching themes) (Ulloa-López & Benavides, 2025).
4. *Ethical Considerations*: Applying the principles of digital qualitative ethics (Irawan, 2021).
5. *Member Checking/Representation*: Linking the findings to JD-R theory and current industrial psychology literature (Bakker et al., 2022).

Data Analysis

Qualitative data analysis was conducted inductively and deductively using thematic analysis assisted by NVivo 14 software. Initial coding focused on identifying forms of *work demand* (e.g., overtime, expectations of rapid response, multitasking) and forms of *burnout* manifestation (emotional exhaustion, depersonalization/cynicism, and reduced personal accomplishment). These categories were then grouped into overarching themes describing the dynamic relationship between digital workload and mental exhaustion.

Ethical Considerations

This study complied with ethical guidelines for social media and online community research (Addeo et al., 2019). All analyzed data were drawn from publicly accessible posts and comments. To protect the privacy and confidentiality of the subjects, all usernames, institution names, and *personally identifiable information* were fully anonymized. Quoted text in the research report was paraphrased without altering its core meaning in order to prevent identity tracing through search engines (*ethics of digital research*). Ethics No.: [EC/JSPS/2024/089]

3. RESULTS

The qualitative thematic analysis of 450 social media comments identified three main themes of *work demand* that trigger *burnout* among remote workers, as well as two principal psychological manifestations of the burnout condition.

Table 1 presents the frequency distribution of the coding of themes and sub-themes of work demand, together with the burnout indicators identified in the public discourse of users on social media.

Table 1

Thematic Structure of Work Demand and Burnout Manifestation Among Remote Workers in Social Media Comments

Sub-theme	Indicator	n	%
1. Work Demand			
Techno-Stress & Hyper-Connectivity	Expectation of rapid response	132	29.3
	Cross-platform notifications	98	21.8
Boundary Blurring	Working beyond operational hours	115	25.6
	Accumulation of domestic multitasking	74	16.4
Isolation & Communication Barriers	Lack of technical social support	31	6.9
2. Burnout Manifestation			

Emotional Exhaustion	Chronic mental & physical fatigue	185	41.1
Depersonalization/Cynicism	Apathy toward work	112	24.9

Note. Total analyzed data units N = 450 comments. Percentages were calculated based on the proportion of code occurrences within each main category.

Work Demand Dynamics Among Remote Workers

Based on the data in Table 1, the most dominant form of *work demand* reported by remote workers on social media was *Techno-Stress & Hyper-Connectivity* (51.1% of total occurrences). Workers complained that the convenience of digital communication channels such as Slack, WhatsApp, and email in fact created excessive pressure to remain constantly available (*always-on culture*). One representative comment stated:

> *"The WFH system makes working hours unclear. At 9 p.m. there are still message notifications from my supervisor, with the expectation of a quick reply. It feels as though even the slightest buzz of my phone immediately makes me anxious and my heart race."* (Comment #114, LinkedIn)

The second dominant theme was *Boundary Blurring* (42.0%), in which the absence of a physical dividing line between living space and workspace led to an unconscious extension of working hours. Workers found it difficult to achieve *psychological detachment* from work at the end of the day.

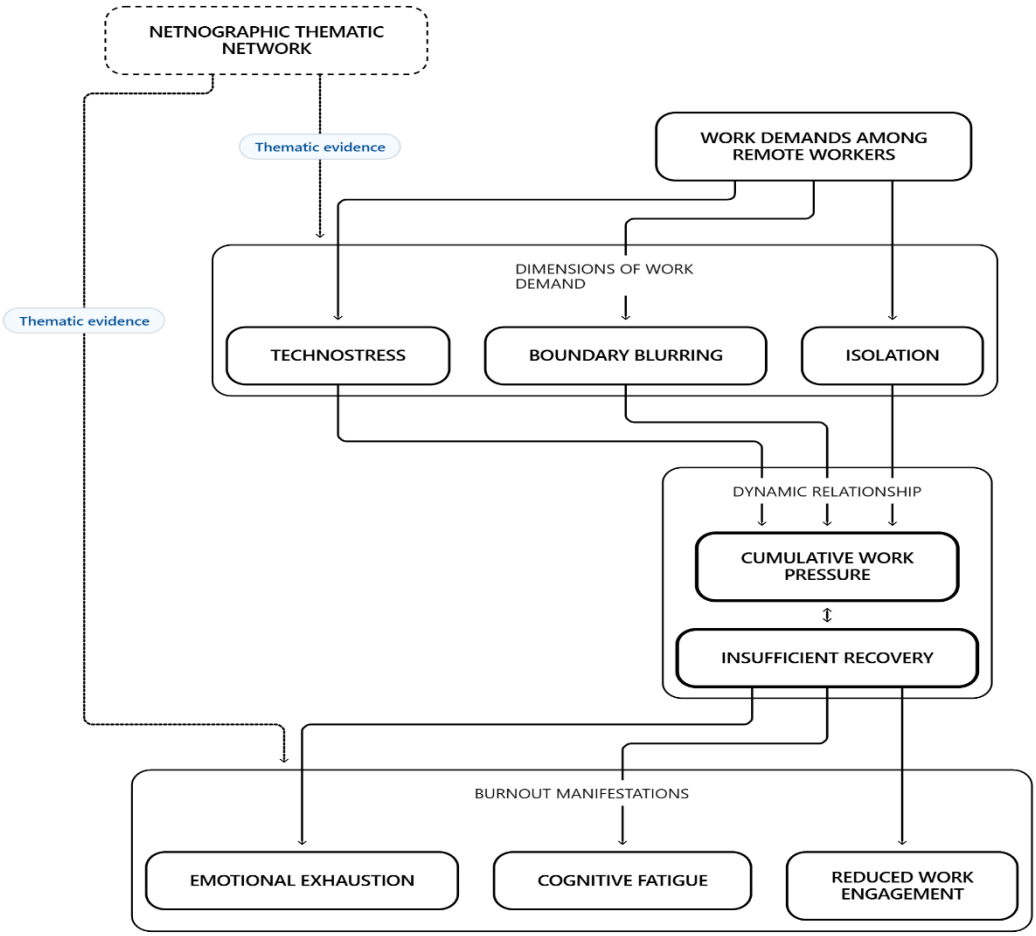


Figure 1. *A model of the dynamic relationship between the dimensions of work demand (techno-stress, boundary blurring, isolation) and the burnout manifestations of remote workers, based on the netnographic thematic network.*

Burnout Manifestation

Constant work demands without clear spatial boundaries had a direct impact on workers' psychological condition. As shown in Figure 1, *Emotional Exhaustion* (41.1%) was the most prominent psychological outcome. Workers expressed a sense of fatigue that did not dissipate even after resting over the weekend. This developed into *Depersonalization/Cynicism* (24.9%), in which workers began to withdraw emotionally, adopt a skeptical attitude, and view work merely as the fulfillment of an obligation without emotional engagement.

4. DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reaffirm that WFH/WFA flexibility does not automatically enhance psychological well-being; rather, it can become a double-edged sword when accompanied by uncontrolled digital *work demand*. The netnographic analysis confirms the assumptions of the *Job Demands-Resources* (JD-R) theory framework (Bakker et al., 2022; Demerouti et al., 2001), in which *job demands* in the form of constant connectivity and extended working hours significantly deplete workers' mental energy.

The *techno-stress* and *hyper-connectivity* phenomena identified in this study are consistent with the findings of Singh et al. (2022) and Song and Gao (2019), who underscored that the pressure of digital platforms triggers *technology exhaustion*. When the boundary between personal and professional life becomes blurred (*boundary blurring*), individuals' control over their working time weakens. As argued by Becker et al. (2022), reduced *job control* and high levels of social isolation while working remotely accelerate the onset of burnout and emotional exhaustion.

This study also extends the understanding in the literature of how burnout narratives are constructed on social media. As demonstrated by Yin and Xia (2026) and Wu et al. (2023), digital platforms serve as spaces of emotional resonance for workers. Public comments on social media reflect a form of resistance and a collective coping mechanism against organizational expectations perceived as excessive.

Implications

Theoretically, this study contributes to the expansion of JD-R theory in the context of qualitative digital work by integrating *techno-stress* and spatiotemporal boundary ambiguity as critical *job demands*. Practically, these findings provide concrete guidance for organizational leaders and HR practitioners:

1. **Formulating a Right to Disconnect Policy:** Organizations need to establish explicit rules regarding the time limits for work-related communication outside official operating hours.
2. **Workload and Response-Expectation Management:** Developing clarity in Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) that focus on output rather than the duration of online presence (*presenteeism*).
3. **Mental Well-Being Intervention Programs:** Providing psychological counseling facilities and self-regulation/stress-coping training specifically for remote workers (Bakker & De Vries, 2020).

Limitations and Suggestions

This study has several methodological limitations. The use of secondary data in the form of social media comments limits the researcher's ability to conduct in-depth *probing* of respondents' specific backgrounds (e.g., industry sector, marital status, or income level). In addition, there is a potential demographic bias toward active social media users. Future research is encouraged to combine netnography with *in-depth interviews* or longitudinal qualitative studies in order to monitor the development of burnout periodically among groups of digital workers.

5. CONCLUSION

This netnography-based qualitative study concludes that the dynamics of *work demand* among remote workers are dominated by techno-stress pressure, work-life boundary ambiguity (*boundary blurring*), and a sense of social isolation. The combination of these excessive digital demands significantly triggers burnout, which manifests primarily as chronic emotional exhaustion and a tendency toward apathy/depersonalization toward work. Workplace location flexibility requires strict organizational regulation so that it does not turn into a source of psychological pressure.

Declarations

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Data Availability. *The anonymized qualitative dataset derived from social media comment extracts is available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.*

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