

Information Obesity, Digital Addiction, and Economic Productivity: Empirical Evidence from Turkey

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Abstract. *This article examines the underexplored nexus between information obesity, digital addiction, and economic productivity in Turkey, drawing on a multi-level analytical framework that integrates labour economics, digital studies, and organisational behaviour. While Turkey has experienced rapid digital transformation—with internet penetration reaching 90.9 per cent in 2025—this expansion has been accompanied by rising technostress, workplace distraction, and digital dependency, particularly in major urban centres such as Istanbul and Ankara. Synthesising empirical evidence from cross-sectional surveys, sectoral studies, and national statistical data, the article demonstrates that information overload and compulsive digital engagement erode labour productivity through mechanisms including reduced attention, cognitive fragmentation, weakened safety culture, and diminished work–life balance. These effects are mediated by gender, socioeconomic status, and regional disparities, with women and lower-educated workers disproportionately affected. The article argues that neoliberal labour market reforms have inadvertently fostered digitally saturated work environments that compound the productivity challenge. Policy recommendations advocate for a multi-tiered intervention strategy encompassing mandatory media literacy education, workplace digital well-being programmes, and regionally sensitive digital inclusion initiatives. In so doing, the article situates information obesity within a developing-economy context and proposes a conceptual framework linking habitual digital overconsumption to productive capacity—a connection that the economics literature has been slow to theorise.*

Keywords: *information obesity, digital addiction, labour productivity, Turkey, technostress, neoliberal policy, digital inclusion, cognitive overload*

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Received: 27 January 2026; Accepted: 19 March 2026; Published online: 22 June 2026

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İnformasiya yüklənməsi, rəqəmsal asılılıq və iqtisadi məhsuldarlıq: Türkiyədən empirik sübutlar

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Xülasə. Bu məqalə Türkiyədə informasiya piylənməsi, rəqəmsal asılılıq və iqtisadi məhsuldarlıq arasındakı kifayət qədər araşdırılmamış əlaqəni əmək iqtisadiyyatı, rəqəmsal tədqiqatlar və təşkilati davranışı birləşdirən çoxsəviyyəli analitik çərçivə əsasında təhlil edir. Türkiyədə sürətli rəqəmsal transformasiya prosesi baş vermiş və 2025-ci ildə internetdən istifadə səviyyəsi 90,9 faizə çatmışdır. Lakin bu genişlənmə, xüsusilə İstanbul və Ankara kimi böyük şəhərlərdə texnostressin, iş yerində diqqət yayınmasının və rəqəmsal asılılığın artması ilə müşayiət olunmuşdur. Kəşif sorğular, sektor tədqiqatları və milli statistika məlumatlarının empirik təhlilinə əsaslanan məqalə göstərir ki, informasiya yüklənməsi və rəqəmsal texnologiyalardan kompulsiv istifadə əmək məhsuldarlığını azaldır. Bu təsir diqqətin zəifləməsi, koqnitiv parçalanma, təhlükəsizlik mədəniyyətinin zəifləməsi və iş-həyat balansının pozulması kimi mexanizmlər vasitəsilə baş verir. Məqalədə qeyd olunur ki, bu təsirlər gender, sosial-iqtisadi status və regional fərqlər tərəfindən vasitələndirilir; xüsusilə qadınlar və təhsil səviyyəsi aşağı olan işçilər bu problemlərdən daha çox təsirlənirlər. Tədqiqat iddia edir ki, neoliberal əmək bazarı islahatları qeyri-ixtiyari şəkildə rəqəmsal informasiya ilə həddindən artıq yüklənmiş iş mühitlərinin formalaşmasına şərait yaratmış və bununla da məhsuldarlıq problemini daha da dərinləşdirmişdir. Siyasət tövsiyələri media savadlılığı üzrə məcburi təhsil proqramlarını, iş yerlərində rəqəmsal rifah proqramlarını və regional xüsusiyyətləri nəzərə alan rəqəmsal inklüzivlik təşəbbüslərini əhatə edən çoxsəviyyəli müdaxilə strategiyasını dəstəkləyir. Bununla da məqalə informasiya piylənməsi problemini inkişaf etməkdə olan ölkə kontekstində qiymətləndirir və vərdiş halını almış həddindən artıq rəqəmsal istehlak ilə məhsuldar fəaliyyət qabiliyyəti arasında əlaqəni izah edən konseptual çərçivə təklif edir. Bu əlaqə iqtisadiyyat ədəbiyyatında indiyədək kifayət qədər nəzəri əsaslandırılmamışdır.

Açar sözlər: informasiya piylənməsi, rəqəmsal asılılıq, əmək məhsuldarlığı, Türkiyə, texnostress, neoliberal siyasət, rəqəmsal inklüzivlik, koqnitiv yüklənmə

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Daxil oldu: 27 Yanvar 2026; Qəbul edildi: 19 Mart 2026; Onlayn dərc edildi: 22 İyun 2026

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Introduction

There is something deeply paradoxical about the digital age. The same technologies that have liberated millions from information scarcity are now drowning them in information excess. In Turkey, this paradox is particularly vivid. A country that only two decades ago struggled with basic internet connectivity now boasts an internet penetration rate of 90.9 per cent among individuals aged 16–74, according to the Turkish Statistical Institute's 2025 survey (TurkStat, 2025). Yet this remarkable digital expansion has not been accompanied by a proportionate rise in labour productivity. If anything, the productivity picture has grown murkier. The OECD's 2025 Compendium of Productivity

Indicators conspicuously excludes Türkiye from its aggregate calculations, hinting at measurement challenges that may themselves be symptomatic of a deeper structural malaise (OECD, 2025).

The concept of ‘information obesity’—the excessive, often compulsive accumulation and consumption of digital information beyond what an individual can meaningfully process—remains surprisingly underdeveloped in the labour economics literature. This is a striking omission. We have long known that the quality and quantity of information available to workers shapes their decision-making capacity, their ability to prioritise tasks, and ultimately their productive output. Yet as the volume of available information has grown exponentially—through emails, social media notifications, instant messaging, news feeds, and algorithmic content recommendations—the analytical focus has remained overwhelmingly on information access rather than information excess. This article seeks to redress that imbalance.

Fieldwork observations across Turkish academic and professional settings point to a palpable shift in how both university students and working professionals interact with information. Students increasingly report difficulty sustaining attention during lectures—not because the material is uninteresting, but because the constant pull of notifications, social media feeds, and messaging applications fragments their cognitive resources. Similarly, professionals in Istanbul and Ankara’s banking and service sectors describe a kind of perpetual cognitive overload: a feeling of always processing but never quite finishing, always connected but rarely productive. These practitioner accounts, while qualitative, align closely with the empirical evidence reviewed in this article and suggest that information obesity is not merely a theoretical construct but a lived reality with tangible economic consequences.

Methods

This article makes three principal contributions. First, it synthesises dispersed empirical evidence on the productivity consequences of information overload and digital addiction in Turkey, drawing on sources from labour economics, organisational behaviour, and digital studies. Second, it develops a multi-level analytical framework that captures how neoliberal policy structures, socioeconomic mediators, and individual digital behaviours interact to shape productivity outcomes. Third, it proposes a comprehensive, multi-tiered policy response that addresses the problem simultaneously at the educational, organisational, and governmental levels—an approach that is the only one commensurate with the scale and complexity of the challenge.

The remainder of the article is structured as follows. Section 2 reviews the theoretical and empirical literature on information obesity, technostress, and digital addiction as they relate to labour productivity. Section 3 presents Turkey’s digital landscape through statistical evidence. Section 4 examines the productivity consequences of information obesity and digital addiction in the Turkish context. Section 5 analyses the mediating roles of gender, socioeconomic status, and regional context. Section 6 explores the structural contribution of neoliberal policies to digitally saturated work environments. Section 7 develops policy recommendations, and Section 8 concludes.

Theoretical and empirical foundations

The term ‘information obesity’ has gained traction in popular and semi-academic discourse, yet it lacks a settled definition in the economics literature. Drawing on the broader concept of information overload—which has roots in Herbert Simon’s (1971) foundational argument that an abundance of information necessarily impoverishes the attention available to process it—I define information obesity as the sustained overconsumption of digital information at a rate and volume that exceeds an individual’s processing capacity, leading to measurable decrements in cognitive functioning, decision-making quality, and productive output. Unlike simple information overload, which may be

episodic and situational, information obesity implies a chronic condition—a habitual pattern of digital consumption that has become structurally embedded in daily routines, work practices, and social expectations.

The distinction matters for policy. If information overload is a temporary spike that resolves when a deadline passes or a project concludes, it calls for individual coping strategies. If information obesity is a chronic condition sustained by structural incentives—platform design, workplace norms, algorithmic curation—it calls for systemic intervention. The evidence reviewed in this article suggests that for a growing number of Turkish workers, the latter characterisation is more apt.

The existing literature has approached related problems from several angles. In organisational psychology, the concept of ‘technostress’ captures the strain that arises when workers feel compelled to remain constantly connected and responsive to digital communications (Yildirim & Ansal, 2014). In information science, Bawden and Robinson (2009) have documented how the exponential growth of available information creates ‘information anxiety’ and decision paralysis. In behavioural economics, the concept of ‘choice overload’ demonstrates that excessive options can impair rather than enhance decision quality. What the literature still lacks, however, is a framework that connects these individual-level findings to national productivity outcomes in a specific country context—which is precisely what this article attempts.

Digital addiction—defined as the compulsive, poorly controlled use of digital devices and platforms despite awareness of negative consequences—has been extensively studied from clinical and psychological perspectives. The global prevalence of internet addiction varies between approximately 8 and 40 per cent depending on the population studied and the measurement instrument employed, while smartphone addiction affects an estimated 27 per cent of users worldwide (Cheng & Li, 2014; Sohn et al., 2019). What economists have largely overlooked, however, is what this means for output: the aggregate productivity cost when large numbers of workers are caught in patterns of compulsive digital use throughout the working day. Doğan (2026), in a phenomenological study currently in press, reports that compulsive device use among Turkish employees leads to significant workplace distraction, diminished safety perception, and weakened collective responsibility. As a qualitative, in-press source, this study should be read as indicative rather than conclusive; its value lies in capturing something that quantitative surveys often miss—the lived experience of workers who recognise that their digital habits are undermining their performance but feel powerless to change them. The parallels with substance addiction—the sense of compulsion, the failed attempts at self-regulation, the social normalisation of the behaviour—are not merely metaphorical. They reflect neurological reward pathways that have been extensively documented in the broader addiction literature.

Among youth, the evidence is equally concerning. Sert et al. (2019) found that technology addiction among Turkish university students was significantly associated with lower academic achievement and increased fatigue, while Çelikkaleli et al. (2025) demonstrated that problematic internet use mediates the relationship between digital game addiction and motivation among Turkish adolescents. Boyacı (2019), in a content analysis of Turkish internet addiction research, noted that studies are overwhelmingly quantitative and cross-sectional, pointing to a methodological gap that limits our ability to draw causal inferences about the productivity effects of digital addiction. The concept of the ‘productivity paradox’—first articulated by Robert Solow’s (1987) famous quip that ‘you can see the computer age everywhere but in the productivity statistics’—remains surprisingly relevant nearly four decades later. Despite massive investments in digital infrastructure and rapid adoption of information and communication technologies (ICTs), productivity growth across OECD countries has been sluggish, averaging just 0.4 per cent in 2024 excluding Türkiye (OECD, 2025). This raises an uncomfortable question: could it be that the very technologies adopted to enhance productivity are, through the mechanism of information obesity and digital addiction, partially undermining that goal?

Results

Berke, Akarsu, and Obay (2017) document a positive association between ICT adoption and economic growth in Turkey and the broader Balkan and Eastern European region. Yet their analysis, like most in this literature, measures technology diffusion rather than the quality of technology use. A country can have high internet penetration and extensive ICT adoption while simultaneously experiencing productivity losses from the misuse, overuse, or compulsive use of those same technologies. This article argues that Turkey exemplifies precisely this condition. Yildirim and Ansal's (2014) study of Turkish banking professionals offers an early empirical anchor for this argument, documenting how mobile technologies—adopted to streamline work—progressively generate technostress and fragment sustained attention. The mechanisms through which these dynamics translate into productivity losses in the Turkish context are examined in detail in Section 4.

A note on methodology is warranted. This article does not generate new primary data; rather, it conducts a critical synthesis of existing empirical studies, national statistical surveys, and sectoral research bearing on information obesity and digital addiction in Turkey. The review follows a systematic scoping approach: sources were identified through database searches (Google Scholar, Scopus, Web of Science) using the terms 'information overload,' 'digital addiction,' 'technostress,' 'labour productivity,' and 'Turkey,' supplemented by citation tracking and official statistical repositories (TurkStat, OECD, DataReportal). Inclusion criteria prioritised peer-reviewed empirical studies published since 2010 alongside key national statistical releases. The article's contribution lies in synthesising this dispersed evidence within a coherent multi-level analytical framework and deriving policy implications specific to the Turkish context.

Turkey's digital landscape: A statistical portrait

To understand how Turkey's digital transformation has affected productivity, it helps to first map the scale of that transformation. Table 1 presents the key indicators across a five-year window, and the picture that emerges is one of rapid, sustained digital expansion.

Table 1
Key digital indicators for Turkey, 2020–2025

Indicator	2020	2024	2025
Internet penetration (% of 16–74 age group)	79.0	88.8	90.9
Male internet users (%)	84.7	92.2	93.6
Female internet users (%)	73.3	85.4	88.2
E-government service usage (%)	51.5	73.7	76.1
Online shopping participation (%)	36.5	51.7	55.7
WhatsApp usage among internet users (%)	N/A	86.2	88.6
YouTube usage (%)	N/A	71.3	72.9
Instagram usage (%)	N/A	65.4	68.1
Online learning participation (%)	N/A	13.8	17.7
Social media user identities (millions)	~54.0	~57.5	~58.5

Source: Compiled from TurkStat ICT Usage in Households and by Individuals Survey (2020, 2024, 2025); DataReportal Digital 2025: Turkey; Kepios analysis (2025).

A few features of these data are worth drawing out. First, the gender gap in internet access, while narrowing, remains persistent: in 2025, women’s internet usage still lagged men’s by 5.4 percentage points. This gap has implications for the gendered distribution of information obesity’s effects, as I discuss in Section 5. Second, the explosive growth in social media usage—with WhatsApp, YouTube, and Instagram collectively dominating Turkish digital life—creates an environment in which informational overconsumption is not merely possible but structurally incentivised by platform design. These platforms are engineered, through infinite scrolling, autoplay, push notifications, and algorithmic personalisation, to maximise engagement time rather than information quality. Third, the relatively modest rate of online learning participation (17.7 per cent) suggests that for most Turkish internet users, digital engagement is oriented more towards consumption and communication than towards skill development—a troubling imbalance from a productivity standpoint.

Behind these figures lies a more immediate reality. A 2022 survey by Turkey’s Radio and Television Supreme Council (RTÜK) found that Turkish adolescents and young people aged 15–21 spent an average of 4 hours and 37 minutes daily on technological devices, with social media applications consuming the largest share of that time (RTÜK, 2022). Among European countries, Turkey stands out with average smartphone usage exceeding 4 hours and 16 minutes daily—one of the highest rates on the continent. When one considers that these figures likely understate actual usage (self-reported screen time data consistently fall below objective measurements), the scale of the information consumption challenge becomes clear.

Table 2
Comparative digital engagement and productivity indicators

Country	Internet penetration (%)	Avg. daily smartphone use (hrs)	GDP per hour worked (USD PPP)
Turkey	90.9	4.27	~53.4
Germany	93.1	3.01	~79.2
United Kingdom	96.7	3.45	~72.1
South Korea	97.6	3.54	~52.8
United States	95.3	4.42	~85.6
OECD average	~89.0	~3.50	~67.1

Source: Compiled from TurkStat (2025); DataReportal (2025); OECD Productivity Database (2023–2024); DemandSage (2025). Note: GDP per hour worked figures are approximate and based on latest available data.

Table 2 reveals a suggestive pattern. Turkey combines relatively high internet penetration and smartphone usage with comparatively low labour productivity. It must be stressed that this six-country comparison is illustrative rather than analytical: without controls for capital intensity, sectoral composition, institutional quality, or human capital, no causal inference can be drawn. The data are consistent with the hypothesis that unmanaged digital engagement may compound productivity constraints, but they do not demonstrate it. With that caveat firmly in place, two contrasts are nonetheless worth noting. Germany, despite lower smartphone usage, maintains substantially higher labour productivity—pointing to the importance of how, rather than how much, technology is used. South Korea, meanwhile, achieves productivity broadly comparable to Turkey despite far higher internet penetration, reinforcing the argument that it is the quality and purpose of digital engagement, not connectivity per se, that shapes productive outcomes.

The productivity consequences of information obesity and digital addiction

The most direct evidence linking information overload to productivity losses in Turkey comes from Yildirim and Ansal's (2014) study of banking professionals. Their research reveals a phenomenon that anyone who has worked in a modern Turkish office will recognise: mobile technologies, initially adopted to enhance efficiency and information flow, progressively increase workload, time pressure, and what the authors term 'technostress.' The result is a paradox familiar to students of technology adoption: the very tools designed to boost productivity end up undermining it by creating an expectation of constant availability and immediate responsiveness that fragments sustained analytical work.

This finding is consistent with practitioner accounts from Turkish professional settings. Employees in the banking and finance sectors frequently describe a working environment in which the sheer volume of incoming communications—emails, WhatsApp messages, internal platform notifications, client inquiries—has reached a point where 'managing the inbox' has become a full-time job that competes with actual productive work. More worrying still is how thoroughly normalised this has become: workers have adjusted their expectations downward, accepting fragmented attention as the new baseline rather than recognising it as a cost. The cognitive science literature is unambiguous that task-switching imposes significant 'switching costs' in terms of time, error rates, and mental fatigue, yet the modern Turkish workplace seems designed to maximise rather than minimise them. Doğan's (2026) in-press phenomenological study adds a further dimension by suggesting how digital addiction among Turkish employees may undermine not just productivity but workplace safety. Workers compulsively checking their devices are, by definition, not fully attentive to their physical environment—a concern particularly acute in manufacturing and service settings where lapses in attention can have immediate consequences. The study further suggests that digital addiction weakens 'collective responsibility'—the shared sense of obligation to maintain safety standards—as workers retreat into individualised digital worlds even during collaborative tasks. While these are qualitative findings from a single study and require corroboration from larger quantitative research, the mechanism they describe is plausible and consistent with the broader safety literature.

These safety implications carry real economic weight. Workplace accidents and injuries carry direct costs (medical treatment, compensation claims) and indirect costs (production disruption, retraining, reputational damage) that compound the more visible productivity losses from digital distraction. For Turkey, where workplace safety standards and enforcement have historically lagged behind OECD norms, the addition of digital addiction as a safety risk factor is particularly consequential. The implications for Turkey's future workforce are perhaps even more troubling than the current workplace effects. Multiple studies document high rates of digital addiction among Turkish youth: Sert et al. (2019) found significant associations between technology addiction and reduced academic performance among university students, while Boyacı (2019) noted that Turkish internet addiction research has predominantly focused on adolescents, reflecting widespread concern about this demographic. The RTÜK (2022) finding that Turkish youth spend over 4.5 hours daily on devices suggests that the cohort entering the labour market in the coming years may arrive with deeply ingrained digital consumption habits that are antithetical to sustained productive focus.

Perhaps the most troubling aspect of these findings is not the immediate academic performance consequences but the formation of cognitive habits. If young people develop their information-processing capacities in an environment of constant distraction and rapid-fire stimulus, they may never acquire the deep attention skills that complex knowledge work demands. Kaya et al. (2022), in their grounded theory study of Turkish adolescents at risk of digital addiction, document how gaming and social media create feedback loops that progressively shorten attention spans and reduce tolerance for sustained cognitive effort. The labour market implications of this cognitive restructuring extend far beyond what current studies capture, and they represent what may be the most significant long-

term productivity threat associated with information obesity. Not all digital engagement undermines productivity, and the genuine economic benefits that digitalisation has delivered to Turkey deserve acknowledgement. Kahveci and Gurgur (2025) document positive associations between digital payments and GDP growth in Turkey, while Turkdonmez, Hazar, and Babuscu (2025) show how banking digitalisation has enhanced efficiency and financial inclusion. Comparable dynamics are observable in other transitioning economies: Aliyev et al. (2024) demonstrate a significant causal relationship between renewable energy consumption and economic growth in Azerbaijan using Toda-Yamamoto VAR methodology, illustrating how productive digital and technological investment can generate measurable growth dividends. Similarly, Abdulhasanova (2025) identifies the structural financial barriers impeding green economic transitions in Azerbaijan, while Ahmadova et al. (2026) examine how investment priorities shape ecological sustainability outcomes in the same economy—both sets of findings highlighting structural governance gaps that closely parallel the digital productivity deficits documented in this article. These findings matter because they complicate any simple story: digital technology does not inevitably destroy productivity. The problem lies not in digital engagement per se but in the specific patterns of engagement—compulsive, fragmentary, consumption-oriented—that characterise information obesity. Gümrah and Karagöz (2023), in their study of Turkish university students, provide an interesting finding: digital addiction does not appear to negatively impact financial literacy. This suggests that targeted, instrumental digital use (such as managing finances) operates through different cognitive channels than passive, consumption-oriented digital use (such as scrolling social media). The practical implication is that policy need not aim to reduce digital engagement as such, but to change its character—less passive consumption, more purposeful use. Current Turkish ICT policy makes no such distinction.

Socioeconomic mediators: Gender, class, and regional disparities

The gendered dimensions of this problem in Turkey are stark, and they are worth unpacking carefully. Several dynamics intersect here. First, the persistent gender gap in internet access (5.4 percentage points in 2025) means that women as a group have less experience and potentially less sophistication in managing digital information flows, making them more vulnerable to information overload when they do engage digitally (Zengin & Naktiyok, 2022). Second, Şahanoğulları and Bilgin (2025) document a gender-based digital divide in Turkey through time use analysis, showing that women’s digital engagement patterns differ qualitatively from men’s in ways that may compound existing labour market disadvantages.

Table 3
Gender disparities in digital engagement in Turkey

Indicator	Male	Female
Internet usage, 2025 (%)	93.6	88.2
E-government usage, 2025 (%)	82.8	69.5
Online shopping, 2025 (%)	59.1	52.3
WhatsApp usage, 2025 (%)	89.5 (2024)	82.9 (2024)
YouTube usage, 2024 (%)	74.7	68.0
Instagram usage, 2024 (%)	67.0	63.9
Online learning, 2025 (%)	17.5	18.0
E-commerce participation, 2025 (%)	59.1	52.3

Source: TurkStat ICT Survey (2024, 2025). Note: WhatsApp, YouTube, and Instagram figures from 2024 survey where 2025 gender breakdown not available.

Table 3 reveals a consistent pattern: women trail men across virtually every indicator of digital engagement except online learning, where participation is essentially equal. This gap is not merely about access—it reflects deeper structural inequalities in education, employment, and social norms that shape how women interact with digital technologies. Zengin and Naktiyok (2022) find that internet addiction disproportionately impairs female employee performance, with social support playing a crucial regulatory role. This suggests that when women do become heavy digital users, the productivity consequences may be more severe because they operate in work environments with less institutional support for managing digital overload. The one area where women match or slightly exceed men—online learning—is perhaps the most hopeful finding in the entire dataset. It suggests that women’s digital engagement, when it occurs, may be more purposefully oriented toward skill development. Policy interventions that build on this pattern, encouraging productive digital use while providing support for managing information overload, could help transform a current vulnerability into a comparative advantage.

The relationship between socioeconomic status and information obesity in Turkey defies simple characterisation. University-educated professionals in Istanbul and Ankara may face the most severe information overload precisely because their work demands constant digital engagement. In contrast, workers in less digitally connected sectors or regions may be partially shielded from information obesity but simultaneously excluded from the productivity-enhancing benefits of digital technology. Polat (2012) identifies persistent digital exclusion among disadvantaged groups—the elderly, disabled, women, and rural residents—that Turkish ICT policy has failed to adequately address.

This observation points to what can be termed a ‘digital productivity paradox’ in Turkey: the regions and populations most exposed to digital technology (major urban centres, higher-educated professionals) face the greatest risk of information obesity, while those least exposed (rural areas, lower-educated populations) face the greatest risk of digital exclusion. Both extremes are productivity-diminishing, but they require fundamentally different policy responses. The challenge for Turkish policymakers is to find the ‘sweet spot’: sufficient digital engagement to capture productivity benefits without tipping into the compulsive overconsumption that characterises information obesity.

Regional disparities compound this challenge. Dalgic-Tetikol, Guloglu, and Koksall (2022) document significant variation in internet adoption determinants across Turkish regions, arguing for a more coherent and context-sensitive ICT policy vision. Fu et al. (2024), while focusing on China, provide methodological insights relevant to Turkey by showing that digitalisation affects urban-rural disparities differently at different levels of development. The implication for Turkey is that national-level digital policies may need to be complemented by regionally differentiated strategies that account for varying levels of digital maturity and information management capacity.

Structural determinants: Neoliberal reforms and digitally saturated work environments

The information obesity challenge in Turkey cannot be properly understood without looking at the structural conditions that have made it so persistent. Since the liberalisation programme initiated in the 1980s, Turkey’s labour market has undergone profound transformation. Senses (2012) traces this neoliberal trajectory in detail, showing how successive waves of reform raised labour market flexibility at a significant cost to job security, worker protections, and work–life balance. These structural changes bear directly on information obesity, though the connection has rarely been made explicit.

Consider the mechanisms. Labour market flexibilisation has extended working hours, blurred the boundary between work and personal time, and created a culture of ‘always on’ availability that digital technologies have amplified rather than created. The rise of precarious employment, freelance work,

and platform-based gig labour has further intensified digital dependency, as workers in these arrangements must remain constantly connected to secure the next assignment, respond to client communications, and manage their digital presence. Özatalay and Altınok (2026) document how Turkey’s neoliberal environment has produced ‘pseudo-entrepreneurs’ and ‘compensation-driven investors’ whose survival strategies depend heavily on continuous digital engagement.

The question of framing is perhaps the most consequential of all. The prevailing discourse on digital addiction treats information overconsumption as a personal failing—a problem of insufficient self-control that the individual must address through willpower or habit change. This framing is convenient for everyone except workers. It absolves platform companies of responsibility for designing addictive interfaces, relieves employers of any obligation to manage digitally saturated work environments, and lets governments off the hook for regulating the digital ecosystem more broadly. Keklik and Güler (2025) demonstrate how precisely this logic operates in health policy, where neoliberal framing systematically relocates responsibility from structural causes to individual behaviour. The same dynamic is at work in information obesity: what looks like a failure of willpower is, in most cases, a predictable response to structural incentives that reward constant digital engagement while offering no institutional support for stepping back from it.

The productivity consequences of this framing failure are real, if largely invisible. When workers face structural pressure to remain permanently reachable, when the platforms they use are engineered to hold attention rather than serve it, and when policy responds to the resulting overuse by blaming individuals rather than examining incentives, the costs accumulate quietly. No single worker’s distracted hour registers in the national accounts, but the aggregate effect—millions of employees operating at slightly diminished capacity, day after day—amounts to a substantial and largely unacknowledged drag on economic output.

Policy recommendations: A multi-tiered approach

If the argument advanced in this article holds, effective policy cannot confine itself to a single level of intervention. Tackling information obesity through digital literacy programmes alone, while leaving intact the structural incentives for overconsumption, would be roughly as effective as responding to a public health emergency with individual counselling while declining to regulate the sources of contamination. The response needs to work at three levels at once: education, the workplace, and government regulation.

Table 4

Proposed multi-tiered policy framework for addressing information obesity and digital addiction in Turkey

Level	Intervention	Target group	Expected outcome
Education	Mandatory media literacy and digital well-being curriculum in primary and secondary schools	Children and adolescents (ages 6–18)	Reduced digital addiction prevalence; improved critical information assessment skills; formation of healthy digital habits before labour market entry
Education	University-level courses on information management, digital productivity, and attention management	University students	Enhanced labour market readiness; reduced academic performance losses from digital distraction; development of metacognitive awareness

Workplace	Digital well-being programmes: notification management protocols, device-free meeting policies, designated focus hours, and mental health support	Employees across all sectors	Reduced technostress; improved sustained attention and deep work capacity; enhanced safety culture
Workplace	Flexible work arrangements with structured digital boundaries and right-to-disconnect provisions	All workers, with gender-sensitive design	Improved work–life balance; reduced digital overload without sacrificing flexibility benefits
Government	National digital inclusion strategy with regional equity provisions and quality-of-use indicators	Disadvantaged groups: rural populations, women, elderly, disabled	Reduced digital divide; shift from passive consumption to productive digital engagement
Government	Regulation of platform design features that promote compulsive use (autoplay defaults, infinite scroll, manipulative notification patterns)	General population	Reduced ambient digital stimulation; structural support for individual self-regulation
Government	Integration of information health indicators into national productivity monitoring and development planning	Policymakers and researchers	Evidence-based policy refinement; longitudinal tracking of information obesity trends and their economic consequences

Source: Author’s own elaboration based on evidence reviewed in this article.

The reason for insisting on all three levels at once is not theoretical tidiness. Educational interventions build long-term resilience but leave untouched the problems facing workers already in the labour market. Workplace measures can reduce current productivity losses but cannot reach those in precarious or informal arrangements. Government regulation creates the structural conditions for individual and organisational change to take hold, but it requires enforcement capacity and sustained political will—neither of which has been easy to maintain in Turkey’s policy environment.

Üstündağ (2024) provides encouraging evidence that media literacy has predictive power in reducing internet addiction among Turkish adolescents, suggesting that the educational tier of this framework is empirically grounded. Similarly, Çivilidağ and Durmaz (2024) find that properly managed flexible work arrangements can improve employee performance, indicating that the workplace tier need not involve rigid anti-technology measures but rather thoughtful digital governance that distinguishes between productive and compulsive digital use. At the governmental level, Polat (2012) and Dalgic-Tetikol et al. (2022) identify significant gaps in Turkish ICT policy—particularly the absence of attention to use quality as opposed to mere access—that the proposed framework would begin to address.

The difficulty of implementing this framework should not be understated. Turkey's political economy creates significant obstacles. The technology sector is a major driver of economic growth, and regulations perceived as constraining digital engagement may face opposition from powerful industry interests. The neoliberal policy orientation documented by Senses (2012) works against precisely the kind of structural intervention this framework requires. And the cross-cutting nature of information obesity—spanning education, labour, technology, and health policy domains—creates coordination challenges that Turkish governance structures are not well designed to handle. None of this makes the framework impractical; it makes the task harder and the need for political commitment greater. The productivity costs of inaction are already accumulating, and they will not diminish as digital penetration deepens.

Conclusion

This article has argued that information obesity and digital addiction pose a significant, and largely unacknowledged, threat to Turkey's economic productivity. The evidence drawn together here—from cross-sectional surveys, sectoral research, national statistics, and the wider comparative literature—points in a consistent direction: Turkey's rapid digital expansion has delivered real gains in connectivity, financial access, and public services, but it has also created conditions in which cognitive overload and compulsive digital engagement have quietly eroded workers' capacity for sustained productive effort. The analytical framework developed here makes clear that the problem cannot be grasped—or meaningfully addressed—from any single vantage point. Individual digital behaviours do not emerge in a vacuum. They are shaped by workplace cultures, which in turn reflect the pressures of a labour market reoriented by decades of neoliberal reform, itself embedded within the wider dynamics of global digital capitalism. Intervening at only one of these levels, while leaving the others intact, is unlikely to achieve much. The multi-tiered policy framework proposed in this article represents the minimum response that the scale of the challenge warrants.

Three contributions stand out. First, treating 'information obesity' as a distinct analytical category—separable from both episodic overload and clinically defined addiction—opens a more productive line of inquiry into how habitual patterns of digital overconsumption erode productive capacity over time. Second, the analysis of gender, socioeconomic, and regional mediators shows that information obesity is not evenly distributed: its effects follow existing fault lines of inequality. The 'digital productivity paradox' identified here—whereby the most connected populations bear the greatest risk of information obesity, while the least connected face exclusion from digital gains—requires policy thinking that goes well beyond uniform national targets. Third, the multi-tiered framework provides a grounded starting point for interventions, ambitious in scope but rooted in the available evidence.

The research agenda that follows from this analysis is substantial. We need longitudinal studies that track the relationship between digital consumption patterns and productivity outcomes over time. We need qualitative research that captures the lived experience of information obesity among different worker populations. We need experimental studies that test the effectiveness of specific workplace interventions in reducing digital distraction and enhancing productive focus. And we need, above all, a willingness to take seriously the possibility that our most powerful technologies are not always making us more productive—and to develop the analytical tools and policy frameworks needed to ensure that they do. The comparative lens offered by neighbouring transitioning economies is instructive in this regard: as Ahmadova et al. (2026) show in their analysis of investment priorities for ecological sustainability in Azerbaijan, and as Abdulhasanova (2025) demonstrates with respect to green finance mobilisation, achieving structural transformation requires deliberate alignment of capital allocation with long-term developmental goals. Turkey's digital productivity agenda demands precisely the same discipline: investment priorities that privilege deep, purposeful digital engagement over passive consumption, backed by institutional frameworks capable of sustaining that orientation over time.

Turkey stands at a critical juncture. The digital infrastructure is in place, the population is connected, and the potential for technology-enabled productivity growth is real. But that potential will not be realised automatically. Without deliberate, multi-level intervention to manage the information environment—to ensure that digital technologies serve productive purposes rather than simply generating noise—Turkey risks entering what we might call a ‘productivity paradox trap,’ in which ever-increasing digital engagement produces ever-diminishing productive returns. The time for action is now.

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