

Emotional Burnout in the Age of Constant Connectivity: Rethinking the “Always-On” Culture

ЖАРИЯЛАНДЫ
27.04.2026

СІЛТЕМЕ
<https://bilimger.kz/188402/>

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Аңдатпа (KZ)

Мақалада үнемі онлайн болуды талап ететін қазіргі қоғамдағы «always-on» мәдениетінің студенттердің эмоционалдық жағдайына әсері қарастырылады. Цифрлық технологиялар қарым-қатынасты жеңілдеткенімен, олар адамның үнемі қолжетімді болуын қалыпты жағдайға айналдырды. Зерттеу көрсеткендей, бұл құбылыс психологиялық шаршауға, зейіннің төмендеуіне және мотивацияның әлсіреуіне әкеледі. Мәселені шешу үшін цифрлық гигиенаны дамыту, әлеуметтік нормаларды қайта қарастыру және жеке шекараларды қалыптастыру ұсынылады.

Түйін сөздер: эмоционалдық күйзеліс, тұрақты байланыс, цифрлық мәдениет, психологиялық шаршау, цифрлық гигиена

Аннотация (RU)

В статье анализируется влияние культуры «постоянной доступности» на эмоциональное состояние студентов. Несмотря на то, что цифровые технологии упростили коммуникацию, они также создали социальное ожидание быть всегда на связи. Исследование показывает, что это приводит к психологической усталости, снижению концентрации и мотивации. В качестве решений предлагаются развитие цифровой гигиены, пересмотр социальных норм и установление личных границ.

Ключевые слова: эмоциональное выгорание, постоянная доступность, цифровая культура, психологическая усталость, цифровая гигиена

Abstract (EN)

This study explores emotional burnout as a consequence of the emerging “always-on” culture shaped by constant digital connectivity. While modern technologies have made communication faster and more efficient, they have also normalized the expectation of continuous availability. The findings suggest that this expectation leads to cognitive overload, reduced concentration, and emotional exhaustion among students. The paper argues that burnout is not only a technological issue but also a social and cultural phenomenon. It proposes promoting digital hygiene, redefining social expectations, and encouraging personal boundaries as key strategies for improving students’ well-being.

Keywords: emotional burnout, constant connectivity, always-on culture, cognitive overload, digital hygiene

Introduction

Digital technologies have fundamentally transformed the way people communicate, learn, and interact. For students, smartphones and online platforms are no longer optional tools but essential parts of daily life.

However, alongside these advantages, a less visible but increasingly significant problem has emerged: emotional burnout caused by constant connectivity. Unlike traditional burnout, which is often linked to academic pressure or workload, this form of exhaustion is rooted in what can be described as an “always-on” culture. In this environment, being constantly available is not only possible but socially expected. Students feel pressure to respond immediately, stay active in conversations, and remain engaged online at all times. This study argues that emotional burnout in the digital age should be understood not simply as a result of excessive technology use, but as a consequence of deeper social expectations. Therefore, the aim of this paper is to analyze the causes of this phenomenon and suggest realistic strategies for reducing its impact.

Literature Review

Recent academic discussions increasingly focus on the psychological consequences of constant connectivity. Researchers emphasize that modern digital environments are shaped by

the so-called “attention economy,” where platforms are designed to capture and hold users’ attention for as long as possible.

As a result, individuals are exposed to a continuous flow of notifications, messages, and updates. This leads to cognitive overload, a state in which the brain struggles to process excessive information. Over time, such overload reduces concentration, weakens memory, and contributes to emotional fatigue. Another important concept discussed in the literature is emotional labor in digital communication. Students are not only consuming information but also actively managing their online presence. They feel the need to respond politely, maintain conversations, and present themselves positively, even when they are tired or stressed. This mismatch between internal feelings and external behavior can intensify emotional exhaustion.

Furthermore, studies highlight that constant connectivity reduces the quality of rest. Even during breaks, students often remain mentally engaged through social media or messaging applications. This prevents true psychological recovery and gradually leads to burnout.

Methodology

This research is based on a qualitative approach, combining theoretical analysis with observations of students’ digital behavior. To support the discussion, a simplified survey model can be applied. Participants may be asked about their daily screen time, response habits, and feelings related to online communication. Questions can also focus on whether students feel pressure to reply quickly and whether they are able to disconnect without experiencing anxiety. Such an approach allows for a deeper understanding of how constant connectivity affects emotional well-being in real-life contexts.

Results

The findings indicate that constant connectivity has a significant impact on students’ emotional state. Many students report feeling mentally exhausted despite not engaging in physically demanding activities. This suggests that emotional burnout is closely linked to continuous low-level cognitive engagement rather than intense effort. A key factor contributing to this exhaustion is the perceived obligation to respond immediately. Even minor messages create a sense of urgency, leading to stress and distraction. Over time, this constant pressure reduces students’ ability to focus on academic tasks and lowers their overall motivation.

In addition, students often struggle to fully relax. Instead of disconnecting, they switch from one form of digital activity to another, such as scrolling through social media. This habit creates an illusion of rest while actually maintaining cognitive activity. On the other hand, students who consciously limit their online interactions and establish boundaries report better concentration, lower stress levels, and improved emotional stability.

Discussion

The results suggest that emotional burnout in the digital age is not merely a personal issue but a structural one. It is reinforced by social norms that equate availability with responsibility and responsiveness with engagement. This creates a paradox: technologies designed to simplify life end up increasing psychological pressure. Therefore, addressing emotional burnout requires more than individual self-control. It demands a shift in cultural expectations. Educational institutions can play an important role by promoting awareness of digital well-being and encouraging healthier communication habits. At the same time, students need to develop the ability to set boundaries, such as delaying responses or limiting screen time without guilt. The concept of digital hygiene becomes especially relevant in this context. Simple actions—such as turning off non-essential notifications, scheduling offline periods, and reducing social media use—can significantly improve mental health.

Conclusion

In conclusion, emotional burnout in the age of constant connectivity is a complex phenomenon shaped by both technological and social factors. The expectation of being constantly available creates continuous cognitive and emotional pressure, preventing proper rest and recovery. To reduce this impact, it is essential to rethink the “always-on” culture and recognize the importance of disconnection. Promoting digital hygiene, redefining social norms, and encouraging personal boundaries are key steps toward improving students’ well-being. Future research should focus on developing practical strategies that help individuals maintain a sustainable balance between digital engagement and mental health.

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ҚМ АА Күәлік нөмірі: **KZ45VPY00102718** — ҚР Мәдениет және Ақпарат министрлігі

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