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## Normalizing Psychological Pressure in Hustle Culture: Transforming Work Identity and Pursuing Constant Productivity in the Digital Economy

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### Abstract

This study analyzes how the normalization of productivity pressure in hustle culture is shaped through the glorification of non-stop work, the internalization of the neoliberal ethos of self-optimization, and the construction of identities based on digital performativity in the platform economy ecosystem. Using a qualitative approach through digital ethnography and critical discourse analysis (CDA), this study examines media representations, digital motivational content, displayed productivity practices, and assessment mechanisms in gig platforms using naturally occurring data from international media, social media, and other digital materials. The findings of this study show that extreme productivity is positioned as a new moral standard, indicating that individuals are encouraged to manage risk, self-discipline, and work performance as personal responsibilities. This study concludes that the professional identity of the younger generation is shaped through the visualization of work activities, platform ratings, and comparative narratives that link self-worth to displayed performance. This study provides a theoretical contribution by formulating a framework on the relationship between the discourse of productivity, internalization processes, and the performativity of identity in the digital economy, as well as offering practical implications for policy design and a more sustainable work ecosystem to reduce culturally legitimized productivity pressures

**Keywords:** Hustle Culture, Constant Productivity, Digital Economy, Psychological Pressure, Work Identity

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The changing global work landscape, marked by digitalization, the gig economy, and an intensified culture of productivity, has reshaped how the younger generation perceives themselves as workers. For the younger generation, particularly Generation Z and urban workers, the line between personal life and work performance is becoming increasingly blurred due to exposure to productivity apps, motivational content, and constantly updated digital performance expectations (Sanjeeva Kumar, 2024). At the same time, traditional values regarding human relations with nature, social harmony, and spirituality are shifting as the logic of efficiency and individual competition increasingly dominates everyday thinking (Becker et al., 2021). This phenomenon not only has implications for psychological pressure and changes in social relations, but also shapes new identity configurations that occur performatively in digital spaces.

Studies on digital productivity culture have shown that hustle culture, grind mentality, and performance gamification encourage workers to continuously optimize

themselves (Murawski, 2021 ;Torresan & Hinterhuber, 2023). Meanwhile, other studies emphasize that digital platforms create work identities that are fluctuating, performance-based, and highly dependent on media exposure (Xu et al., 2024 ; Pilatti et al., 2024). However, existing studies rarely examine how these dynamics intersect in empirical settings, where productivity narratives, self-optimization practices, and performative displays appear simultaneously and reinforce one another in everyday digital content. This empirical overlap, observed across media texts and platform-based practices, motivates an integrated analysis of how the three dimensions co-constitute contemporary work identity in the digital economy.

This study aims to explain how neoliberal values operate through everyday digital practices, thereby shaping the identity of modern workers who are oriented towards self-optimization, digital performance, and dependence on the logic of sustainable productivity. Specifically, this study examines how productivity content, platform rating systems, digital routines, and motivational narratives shape the way workers interpret success, risk, and professionalism. In addition, this study reflects on how the normalization of productivity and self-optimization may indirectly reshape how younger workers interpret their relationship with work, community, and broader moral values.

This study departs from the assumption that the identity of contemporary workers cannot be understood solely through economic structures, but is the result of interactions between neoliberal logic, digital mediation, and cultural value transformations. Performativity constructed through digital platforms is not merely a representation of identity, but an active mechanism that influences how individuals manage their bodies, time, and aspirations. Furthermore, this study views the shift in spiritual and ecological relations among the younger generation not as a phenomenon separate from digital work practices, but as an epistemic consequence of the internalization of a productivity ethos that changes the way humans view nature, community, and themselves. This guides the overall analysis in the article, ensuring consistency between the introduction, methods, and results.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### **Hustle Culture**

Hustle culture is often referred to as a "rush culture" that emphasizes relentless productivity, constant work engagement, and the glorification of overwork. (Choudhary & Bhardwaj, 2025). This culture is characterized by long working hours, multitasking, and a high-pressure work environment, which leads to conflicts between work and personal life as well as psychological stress (Hernández-Medina, 2021). In organizational studies, hustle culture is often positioned as a specific form of overwork culture and always-on culture, namely a situation where excessive work demands, expectations of instant responses, and the glorification of being "busy" blur the boundaries between work and non-work. (Mdhluli, 2025) shows that digital tools reinforce this condition by demanding that employees always be "on". Meanwhile (Žiedelis et al., 2024) emphasizes

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that overtime norms and sacrifice are considered part of the logic of modern professional success. Furthermore, the literature links hustle culture to neoliberal ideology, which encourages workers to continue to internalize that "living to work" is the ideal standard. (Boss, 2025). In that context, hustle culture is portrayed not only as individual behavior but also as an institutional cultural structure that shapes expectations of continuous high work commitment.

In terms of aspects, key indicators of hustle culture include: extended working hours (regular overtime), difficulty separating work and personal life (blurred boundaries), high self-control over work performance (self-entrepreneurship), and the use of social media or digital platforms as a means of displaying busyness and productivity. (Iskandar & Rachmawati, 2022). Empirical cases show that this phenomenon can have an impact on workers' mental health, for example, (Aziz & Abdhy Aulia Adnans, 2023) found that intense work participation, high intrinsic motivation, and pressure to always be productive are linked to anxiety among Nepalese workers. In addition, research in the Indonesian gig economy shows that freelancers who are caught up in hustle culture often experience time exploitation and low well-being. (Yuningsih & Prasetya, 2022) calling it the "new face of slavery" in the context of flexible work. Thus, these indicators illustrate how hustle culture permeates various types of work and produces work patterns that continue to be legitimized.

### **Constant Productivity**

Constant productivity can be understood as the ability of individuals or organizations to maintain a relatively stable level of performance and output in the long term, rather than simply "exploding" momentarily and then falling dramatically. In the literature, this concept is often discussed through the terms sustainability of employee productivity and sustainable productivity, which refers to productivity that remains high without sacrificing the sustainability of human resources or the organization (Škare et al., 2013) emphasizing that the sustainability of employee productivity is a key prerequisite for business sustainability, as extreme fluctuations in productivity will disrupt long-term growth. At the organizational level, (Wang & Zhao, 2025) Defining sustainable productivity as advanced productive capacity driven by technological innovation, human capital structure, and operational efficiency, enabling companies to maintain long-term competitiveness. Thus, constant productivity combines the dimensions of economic efficiency with aspects of welfare and adaptive capacity, rather than just short-term output growth.

Constant productivity is reflected in the ability to maintain stable work volume and quality, low error rates, and consistent achievement of performance targets across periods. (Škare et al., 2013) shows that sustainable productivity is determined by the suitability of the workload to employee capacity, stability of the work environment, and appropriate incentives. At the company level, (Wang & Zhao, 2025) Measuring sustainable productivity through a combination of indicators: the proportion of highly

educated workers, R&D investment, high-tech fixed assets, and production cost efficiency, which together maintain high and sustainable productivity. At the individual behavior level, meta-analysis (Corbeanu & Iliescu, 2023; Harter et al., 2002) shows that high work engagement and job satisfaction correlate positively with consistent business performance and results, so that work engagement can be seen as an important psychological mechanism for sustaining constant productivity.

### **Digital Economy**

The digital economy refers to an economic environment in which digital technologies, including the internet, online platforms, big data, automation, and IT-based services, form the primary basis for value creation, business-consumer interactions, and the transformation of traditional business models (Cigu, 2025). This concept emphasizes that economic strength does not only come from physical and human resources, but also from digital capabilities that enable the rapid and global production, distribution, and consumption of goods and services (An et al., 2024). In a theoretical framework, the digital economy is viewed as part of the fourth industrial revolution, in which connectivity, platformization, and digital ecosystems are the main drivers of efficiency and innovation (Ferrari, 2022). In addition, indices such as the Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI) facilitate the measurement of a country's readiness to take advantage of the digital economy (Su et al., 2023). Thus, the digital economy redefines how economic value is generated, measured, and replicated through technology and data.

From its aspects and indicators, the digital economy can be measured through several dimensions: internet and mobile device penetration, the level of adoption of digital platforms and e-commerce, the use of big data and AI technology in business processes, investment in digital infrastructure and the startup ecosystem, as well as the contribution of the digital sector to GDP and employment. (Su et al., 2023; Weng et al., 2024). Empirical examples from China show that the digital economy has driven green innovation and high economic quality through the large-scale use of digital technology in manufacturing and services (Chang et al., 2022). In Europe, cluster analysis of EU member states based on DESI scores shows that countries with high scores have experienced a reduction in youth unemployment and an increase in digital economic participation (Oloyede et al., 2023). Meanwhile, in developing countries, research in Vietnam shows that the adoption of e-commerce by MSMEs improves business performance and economic inclusion (Nguyen et al., 2022). Thus, these indicators and case studies show that the digital economy is not only changing the structure of the economy but also opening up new avenues for economic growth and inclusion.

### **3. METHOD**

The units of analysis in this study include three main categories that are consistent with the research results: (1) media representations related to the glorification of extreme work, (2) digital narratives that promote self-optimization, and (3) performative practices

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displayed by young workers through productivity content. These units of analysis include national and international news articles, as well as online opinion pieces and essays discussing digital work culture. These media outlets and platforms were selected purposively because they (a) have high visibility and audience reach, (b) regularly publish or circulate content on work, productivity, and the digital economy, and (c) provide accessible archives that allow systematic documentation. By placing these three categories as units of analysis, this study can identify the mechanisms that shape the normalization of pressure in diverse but interconnected contexts.

This study uses a qualitative approach with a digital ethnography and critical discourse analysis design (Jensen et al., 2022), to understand how hustle culture is produced, reproduced, and normalized in the digital ecosystem. This approach was chosen because it allows researchers to trace the representational practices, public narratives, and digital interactions that shape how young workers interpret productivity, pressure, and work identity. The analytical framework combines perspectives from digital culture studies, neoliberal subjectivity theory, and the concept of performativity to explain the connection between the discourse of productivity and the subjective experiences of workers.

The types of data used in this study are text-based and visual qualitative data, including news articles, online media opinions, productivity vlogs, motivational content, social media posts, and documentation from digital platforms related to the experiences of gig workers. The data is naturally occurring, obtained from digital spaces without researcher intervention. Data selection followed the principle of purposive sampling, focusing on content that explicitly discussed productivity, extreme work, self-improvement, digital performativity, and professional identity. Platform selection was guided by the fit between platform affordances and the study focus on news or opinion sites were used to capture institutional representations, while highly visual and interaction-driven platforms (e.g., short-video and social networking spaces) were used to capture performative productivity content and public engagement.

Data collection techniques in this study were carried out through digital observation on various online platforms, including international and national news portals and media opinion sites. This process was conducted to identify and document text content relevant to the themes of productivity, extreme work, self-improvement, digital performativity, and professional identity in the digital economy. The researchers used purposive sampling to select material that explicitly presented narratives and representations related to the research issues based on their level of relevance, intensity of discussion, public interaction, and discursive significance. In practice, sampling followed a clear logic: sources were included when they repeatedly addressed hustle or productivity themes, generated observable audience interaction (e.g., comments and shares), and presented recognizable narrative frames (e.g., “work nonstop,” “optimize yourself,” “prove productivity publicly”). All data were archived through digital

documentation, including screen recordings, screenshots, and link storage, and then compiled into a structured database for analysis.

Analysis technique using critical discourse analysis (Gulestø et al., 2025), involving three stages: textual analysis, discursive practice analysis, and social practice analysis. In the textual stage, researchers examine keywords, metaphors, narrative structures, and patterns of productivity representation. In the discursive practice stage, researchers examine how content is formed, disseminated, and received in digital spaces. In the social practice stage, researchers interpret how the discourse of extreme productivity and self-optimization contributes to the formation of neoliberal subjects and digital work identities. Through this analytical approach, the study can explain the relationship between the discourse of productivity, the mechanisms of internalizing pressure, and the performativity of identity as reflected in the three findings.

Ethical considerations were addressed by relying primarily on publicly accessible content and minimizing the collection of personally identifiable information. When user-generated content was used, the analysis prioritized discursive patterns rather than individual identities, and any identifying details were omitted in reporting. This study also acknowledges limitations of digital data: platform algorithms shape what becomes visible, some posts may be deleted/edited over time, and online engagement metrics do not automatically represent broader offline experiences. These constraints are considered when interpreting findings.

#### 4. RESULT

##### The Glorification of Nonstop Work as a New Moral Standard

Political instability in recent years has not only affected the constitutional and institutional dimensions of the state, but has also produced profound psychological consequences for society. Large-scale demonstrations, repressive responses by security forces, and the constant circulation of conflict-related news have created a climate of sustained fear and uncertainty. People are not merely observers of political events, but direct subjects of emotional strain that develops into collective trauma. Incidents involving casualties, material destruction, and disruption of daily activities further erode a sense of safety in public life. In this context, examining how political violence systematically and persistently impacts mental health becomes an urgent necessity.

Table: 4.1

Evidence of Work Glorification as a New Moral Standard in the Digital Economy

No	Data	Sources
1	"Work-all-day" content and productivity vlogs normalize overwork as an ideal lifestyle.	<a href="https://www.bbc.com/worklife/article/20230417-hustle-culture-is-this-the-end-of-rise-and-grind">https://www.bbc.com/worklife/article/20230417-hustle-culture-is-this-the-end-of-rise-and-grind</a>
2	The "Rise and Grind" trend places extreme work as a moral virtue.	<a href="https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2025/jan/08/gen-">https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2025/jan/08/gen-</a>

3	The tech industry promotes extreme working hours as a sign of professional commitment.	<u><a href="https://www.cnbc.com/2025/07/05/soham-parekh-working-many-tech-jobs-at-once-takes-hustle-culture-to-extreme.html">z-hustle-culture-jobs-workers-stability</a></u> <u><a href="https://www.cnbc.com/2025/07/05/soham-parekh-working-many-tech-jobs-at-once-takes-hustle-culture-to-extreme.html">https://www.cnbc.com/2025/07/05/soham-parekh-working-many-tech-jobs-at-once-takes-hustle-culture-to-extreme.html</a></u>
4	Young people often feel guilty when they take a break due to productivity norms.	<u><a href="https://www.kompas.id/artikel/tekanan-pada-usia-produktif">https://www.kompas.id/artikel/tekanan-pada-usia-produktif</a></u>
5	Digital communities create self-shaming when they are not productive.	<u><a href="https://www.vice.com/en/article/the-vice-guide-to-getting-through-a-mid-twenties-crisis/">https://www.vice.com/en/article/the-vice-guide-to-getting-through-a-mid-twenties-crisis/</a></u>

Table 4.1 shows that media narratives do not merely describe overwork as a work practice, but elevate it into a moralized value system what this study frames as a moral economy of productivity. In this moral economy, being always-on is treated as socially admirable (BBC; The Guardian; CNBC), while rest is re-coded as moral failure expressed through guilt and self-shaming (Kompas; Vice). This pattern indicates a normative shift; extreme productivity becomes a moral credential, and withdrawal from work becomes a moral deficit. Rather than repeating the data points, the key result here is the consistent framing across sources: overwork is legitimized through praise (commitment, professionalism, ideal lifestyle), and social sanctions appear when individuals deviate (guilt, self-blame, self-shaming). In short, digital culture produces a moral boundary where nonstop work signals virtue, and rest signals insufficiency demonstrating how moral economy operates within contemporary work discourse.

### Internalisasi Etos Neoliberal tentang Self-Optimization

Neoliberal logic regarding individual performance and self-optimization is not only present at the structural level, but is also subtly internalized through various digital practices and narratives. Various platforms, motivational content, and flexible work ecosystems create conditions in which individuals are encouraged to continuously measure, assess, and improve themselves as "projects" that must always be efficient and competitive. Through these patterns of interaction, values such as personal responsibility for failure, competition between subjects, and the obligation to always develop become part of the daily experience of workers. The internalization mechanism summarizes empirical data highlighting the role of digital applications, self-tracking practices, the gig economy, productivity challenges, and the influence of content creators in reinforcing the ethos of self-optimization. This context can be seen in the following table:

Table: 4.2  
Internalization of the Neoliberal Ethos through Self-Optimization Practices and Narratives in the Digital Realm

No	Data	Sources
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1	Tracking applications enable workers to monitor their individual output and continuously optimize themselves.	<a href="https://www.reuters.com/">https://www.reuters.com/</a>
2	The narrative that "failure is an individual's fault" is promoted in digital motivational content.	<a href="https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2011/11/15/how-neoliberalism-created-an-age-of-activism">https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2011/11/15/how-neoliberalism-created-an-age-of-activism</a>
3	The gig economy forces workers to bear personal risks as "individual entrepreneurs."	<a href="https://rethinkeconomics.org/blog/2025/03/13/gigconomyblog/">https://rethinkeconomics.org/blog/2025/03/13/gigconomyblog/</a>
4	Challenges such as the "30-Day Productivity Challenge" encourage continuous self-competition.	<a href="https://edition.cnn.com/2022/06/16/health/productivity-stress-less-in-person-work-wellness">https://edition.cnn.com/2022/06/16/health/productivity-stress-less-in-person-work-wellness</a>
5	Productivity influencers reinforce a culture of self-optimization as a prerequisite for success.	<a href="https://www.kompas.id/artikel/mengapa-menjadi-pemengaruh-dan-kreator-konten-dianggap-menjanjikan">https://www.kompas.id/artikel/mengapa-menjadi-pemengaruh-dan-kreator-konten-dianggap-menjanjikan</a>

Table 4.2 indicates that digital infrastructures and narratives cultivate what this paper conceptualizes as neoliberal subjectivity a subject who experiences the self as a permanent improvement project. Self-tracking and monitoring tools (Reuters) make performance measurable and therefore governable, while motivational narratives relocate failure from structural conditions to individual responsibility (Al Jazeera). The gig economy intensifies this logic by positioning workers as entrepreneurs of themselves, transferring risk and insecurity into personal burdens (Rethink Economics). Crucially, this is not merely "people trying to be productive"; it is the formation of a subjectivity that normalizes continuous self-auditing and self-discipline as moral obligation and survival strategy. Productivity challenges and influencers (CNN; Kompas) function as cultural mechanisms that reward self-competition, framing relentless improvement as the only legitimate route to success. Thus, the result demonstrates internalization: neoliberal logic becomes psychologically lived as self-responsibilization, self-monitoring, and permanent self-optimization.

### **The Formation of Identity Based on Digital Performativity**

Performative practices in the digital space play a significant role in shaping the work identities of the younger generation. Various international media reports show that representations of productivity, visualizations of routines, and assessment mechanisms integrated into digital platforms not only frame how workers present themselves, but also influence how they understand their self-worth, professional legitimacy, and position in the modern work ecosystem. This data provides an empirical basis for seeing that work

identity is no longer formed solely through institutional experience, but through a continuous performative process in the digital space. This context can be seen in the following table:

Table: 4.3  
Formation of Identity Based on Digital Performativity

No	Data	Sources
1	Gen Z builds their work identity through productivity routine content such as morning routines and work logs.	<a href="https://www.vox.com/culture/464023/great-lock-in-tiktok-hard-75-winter-arc-gen-z">https://www.vox.com/culture/464023/great-lock-in-tiktok-hard-75-winter-arc-gen-z</a>
2	Workers' identities become unstable due to the demands to be constantly productive.	<a href="https://www.rockandart.org/hustle-culture-well-being-productivity/">https://www.rockandart.org/hustle-culture-well-being-productivity/</a>
3	Self-worth and professional legitimacy are attached to digitally displayed performance.	<a href="https://www.hindustantimes.com/opinion/the-double-edged-sword-of-hustle-culture-101728913186463.html">https://www.hindustantimes.com/opinion/the-double-edged-sword-of-hustle-culture-101728913186463.html</a>
4	Grind culture shapes the persona of modern workers who must always be active and productive.	<a href="https://redeemingproductivity.com/a-time-to-hustle-a-time-to-stroll/">https://redeemingproductivity.com/a-time-to-hustle-a-time-to-stroll/</a>
5	The identity of gig workers is formed through ratings, profiles, and digital track records on the platform.	<a href="https://www.mckinsey.com/mgi/media-center/the-gig-economy-has-an-identity-problem-and-digital-id-could-fix-it">https://www.mckinsey.com/mgi/media-center/the-gig-economy-has-an-identity-problem-and-digital-id-could-fix-it</a>

Table: 4.3 demonstrates that work identity is increasingly assembled through digital performativity identity is produced and stabilized through repeated displays of productivity in online space rather than solely through institutional credentials. Routine-content (Vox) and grind-persona narratives (Redeeming Productivity) operate as performance scripts, instructing how a “legitimate worker-self” should look and behave in public. At the same time, this performativity produces fragility, when individuals must constantly appear productive, identity becomes unstable and contingent on continuous display (Rock & Art; Hindustan Times). The gig platform context sharpens this mechanism: ratings, profiles, and track records function as performative metrics that “officially” validate or degrade identity (McKinsey). Therefore, the result is not simply that people share routines online, but that identity becomes dependent on visibility, repetition, and platform validation making performativity a central mechanism in contemporary work subject formation.

## 5. DISCUSSION

The findings in this study indicate that the hustle culture in the digital economy operates through mutually reinforcing mechanisms of discourse and social practice. The glorification of nonstop work, the internalization of a self-optimization ethos, and the formation of identities based on digital performativity create a structured yet unconscious ecology of pressure. These three findings show how productivity pressure arises not only from economic or technological dynamics, but also from cultural processes that construct work as a moral value, personal identity, and source of social legitimacy.

(Cuervo et al., 2024). Thus, hustle culture cannot be understood solely as an individual phenomenon, but as the result of a digital power configuration that influences how subjects interpret themselves and their work (Steinberg et al., 2025).

The first result shows that the glorification of overwork operates through public representations that normalize intense work as a moral virtue. When the media and digital communities position extreme discipline, long working hours, and uninterrupted productivity as indicators of professional responsibility, a new moral standard is formed that shifts the boundaries of what is reasonable in the workplace. This finding is in line with the moral economy of labor theory, which states that work values can be shaped through repetitive representational practices (Nwankwo, 2023). In this context, work pressure becomes socially legitimate because it is constructed as a moral obligation, not merely an economic demand (Carollo et al., 2024).

In the second result, it is evident that the neoliberal logic of self-optimization works through a very subtle mechanism of internalization. Productivity monitoring applications, motivational narratives about personal responsibility, and gig economy structures that shift risk to individuals ultimately force workers to see themselves as projects that must be continuously improved. In the second result, it is evident that the neoliberal logic of self-optimization works through a very subtle mechanism of internalization. Productivity monitoring applications, motivational narratives about personal responsibility, and gig economy structures that shift risk to individuals ultimately force workers to see themselves as projects that must be continuously improved (Kayas et al., 2025). This reading is consistent with the literature on neoliberal subjectivity, which asserts that individuals are positioned as entrepreneurs of the self (Grisard, 2023). In that situation, the findings Andrade & Neves, (2025) explains that workers not only bear the burden of productivity, but also absorb it as a psychological and moral norm that must be fulfilled, so that pressure becomes part of their identity.

The third finding highlights that contemporary work identity is shaped through performative processes mediated by digital platforms. Representations of productivity, assessment algorithms, and expectations to always appear active create conditions in which self-worth depends on displayed performance (Zhu et al., 2024). This phenomenon reinforces the argument in digital performativity theory that identity is not only "owned" but "performed" repeatedly through representational practices (Lüders et al., 2022). In this ecosystem, young workers build their identities based on what can be seen, assessed,

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and measured publicly, rather than on substantive professional experience (Vilasís-Pamos et al., 2024).

The three findings above do not operate independently, but rather reinforce each other in producing structural pressures that are difficult to avoid. The glorification of work determines moral norms and an ethos of self-optimization (Nehring & Röcke, 2024). The internalization of the neoliberal ethos of self-optimization internalizes these norms into individuals and digital performativity (Wieczorek et al., 2023). Thus, the formation of work identity in the digital performativity ecosystem provides space and mechanisms to demonstrate and validate these norms (van Zoonen et al., 2024). This combination of contexts creates a self-perpetuating cycle of pressure: the higher the moral expectations, the stronger the drive to optimize oneself, and the more intense the digital performance required to maintain professional legitimacy.

Theoretically, this discussion shows that hustle culture is not only related to work practices, but also the formation of neoliberal subjects in the digital economy. This study opens up space to understand work pressure as a multidimensional phenomenon that includes discourse production, internalization processes, and identity performativity. In practical terms, these findings underscore the urgency of reformulating digital work design, strengthening worker protection policies, and developing interventions that target excessive productivity mindsets. Without structural change, workers will continue to be driven to follow extreme productivity norms that are shaped and legitimized by the digital ecosystem, thereby increasing the risk of exhaustion, identity instability, and psychosocial stress.

## 6. CONCLUSION

This study shows that the hustle culture in the digital economy works through three main mutually reinforcing mechanisms: the glorification of non-stop work as a moral standard, the internalization of the neoliberal ethos of self-optimization, and the formation of work identity through digital performativity. These three mechanisms reveal how productivity pressure is no longer understood as a structural demand alone, but has become part of the values, identities, and daily practices of young workers. Thus, this study confirms that hustle culture is a multidimensional phenomenon rooted in the interaction between media representations, motivational narratives, and digital platform architecture.

The theoretical implications of these findings suggest that a new approach is needed to understand work pressure in the digital age, namely by viewing it as a product of discourse construction and neoliberal subjectivity. In this context, work identity is constructed not through direct professional experience, but through performance that is displayed, assessed, and validated publicly. This research makes a conceptual contribution by linking the mechanisms of pressure normalization with identity formation, expanding the literature on digital work culture and the platform economy. However, this argument is developed from a context-specific, interpretative analysis of

selected digital narratives and platform environments, which limits its ability to capture the full heterogeneity of digital labor experiences. For this reason, the findings should be understood as offering analytical insights that are transferable to similar digital-economy settings, rather than as claims that can be generalized to all young workers or all forms of platform-based work. Future research could extend this narrative by tracing how these mechanisms operate across different sectors and national contexts, combining qualitative depth with comparative and quantitative approaches, and exploring how social positions and regulatory conditions mediate the internalization of hustle norms and digital performativity.

In practical terms, the results of this study emphasize the importance of structural and cultural interventions to address increased work pressure among young workers. Such interventions could include more sustainable digital work designs, worker protection policies in the platform sector, and public education efforts to critique narratives of excessive productivity. Without collective efforts at the policy, institutional, and digital culture levels, this normalized pressure has the potential to worsen mental health conditions, reduce work well-being, and shape fragile professional identities amid endless demands for performativity.

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