



Original scientific paper

UDC: 338.48:005.96(497.11)

<https://doi.org/10.2298/IJGI250707022D>







Received: July 7, 2025

Reviewed: August 6, 2025

Accepted: October 6, 2025



## MANAGING DIGITAL WORKLOADS IN HOSPITALITY: INSIGHTS FROM SERBIA ON EMPLOYEE RETENTION AND PERFORMANCE

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**Abstract:** The rapid digitalization of hospitality work has intensified pressures on employees through hyperconnectivity, online reviews, and 24/7 digital communication. This study examines how these digital job demands affect employees' psychological well-being, job satisfaction, job performance, and turnover intentions in Serbia's hospitality sector, and whether leadership style moderates these effects. A survey of 405 hospitality employees was analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling. Results show that all three digital job demands significantly reduced psychological well-being, satisfaction, and performance, while increasing turnover intentions. Online reviews emerged as the most negative predictor of psychological well-being, accounting for nearly 59% of explained variance, whereas 24/7 digital communication strongly predicted turnover intentions. Hyper-connectivity and online reviews equally affected job satisfaction, while job performance declined most with hyperconnectivity and constant communication. Leadership style had a significant moderating effect, with supportive leadership significantly reducing the negative impacts of digital demands. A comparative analysis between employees working in large urban areas (Belgrade, Novi Sad, and Niš) and those employed in rural areas showed significant spatial differences in how much they are exposed to digital job demands and how those demands affect their work experience. The findings underscore the importance of organizational strategies such as "right to disconnect" policies, structured online review management, and targeted leadership development to keeping positive level of employees' well-being and performance.

**Keywords:** digital job demands; employees' psychological well-being; job satisfaction; job performance; hospitality industry

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## 1. Introduction

The usage of digital technologies has changed the way work tasks are done, especially in industries such as tourism. Answering to guest questions even after regular hours, checking online reviews and responding to them, and remaining available on smartphones phones became almost mandatory for employees (Liu et al., 2022; Scholze & Hecker, 2023). These situations create what researchers call the “always-on” culture, which is linked to employees' emotional strain, burnout, and problems with psychological well-being (Li et al., 2025). Despite increased interest among researchers on writing about technostress and digital presenteeism, which is a wider idea that includes different digital job pressures (Tarafdar et al., 2014), only a few studies have analyzed how specific ones, like hyperconnectivity, 24/7 digital communication, and exposure to online reviews, influence employees and business organizations (Mercan et al., 2021). Also, there is a scarcity of research about how leadership style can protect employees from these issues. Previous research indicated that supportive leaders could help employees to cope better with stress and to reduce burnout (Nugroho et al., 2024; Xiong et al., 2023). To fill in these gaps, this study analyzed how digital job demands affect three areas: (1) employees' psychological well-being; (2) workplace outcomes (job satisfaction and performance); and (3) organizational outcomes (turnover intentions). Additionally, it was analyzed whether leadership style can reduce the negative impact of digitalization.

The hospitality sector in Serbia is going through fast digital transformation, influenced by global technology trends but also by local, region-specific characteristics. Urban centers like Belgrade and Novi Sad have more international tourists, their businesses rely on global booking platforms and they use digital tools, while, in contrast, rural and small-town areas are less digitalized and depend mostly on domestic tourists. These differences influence not only how fast digital changes happen but also how employees feel and deal with digital job demands at work. Since Serbian economy is transitional, it faces unique challenges related to digitalization. These challenges include insufficient digital infrastructure in some areas, limited internet connection, and a lack of digital tools in many small and medium-sized businesses, which make up most of the hospitality industry. Further, there is also a constant problem with the lack of digital skills among employees (Bradić-Martinović et al., 2023). Another reason why digital job demands are intensified is because Serbia depends a lot on international tourism market and on global digital platforms like Booking.com, TripAdvisor, and Airbnb (Cimbaljević et al., 2020). After the COVID-19 pandemic, daily work became even more digitalized since digital services, such as contactless payments, online check-in, and virtual customer support have gained significant importance. Placing this research in Serbia's social and economic setting helps to look not only at global issues with digital job demands in hospitality but also at how these dynamics unfold in a transitional and tourism-dependent economy.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1. Digital job demands and employees' psychological well-being

Figure 1 shows the research model and the proposed hypotheses. Previous studies have linked digital job demands with changes in emotional, psychological, and social well-being (Ruiner et al., 2023). Hyperconnectivity (marked as connection to work through phones or other devices even after working hours) can have both positive and negative effects on employees. The research of Ali et al. (2023) on hotel employees in Turkey showed that being always connected

to work platforms, like email or chat apps, after hours lead to emotional exhaustion and work-family conflict. The situation of 24/7 digital communication, where employees are expected to answer quickly, is also a risk for their psychological well-being. This constant availability makes it hard for employees to mentally disconnect from work (Olafsen & Bentzen, 2020). However, not all researchers agree with these findings. For example, Mazmanian et al. (2013) pointed out that some employees can derive a sense of identity and purpose from always being connected. At the same time, frontline employees often experience stress and emotional pressure when their work is judged in public through online reviews. Xie et al. (2017) showed that negative online reviews can decrease emotional well-being by increasing self-monitoring and perceived job insecurity. Based on this discussion, the following  $H_1$  was developed:

$H_1$ : Digital job demands are negatively and significantly correlated with employees' psychological well-being.

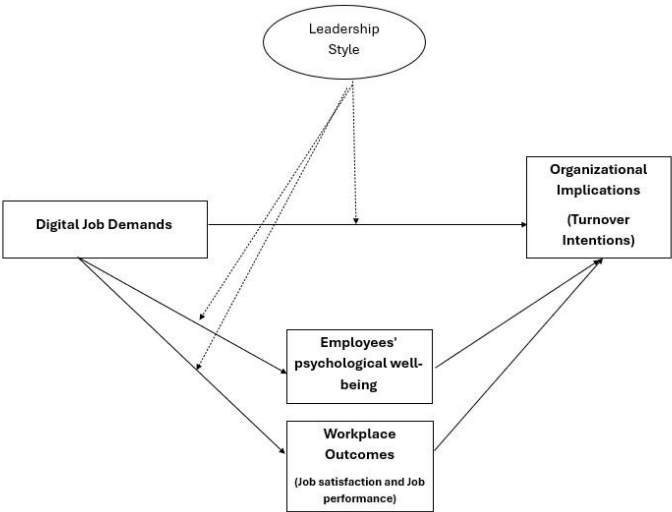


Figure 1. Research model.

2.2. Digital job demands and workplace outcomes

Hyperconnectivity can cause work interruptions due to digital information and communication technology issues, and this has negative impact on work performance (Scholze & Hecker, 2023). Being constantly connected through technology also blurs the line between work and personal life, which makes it hard to keep a good balance and can lower job satisfaction (Ren et al., 2023). On the other hand, it was found that digital connectivity may improve job performance and job satisfaction. For instance, Abdeen and Khalil (2023) found that increased digital connectivity was linked with higher job performance and job satisfaction. On the other hand, digitalization can make jobs more engaging, reduce tasks that are constantly repeating, and give employees more freedom, which are factors that lead to increased job satisfaction (Cimbaljević et al., 2020). At the same time, the pressure to keep a positive online reputation can intensify the volume of job demands, and if this is not managed appropriately, it may lead to job dissatisfaction (Singh et al., 2025). Based on these studies, the following  $H_2$  was set:

*H<sub>2</sub>: There is a negative relationship between digital job demands and workplace outcomes – job satisfaction and job performance.*

### *2.3. Digital job demands and organizational implications*

Research shows that employees who stay connected to work all the time through smartphones and digital platforms often experience a blurring of work-life boundaries, which raises the risk of burnout and also makes them more likely to think about leaving their jobs. In the same way, 24/7 digital communication gives people the feeling of being watched all the time and having less control (Wang et al., 2020). Further, employees are often aware that their performance can be publicly evaluated instantly, which brings more emotional strain and stress about their performance (Lee et al., 2020). While some studies pointed to a fact that online reviews can motivate employees to keep high working standards (Sparks et al., 2016), others concluded that too many negative or unfair reviews can erode morale and push people toward quitting their job (Hwang et al., 2021). In the tourism industry, Liu et al. (2022) found that hospitality employees who were always connected after hours had lower work-life balance and stronger intention to leave their positions. Digital platforms such as TripAdvisor, Yelp, and Google Reviews made employees' performance highly visible and open to constant commenting. Authors like Sparks et al. (2016) indicated that negative reviews can discourage hospitality employees, especially when the reviews seem unfair or not under their control. Based on this review, the following *H<sub>3</sub>* was proposed:

*H<sub>3</sub>: Digital job demands are positively associated with employees' turnover intentions.*

### *2.4. Employees' psychological well-being and organizational implications*

Employees who face emotional exhaustion are more likely to think about quitting their jobs (Akhtar et al., 2017). Results from a research which involved employees in luxury hotels revealed that when managers are supportive with employees' emotional well-being and try to build a positive work atmosphere, employees will be more loyal and less likely to leave the organization (Jayasinghe, 2017). Further, higher psychological well-being of hotel employees was linked to lower turnover intentions (Baquero, 2023). This suggests that if employees feel their workplace supports their psychological needs, they will want to stay longer. Also, a sense of appreciation from coworkers and seeing their work as meaningful are also tied to greater happiness at work, and this lowers turnover intentions (Xu et al., 2022). Based on these findings, the following *H<sub>4</sub>* is set:

*H<sub>4</sub>: Employees' psychological well-being is negatively and significantly associated with turnover intentions.*

### *2.5. Workplace outcomes and organizational implications*

In the hospitality industry, job satisfaction is very important for shaping employees' turnover intentions (Ersoy, 2024). A study on hotel employees in Accra metropolitan area showed that job satisfaction is negatively related to turnover intentions (Deri et al., 2022). The connection between job performance and turnover intentions is more complex. While high performance is often associated with stronger organizational commitment and higher job satisfaction, it does not always correlate with lower turnover intentions. For example, a study in the hospitality sector found that job stress lowers performance and at the same time makes

employees more likely to think about leaving (Duffour et al., 2021). This suggests that even good performers may want to leave if the job stress is significant. Because of this complex relationship between job satisfaction, job performance, and turnover intentions, the following  $H_5$  is proposed to capture this relationship:

*$H_5$ : Employees' turnover intentions are significantly and negatively related to both job satisfaction and job performance.*

## 2.6. Moderating effects of leadership style

Hyperconnectivity can intensify conflict between work and family life and further brings risks to both physical and psychological well-being of employees (Xiong et al., 2023). Online reviews increase job stress and dissatisfaction, which can push people toward leaving their jobs. While there are not many direct studies on how leadership style changes this relationship, there are also ideas that transformational leadership—which include giving support and focusing on employee development—may help employees to deal better with stress from online reviews (Xiong et al., 2023). Past studies have also shown that transformational leadership is linked with lower turnover intentions because it improves how well employees feel they fit with the organization and makes them more tied to their jobs (Shweta & Panicker, 2025). Still, there are few studies that clearly test how leadership style changes the relationship between digital job demands and turnover intentions. Some evidence shows that supportive leadership can reduce the negative effects of digital demands and make satisfaction and performance even better (Tarafdar et al., 2014). Based on these points, the following  $H_{6a}$ – $H_{6c}$  are proposed:

*$H_{6a}$ ,  $H_{6b}$ ,  $H_{6c}$ : Leadership style is expected to moderate the relationship between digital job demands and key employee outcomes. Specifically, it may attenuate the negative effects of digital job demands on employees' psychological well-being and workplace outcomes, while also weakening the positive association between digital job demands and turnover intentions. In this context, transformational or supportive leadership is anticipated to serve as a buffering mechanism.*

## 3. Methods and materials

### 3.1. Sample and procedure

The target population included front desk staff, hotel managers, marketing managers, hosts at restaurants, and customer service representatives. The link to the online questionnaire was sent to HR and/or general managers inviting them to participate in research by sending a link to the targeted sample. On the first page of the questionnaire, participants were introduced with the aim of the research, that the anonymity of all participants is ensured, and that the answers will be used exclusively for scientific purposes.

Data collection lasted two months, in October and November 2024, and in total, 413 responses were collected, while 405 valid ones were used in the analysis. From the total number of respondents, 56.5% were women, while 43.5% were men. The dominant age group was 23–34 years (44.8%), followed by 35–44 (29.4%). Nearly half of the respondents held a bachelor's degree (48%). In total, 41.1% had 3–10 years of working experience in hospitality, while 30.3% had worked for over 10 years. Most employees (65%) were

employed in hospitality businesses located in major urban areas like Belgrade, Novi Sad, and Niš, and the remaining 35% were employed in smaller towns and rural areas.

### 3.2. Instruments

The research used well-established and validated measurement scales to assess key constructs, with adjusted specific items if need be (to connect them with tourism industry, where necessary). All scales used a 5-point Likert scale for responses (1-strongly disagree, 5-strongly agree).

*Digital Job Demands* was assessed with 18 items combining hyperconnectivity (adapted from Derks et al., 2015), online reviews (custom-developed for this study), and the Online Vigilance Scale for a 24/7 Digital communication (Reinecke et al., 2018). Sample items were: "I check my work-related email until I go to sleep" (hyperconnectivity), "I feel stressed when I think about how online reviews might reflect on my performance" (online reviews), and "I frequently check my device to see if there are new messages or notifications" (24/7 Digital communication). *Job satisfaction* was evaluated with a 20-item Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire – Short Form (Weiss et al., 1967). The sample item was: "The chance to do something that makes use of my abilities". *Job performance* was measured with a 9-item scale developed by Williams and Anderson (1991). The sample item was: "Adequately completes assigned duties". The study measured psychological well-being through the General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-12) (Goldberg & Hillier, 1979). The sample item was: "Have you recently lost much sleep over worry?" *Leadership style* was assessed via 7-item scale of the Servant Leadership Short Form developed by Liden et al. (2015), which looks at ethical behavior, employee development, and community. The sample item was: "My leader puts my best interests ahead of their own". Finally, *Turnover intentions* were measured using a 3-item scale from Cammann et al. (1983), with the sample item: "I often think about quitting my job".

### 3.3. Data analysis

Descriptive statistics, reliability checks, and inferential methods were used to investigate how digital job demands are connected with organizational, psychological, and workplace outcomes. All analysis was done in SPSS version 26. Reliability of the scales was tested with Cronbach's alpha, where values above .70 were taken as acceptable. After that, Pearson correlation coefficients were used to explore the relationship between digital job demands and three groups of outcomes: (1) employees' psychological well-being, (2) workplace outcomes, like job satisfaction and job performance, and (3) organizational outcomes, like turnover intentions. After that, Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was used to test the expected relationships between the variables. The study followed a two-step procedure. First, Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was carried out to check if the measurement model was valid and if the fit was good. Second, the structural model was tested to see the paths from digital job demands to the outcomes. The effect of leadership style as a moderator was also tested with multi-group SEM analysis, by comparing groups with high and low levels of perceived leadership support.

4. Results

4.1. Exploratory analysis: regional differences

In order to explore regional differences between respondents employed in urban centers and those working in rural areas, an exploratory analysis was conducted. The results revealed that urban employees reported higher pressure due to hyperconnectivity ( $M = 3.85$ ,  $SD = .72$ ) compared to rural employees ( $M = 3.41$ ,  $SD = .068$ ;  $t(403) = 4.85$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and due to online reviews (Urban:  $M = 4.12$ ,  $SD = 0.69$ ; Rural:  $M = 3.77$ ,  $SD = .71$ ;  $t(403) = 4.02$ ,  $p < .001$ ). However, there was no significant difference in pressure caused by 24/7 digital communication between these two groups (Urban:  $M = 3.65$ ,  $SD = .74$ ; Rural:  $M = 3.59$ ,  $SD = .71$ ;  $t(403) = .84$ ,  $p = .40$ ). Employers from urban areas reported lower level of psychological well-being (Urban:  $M = 3.33$ ,  $SD = .78$ ; Rural:  $M = 3.11$ ,  $SD = .75$ ;  $t(403) = 2.67$ ,  $p = .008$ ) and higher turnover intentions (Urban:  $M = 3.47$ ,  $SD = .81$ ; Rural:  $M = 3.21$ ,  $SD = .79$ ;  $t(403) = 2.95$ ,  $p = .003$ ). The higher concentration of digital work in cities like Belgrade and Novi Sad showed that digital technology is not adequately spatially spread across Serbia's tourism labor market. Also, these results imply that digital job demands are more intense in urban areas, likely due to higher guest expectations, rapid digitalization, and larger competition. On the other hand, employees from rural areas are exposed to lower level of digital pressure mostly because businesses are based on traditional operations and slower technology adoption.

4.2. Results from correlation analysis

As shown in Table 1, digital job demands were significantly and inversely related to employees' psychological well-being. Furthermore, digital job demands were negatively associated with workplace outcomes. Specifically, significant negative correlations were found between digital job demands and both job satisfaction and job performance. From an organizational perspective, digital job demands were found to be positively associated with turnover intentions. Employees' psychological well-being variables were strongly and negatively associated with turnover intentions. Similarly, negative associations were found between job satisfaction, job performance, and turnover intentions. Additionally, perceived leadership style was moderately and positively associated with psychological well-being, job satisfaction, and job performance, while showing a negative association with turnover intentions. These patterns preliminarily suggest a potential moderating role of leadership style.

Table 1. Results of correlation analysis

Mean	SD	HC	OR	DC	PSW	JC	JP	TI	LS
3.83	1.32	1	.45	.51	-.49	-.38	-.31	.46	-.41
4.09	1.29	.45	1	.47	-.53	-.34	-.28	.44	-.3
3.92	1.28	.51	.47	1	-.52	-.36	-.29	.48	-.39
4.04	1.27	-.49	-.53	-.52	1	.42	.37	-.51	.44
3.71	1.33	-.38	-.34	-.36	.42	1	.45	-.58	.46
3.69	1.34	-.31	-.28	-.29	.37	.45	1	-.32	.39
3.38	1.25	.46	.44	.48	-.51	-.58	-.32	1	-.49
3.76	1.30	-.41	-.37	-.39	.44	.46	.39	-.49	1

Note. Authors' calculations; HC – Hyperconnectivity, OR – Online reviews, DC – 24/7 Digital communication, PSW – Psychological well-being, JS – Job satisfaction, JP – Job performance, TI – Turnover intentions, LS – Leadership style.

### 4.3. Results from SEM

The CFA indicated that the measurement model fits the data well ( $\chi^2(df = 614) = 1276.88, p < .001$ , CFI = .945, TLI = .937, RMSEA = .049, SRMR = .042.). Further, all standardized factor loadings were significant ( $p < .001$ ) and exceeded the recommended threshold of .60, confirming good convergent validity. Composite reliability (CR) values were above .70 and average variance extracted (AVE) values were higher than .50, supporting the reliability and validity of the constructs. The structural model also demonstrated satisfactory fit indices ( $\chi^2(df = 619) = 1328.37, p < .001$ , CFI = .938, TLI = .931, RMSEA = .051, SRMR = .045). The findings showed that digital job demands had a significant negative relationship with employees' psychological well-being,  $H_1$ . In line with  $H_2$ , digital job demands also exhibited a significant negative effect on workplace outcomes. Specifically, they were negatively related to job satisfaction and job performance.

**Table 2.** Results of SEM (n = 405)

Hypotheses	Path coefficients	t- value	p-value	Effect size	Decision
Direct hypotheses					
Digital job demands–employees' psychological well-being	–.56	8.41	< .001	Large	Supported
Digital job demands–job satisfaction	–.43	7.12	< .001	Medium	Supported
Digital job demands–job performance	–.31	4.89	< .01	Small to Medium	Supported
Digital job demands–turnover intentions	.48	8.03	< .001	Large	Supported
Employees' psychological well-being–turnover intentions	–.41	6.77	< .001	Medium	Supported
Turnover intentions–job satisfaction	–.52	8.68	< .001	Large	Supported
Turnover intentions–job performance	–.22	3.43	< .01	Small	Supported
Indirect hypotheses (Moderating effects)					
Digital job demands–leadership style–employees' psychological well-being	Significant	–	< .01	Moderation present	Supported
Digital job demands–leadership style–workplace outcomes	Significant	–	< .01	Moderation present	Supported
Digital job demands–leadership style–turnover intentions	Significant	–	< .01	Moderation present	Supported

Hypothesis ( $H_3$ ) was also supported since a positive correlation was found between digital job demands and turnover intentions. Employees' psychological well-being was negatively associated with turnover intentions, supporting  $H_4$ . Similarly,  $H_5$  was confirmed, as both job satisfaction and job performance were negatively linked to turnover intentions. Finally, moderation analysis confirmed  $H_{6a}$  to  $H_{6c}$  indicating that leadership style has a significant



moderating role. The impact of digital job demands on psychological well-being ( $H_{6a}$ ), job satisfaction and performance ( $H_{6b}$ ), and turnover intentions ( $H_{6c}$ ) was significantly lower among employees who perceived their leaders as supportive.

To determine which digital job demand has the greatest influence on key employee outcomes, a relative importance analysis was conducted. As shown in Figure 2, the relative importance of digital demands varied across the four outcome variables. Online reviews emerged as the most influential predictor of psychological well-being, accounting for nearly 59% of the explained variance. When it comes to job satisfaction, the contributions of online reviews (36%) and hyper-connectivity (36%) were equal. For job performance, hyper-connectivity and 24/7 communication contributed the most, while online reviews were less impactful. Finally, 24/7 digital communication was the most significant predictor of turnover intentions, explaining 43% of the variance. These findings highlight that online reviews are particularly damaging to employees' psychological well-being, while 24/7 digital communication can significantly increase turnover intentions. On the other hand, job satisfaction and performance are influenced by the combined impact of all the three digital stressors.

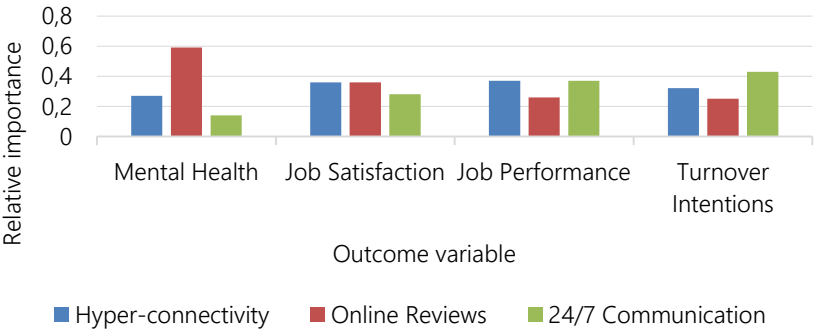
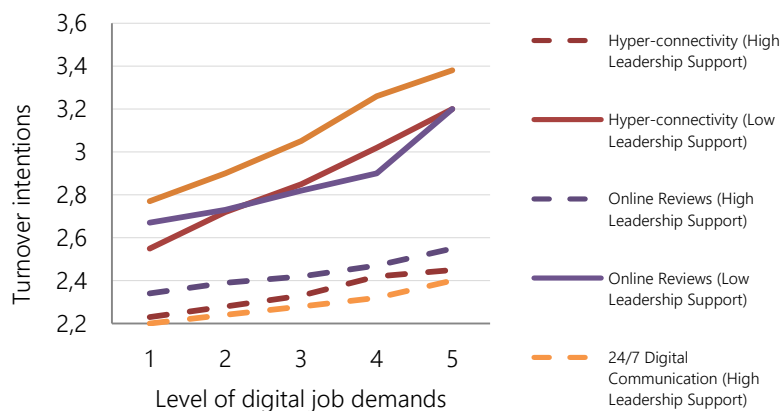


Figure 2. Relative importance of digital job demands on key outcomes.

4.4. Moderating effects of leadership style

The interaction effects of leadership style on the relationship between the three types of digital job demands and employees' turnover intentions are shown in Figure 3. In the case of hyperconnectivity, turnover intentions increased from approximately 2.6 to 3.2 across rising digital demands under low leadership support, but only from 2.3 to 2.5 under high leadership support. For online reviews, turnover intentions values grew from 2.6 to 3.1 in the case of low leadership support, while when the leadership support was higher, only smaller increment was detected (from 2.35 to 2.55). The biggest difference was found in the case of 24/7 digital communication – turnover intentions increased from 2.75 to 3.25 under low support, but only from 2.25 to 2.45 when leadership support was higher. These results suggest that supportive leadership helps in buffering the negative effects of digital job demands; without that support employees are more likely to consider leaving their positions.



**Figure 3.** Leadership style moderation across digital job demands.

As Figure 4 shows, level of employees' psychological well-being decreases when the values of all the three types of digital job demands increase. This decline was significantly higher when employees perceive leadership support as low. For example, in case of hyperconnectivity, employees who lacked leadership support reported decline in their psychological well-being from 4.5 to 3.7, while those who felt supported recorded only a smaller decrease, from 4.3 to 3.9. A similar pattern was recognized for online reviews – with low level of leadership support scores decrease from 4.6 to 3.7, while with high level of support from 4.4 to 4.0. The biggest difference was spotted with 24/7 digital communication since employees' psychological well-being dropped from 4.7 to 3.78 when the support was low, but only from 4.4 to 4.05 when leadership support was perceived as strong. These results highlight that supportive or transformational leaders can have a key role in helping employees to overcome challenges when working in digital work environments and save their psychological well-being.

The results also showed that leadership style can shape the relationship between digital job demands and job satisfaction – as the pressure from digital job demands increases, employees' job satisfaction decreases (this is more pronounced among employees who did not perceive support as adequate). For example, when perceived leadership support is low, level of job satisfaction decreases from 4.5 to 3.7 for hyperconnectivity, from 4.6 to 3.9 for online reviews, and from 4.7 to 3.9 for 24/7 digital communication. If the perceived leadership is stronger, these declines are smaller—from 4.3 to 4.0, from 4.4 to 4.15, and from 4.5 to 4.25, respectively. These results suggest that supportive leadership can buffer negative impact of digital job demands and help employees to stay more motivated and satisfied at work.

Job performance is also affected by increasing digital demands, with sharper declines observed under low leadership support. More precisely, when leadership support is weak, employee performance drops from 4.4 to 3.8 under hyper-connectivity, from 4.5 to 3.9 with online reviews, and from 4.6 to 3.9 with 24/7 digital communication. However, when leaders are supportive, performance stays more stable, decreasing only moderately—from 4.2 to 3.95, 4.3 to 4.1, and 4.4 to 4.25, respectively.

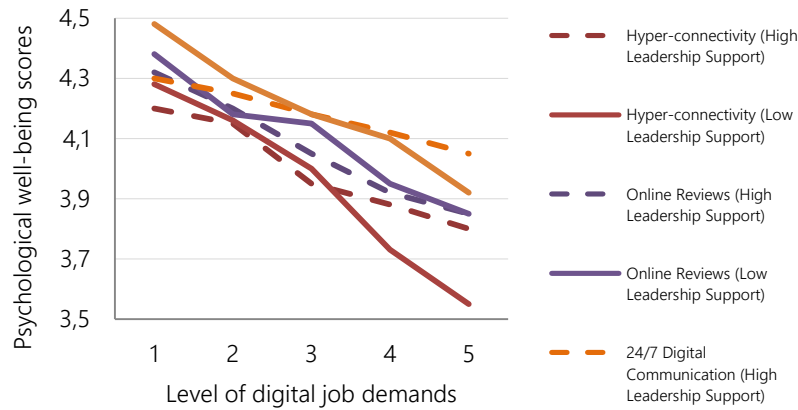


Figure 4. Moderating role of leadership style on employees' psychological well-being.

5. Discussion

Online reviews emerged as the most damaging for psychological well-being, probably because they are personal, public, and often cannot be controlled. Hyperconnectivity was the strongest predictor that decreased the level of job satisfaction and performance probably due to the inability to create a clear boundary between work and private life. Further, 24/7 digital communication had the strongest effect on turnover intentions, showing that stress caused from always being available can increase employees intention to leave. These findings suggest that even though digital job demands have the same digital origin, their mechanisms and outcomes are quite different, which means organizations need different responses. The negative relationship between digital job demands and job satisfaction/performance are also in line with earlier studies on digital stress, often discussed under concepts like technostress and digital presenteeism (Scholze & Hecker, 2023). Similar results in tourism (Singh et al., 2025) confirm that the sector’s focus on customers and heavy digital use makes these pressures more intense. Leadership style also played a significant role in reducing negative impacts of digital demands, which aligns with other studies (Alavuk et al., 2023; Nugroho et al., 2024; Xiong et al., 2023). Even though most of the findings were confirmed in the past research, some brought different perspective. Unlike Abdeen and Khalil (2023), who found that digital connectivity can improve job satisfaction and performance, this study found that all the three types of digital job demands led to negative outcomes. This difference may be because of the type of work. Hospitality employees often face stronger customer pressure and irregular hours compared to workers in corporate environments where digital tools can be used to enhance autonomy and efficiency.

If we compare our findings with those from other countries, it can further underscore the significance of the Serbian context. In their research, Ali et al. (2023) found that Turkish hotel employees felt more emotional exhaustion because of digital connectivity, which is similar to the psychological well-being effects found in our study. But in Serbia, the higher share of SMEs and the strong reliance on seasonal tourism make the pressures from hyper-connectivity and online reviews even higher. Studies in China (Liu et al., 2022) and Turkey (Ali et al., 2023) also showed that digital job demands affect turnover intentions, but this

study points out the stronger role of 24/7 digital communication in Serbia, where there are gaps in digital skills and less available organizational resources. These comparisons between countries suggest that while digital job demands are a global phenomenon, the strength and effects can be very different depending on the local economy and on the readiness of that economy for digital change. The analysis also shows possible regional differences. Employees from cities like Belgrade and Novi Sad reported more digital stress, which may be the result of a higher exposure to digital platforms and higher customer demands. On the other hand, employees in rural areas experienced less digital pressure, probably due to the more traditional business models and limited access to digital tools. These results show that geographical dimension is important when analyzing digital job demands in hospitality, since local infrastructure, the market, and resources all shape how employees experience them. Also, there is a need for regionally adjusted strategies, like training on digital skills organized for employees working in rural hospitality businesses and well-being programs for urban employees who are most exposed to higher levels of digital pressure.

### *5.1. Practical and theoretical implications*

Since online reviews emerged as the strongest predictor of poor psychological well-being among employees, it is important that management take a more active role in supporting staff to deal with customer feedback. Using positive reviews as part of employee recognition can help balance the negative effects of online reviews and make employees feel valued and motivated. It is also important to have fair and transparent procedure for how reviews are handled, so employees are not blamed for the things outside their control, like unrealistic guest demands or wider problems in the organization. To improve job satisfaction and performance, managers should work on reducing unnecessary digital interruptions and making digital systems easier to use. Programs such as employee assistance, peer support groups, and access to counseling inside the workplace can also help employees to more easily handle the emotional stress that comes with hyperconnectivity and being exposed to online reviews. Looking at legal frameworks for digital disconnection rights and setting voluntary guidelines for after-hours digital communication, could also reduce the negative effects found in this study.

When it comes to theoretical implications, this study adds to how digital job demands are understood by looking at them as a multidimensional construct. While previous studies examined these factors separately or only within broad technostress models (Tarafdar et al., 2014), our study's approach is more comprehensive and shows how different digital stressors affect employees both on their single and joint effect. The study adds new insights to the stress–strain–outcome model by testing the path from digital job demands (as stressors) to psychological well-being problems (as a strain), and then to workplace and organizational results like lower satisfaction, weaker performance, and higher turnover intentions. This supports previous work in occupational health but also extends it by applying the model in a service sector that is highly digitalized and customer-focused. Another contribution is showing the role of leadership style. Earlier studies indicated that leadership could reduce stress (Xiong et al., 2023), but this research tested and showed its buffering effect across three areas: psychological well-being, workplace outcomes, and turnover intentions. This shows why leadership style should be included in theories about technostress, digital burnout, and resilience. Finally, if we look at the hospitality sector in a transitional economy like Serbian, the study provides specific insights that can question how

far digital work theories from Western or corporate settings can be applied everywhere. The results suggest that sector characteristics, such as high emotional labor, lack of organizational resources, and cultural expectations about being always available at workplace, can make the effects of digital demands even stronger.

## 6. Conclusion

This study shows that digital job demands have a significant negative effect on hospitality employees' psychological well-being, job satisfaction, job performance, and turnover. Online reviews affect psychological well-being negatively, while 24/7 digital communication was the biggest driver of turnover intentions. On the other hand, hyperconnectivity was linked to lower job satisfaction and performance. Employees from urban areas reported higher negative effects of digital demands than those in rural areas, which can be explained by stronger competition and technology use in bigger markets. Leadership style was also important since supportive leaders can help in reducing the negative effects of digital demands. The study revealed that digital job demands should be viewed as a multidimensional concept, while the results brought insights for transitional economies like Serbian that are going through rapid digitalization process in hospitality sector. The research used SEM to test the model, but the temporal order of effects remains unclear. Future research could apply longitudinal designs to track how digital pressures change over time and what long-term effects they have on employees' well-being, satisfaction, and commitment. Although validated measurement scales and guaranteed participants anonymity were used, the results can be based more on their perceptions rather than objective measures, so future research could include supervisor evaluations, customer feedback, and digital activity records as data sources. Further, this study did not examine how individuals can adapt to digital job demands, which is why future studies could add some personal coping resources (digital skills, emotional intelligence) to models such as Job Demands–Resources. While this research focused only on the negative outcomes of digitalization, future research could also look at its positive sides, since digital tools may sometimes enhance employees' independence, motivation, or creativity.

Exploring both sides would give a more balanced perspective and could help organizations to design strategies that will reduce digital strain and use digital opportunities as well. Finally, while this study is focused on Serbia as a country with transitional economy, the results may also be applied to other developing or transitional economies that face similar challenges with digitalization and weak infrastructure. More research is also needed on local and regional differences, to see how factors like city size, infrastructure, and labor markets shape employees' digital work experiences.

## Acknowledgements

The research was supported by the Ministry of Science, Technological Development and Innovation of the Republic of Serbia (Contract no. 451-03-136/2025-03/200172).

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