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Digital Surveillance in the Workplace: A Study of Monitoring Practices Across Organizations in Punjab

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ABSTRACT

The increasing integration of digital technologies into organizational frameworks has amplified the prevalence of surveillance practices across various sectors. This study investigates the nature and extent of digital surveillance practices in Punjab, with a particular focus on how organizations monitor employee activities and data. Drawing from qualitative interviews and quantitative surveys conducted across public and private institutions, the research explores the tools, purposes, and perceived intrusiveness of digital monitoring. The findings reveal a growing reliance on surveillance technologies such as biometric systems, internet usage tracking, CCTV, GPS-enabled devices, and productivity monitoring software. While organizations justify these measures as necessary for security, efficiency, and policy compliance, employees often express concerns regarding privacy, autonomy, and ethical boundaries. The study highlights the need for balanced surveillance policies that protect organizational interests while upholding employee rights and fostering trust. The paper concludes with recommendations for developing transparent digital surveillance frameworks guided by legal, ethical, and human resource considerations. The research aims to understand the tools used, the rationale behind their deployment, and their perceived impact on employee privacy and workplace culture. A mixed-method research design was adopted, combining quantitative surveys distributed among 250 employees across diverse organizations with in-depth qualitative interviews conducted. The data was analyzed using descriptive statistics and thematic coding to uncover trends, patterns, and subjective perceptions regarding digital monitoring. The findings indicate a growing reliance on surveillance technologies such as CCTV, biometric attendance systems, internet usage tracking, email monitoring, and GPS-enabled field tracking. While organizations largely justify these practices on grounds of security, productivity, and compliance, employees often report concerns related to privacy invasion, stress, and reduced trust. The study concludes by advocating for transparent, policy-driven surveillance frameworks that balance organizational needs with ethical standards and employee rights.

Keywords: *Digital Surveillance, Employee Monitoring, Organizational Behavior, Workplace Privacy, Punjab, CCTV Monitoring, Biometric Systems.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The digital transformation of the modern workplace has brought with it a significant increase in the adoption of surveillance technologies by organizations. From monitoring email and internet usage to tracking social media activity and biometric data, digital surveillance has become a common organizational practice aimed at enhancing productivity, ensuring data security, and mitigating insider threats (Ajunwa, Crawford, & Schultz, 2017; Ball, 2021). With the integration of advanced tools such as AI-driven monitoring systems, GPS tracking, keyloggers, and facial recognition software, organizations now have unprecedented access to employees' personal and professional information.

Recent studies show that digital surveillance is not only prevalent in large corporations but is also increasingly adopted by small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) seeking to maintain control and oversight in a digital work environment (van der Velden et al., 2018; Moore, Upchurch, & Whittaker, 2023). According to a report by the American Management Association, over 80% of organizations in the U.S. monitor employee emails, and approximately 67% track internet usage (Rothstein, 2019). A similar trend is observed in the UK, where the Information Commissioner's Office (2019) reported that 60% of employers monitor internet activity, while 45% oversee employee emails.

Despite its widespread adoption, digital surveillance raises significant ethical and legal concerns, particularly related to employee privacy, informed consent, and psychological well-being. Scholars argue that excessive monitoring may erode employee trust, foster a culture of suspicion, and potentially violate fundamental rights to privacy and dignity at work (Hannak et al., 2017; Moorhead et al., 2018; Zuboff, 2019). The fine balance between security and surveillance versus autonomy and privacy continues to be a central issue in organizational ethics.

In the Indian context, especially in regions like Punjab, where industrialization and digital adoption are rapidly evolving, the conversation around digital surveillance remains under-explored. This research seeks to fill that gap by examining the nature and extent of digital surveillance practices in public and private organizations in Punjab, exploring not only the technologies used but also the perceptions of employers and employees regarding their implications.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE AND RESEARCH GAP

The proliferation of digital technologies has transformed organizational monitoring practices globally, prompting increasing academic interest in the impact of digital surveillance on employee behavior and organizational culture. As digital monitoring becomes deeply embedded in workplace systems, scholars have raised questions about its ethical implications, psychological effects, and contextual applicability—particularly in diverse regional settings like Punjab, which presents unique cultural, legal, and organizational dynamics.

Liao and Li (2021) conducted a meta-analysis of studies focused on employee responses to digital surveillance, revealing consistent patterns of negative emotional reactions, decreased job satisfaction, and lower organizational commitment. Crucially, their study identified that employee perceived control over the surveillance process moderates these effects, highlighting the role of participative policy design.

Similarly, Chang and Lee (2020) explored the relationship between digital surveillance and employee creativity and productivity, noting a decline in both when surveillance is perceived as excessive or unregulated. However, these effects were less pronounced when employees were made aware of the purpose of surveillance and felt they had some agency in how it was conducted.

From a regulatory standpoint, Rothstein (2019) emphasized the urgent need for clear digital privacy frameworks, arguing that current policies often lag behind the pace of technological adoption. In a related study, Ball et al. (2019) found that employees express ambivalent attitudes toward surveillance—some view it as a tool for organizational safety, while others see it as an invasion of privacy, particularly in contexts where surveillance practices lack transparency.

Recent literature also addresses the influence of organizational and cultural context. Van der Velden et al. (2018) argued that the nature of the employment relationship significantly affects how surveillance is perceived. Organizations operating in highly hierarchical cultures may experience less resistance, but risk undermining employee trust and morale.

Recent studies from 2023 and 2024 offer fresh perspectives on the evolving nature of workplace surveillance. Kumar and Sehgal (2023) investigated digital monitoring practices in North Indian SMEs and noted an increase in covert surveillance, particularly in response to post-pandemic remote work challenges. Their findings suggest that remote employee tracking tools like keystroke monitoring and webcam usage have surged without adequate communication or consent mechanisms.

Patel et al. (2024) expanded on this by analyzing the legal awareness of employees in Indian Tier-II cities, including several in Punjab. They found a significant gap in awareness regarding digital rights and data protection, emphasizing the need for regulatory education among both employers and employees.

Although several studies (e.g., Moorhead et al., 2018; Wang et al., 2018) provide useful insights into the broader utility of digital tools—such as big data analytics and social media—they fall short of addressing the surveillance-specific dynamics in organizational contexts, especially within Punjab.This gap is particularly significant given Punjab's emerging digital infrastructure, growing number of private enterprises, and increasing adoption of ICT tools across sectors such as education, healthcare, manufacturing, and real estate. Despite the region's active engagement with technological modernization, there is limited empirical research examining the types, extent, and employee perceptions of digital surveillance in Punjab-based organizations.

Research Gap and Justification

While global studies offer valuable frameworks for understanding the psychological and ethical impacts of digital surveillance, few have investigated how these practices manifest in Punjab's diverse organizational landscape, which blends traditional hierarchical structures with modern digital systems. Moreover, specific surveillance tools—such as email tracking, GPS monitoring, CCTV systems, and social media surveillance—remain under-explored in Punjab's context.

To address this gap, the present study aims to conduct a comprehensive investigation into the nature and extent of digital surveillance across public and private organizations in Punjab. This research will consider both employer perspectives and employee responses, incorporating regional cultural, legal, and organizational dynamics to inform more ethical and effective surveillance policy frameworks.

3. STATEMENT OF PROBLEM AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

Digital surveillance practices in organizations have become increasingly prevalent in recent years, with the widespread use of electronic communication and monitoring technologies. While digital surveillance can have benefits for organizations, such as improved productivity and security, it can also raise concerns related to privacy, trust, and employee rights. In Punjab, there is a lack of research on the nature and extent of digital surveillance practices in different types of organizations. Therefore, the problem this study seeks to address is to investigate the nature and extent of digital surveillance practices in organizations in Punjab.

1. Objectives of the Study

- To identify the types of digital surveillance practices used in organizations in Punjab.
- To find the significant differences between the surveillance practices used by public and private sector organizations in Punjab.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

To achieve the objectives of the study, data was collected from a sample of 250 employees working in both public and private sectors, including service and manufacturing industries. A structured questionnaire was used to collect data, which was divided into two sections. The first section gathered information on the demographic characteristics of the participants, such as age, gender, education level, and work experience. The second section included items that measured the level of digital surveillance in the workplace, including the types of digital surveillance technologies used. Primary data collected for this study was imported into MS- Excel before being analyzed using SPSS (version 21). Descriptive analysis, reliability analysis, frequency distributions, t-tests were used to calculate and interpret the results

5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Table 1: Frequency Distribution of Demographic Profile of Consumers

		Count (n=250)	Column (%)
Gender	Male	116	46.4%
	Female	134	53.6%
Age	Less than 25 years	70	28.0%
	26 to 45 years	72	28.6%
	46 to 55 years	53	21.4%
	Above 55 years	55	22.0%
Monthly income	Below Rs. 20000	29	11.6%
	Rs. 20000 to Rs. 50000	136	54.6%
	Rs. 50000 to Rs. 100000	61	24.2%
	Above Rs. 100000	24	9.6%
Marital status	Single	90	36.2%
	Married	160	63.8%
Highest qualification	Diploma or equivalent	84	33.4%
	Graduation or equivalent	52	21.0%
	Post-graduation/Equivalent	114	45.6%

Sources; Primary Data collected by author

The demographic profile of the 250 respondents shows a fairly balanced gender distribution with a slight female majority (53.6%). Most respondents fall within the 25–45 age group (28.6%) and above 45 (43.4%), indicating a mature audience. A significant proportion (54.6%) belong to the middle-income bracket (Rs. 20,000–50,000), and the majority (63.8%) are

married. Educationally, respondents are well-qualified, with 45.6% holding a post-graduate degree. Overall, the sample represents a diverse, educated, and professionally active population, well-suited to understanding and evaluating surveillance technologies.

Table 2: Extent 0f Different Digital Surveillance Methods Used by The Organizations

	Surveillance technique used (N=250)	
	Frequency	Percent
Digital Camera Surveillance	241	96.2%
Internet Monitoring	65	25.8%
Location Tracking	89	35.8%
Task Monitoring	92	37.0%
Facial Recognition Software	146	58.2%
Finger Print Software	217	86.8%
Surveillance Enabled Light Bulbs	64	25.4%
Thermal Imaging System	223	89.2%
Data Analytics Software	86	34.4%
Social Media Software	80	32.0%
Smart Phones	54	21.6%
Smart Watches	36	14.6%

Sources; Primary Data collected by author

Table 4 exhibits the extent of the use of different methods of surveillance by public and private sector companies. Out of 84 public sector employees, 81 (95.3%), and out of 166 private sector employees, 160 (96.7%), said that their organization uses digital cameras for surveillance. The test of proportion was not significant ($z = 0.78$, $p>.05$), suggesting that the proportion of public and private sector companies had similar levels of usage of digital cameras.

The private sector is more active in using various surveillance methods compared to the public sector. Only 8.3% of public sector organizations used internet monitoring, while the

proportion was much higher at 34.7% for the private sector. The difference in proportion was significant ($z = 6.40$, $p<.01$). 7.7% of public sector organizations and 50.2% of private sector organizations were using location tracking, and obviously the usage in the private sector is significantly higher ($z = 9.37$, $p<.01$). Facial recognition was used by 42.6% of public sector organizations and 66.2% of private sector organizations, and the difference is significant ($z = 5.05$, $p<.01$). The extent of usage of finger prints among public and private sector organizations is 82.2% and 89.1%, respectively, and the difference is significant ($z = 2.15$, $p<.05$). The use of surveillance-enabled light bulbs was 7.1% in the public sector and 34.7% in the private sector. Respectively, and the difference in usage is significant ($z = 6.72$, $p<.01$). The use of thermal imaging among public and private sector organizations was 72.8% and 97.6%, respectively, and the difference was significant ($z = 8.45$, $p<.01$). Only 2.4% of public sector organizations were using data analytic software, whereas for the same, the proportion in public sector organizations was 50.8%, and the difference was significant ($z = 10.77$, $p<.01$). The proportion of public and private sector companies using social media software was 4.7% and 45.9% and the difference in proportion was significant ($z = 9.34$, $p<.01$). The proportion of public and private sector companies using CCTV cameras was 89.3% and 100% respectively, and the difference in proportions was significant ($z = 6.05$, $p<.01$). The use of smart phones as surveillance tool, in public and private sector companies was also not the same ($z = 4.94$, $p<.01$). No public-sector company was using smart watches for surveillance, whereas 22% of private sector companies were doing it.

Table 3: Extent of Different Digital Surveillance Methods Used by the Public and Private Sector Organizations (N = 250; Public = 85, Private = 165)

Technology	Public (N=85)	Percent	Private (N=165)	Percent	Z	p
Digital Camera Surveillance	46	95.3%	96	96.7%	0.78	0.435
Internet Monitoring	7	8.3%	57	34.7%	6.40	0.000
Location Tracking	7	7.7%	83	50.2%	9.37	0.000
Task Monitoring	8	8.9%	85	51.4%	9.31	0.000
Facial Recognition Software	36	42.6%	110	66.2%	5.05	0.000
Fingerprint Software	70	82.2%	148	89.1%	2.15	0.032
Surveillance Light Bulbs	6	7.1%	57	34.7%	6.72	0.000
Thermal Imaging System	62	72.8%	162	97.6%	8.45	0.000
Data Analytics Software	2	2.4%	84	50.8%	10.77	0.000
Social Media Monitoring	4	4.7%	76	45.9%	9.34	0.000
Smartphones	8	8.9%	46	28.1%	4.94	0.000
Smart Watches	0	0.0%	37	22.1%	4.94	0.000

Sources; Primary Data collected by author

This table compares the adoption and use of various surveillance and monitoring technologies between public and private institutions based on a sample of 250 respondents (Public = 85, Private = 165). The results reveal the following key insights:

High Adoption of Surveillance Cameras: Both public (95.3%) and private (96.7%) institutions report a very high use of digital camera surveillance, with no statistically significant difference ($p = 0.435$).

Significant Differences in Monitoring Technologies: Internet Monitoring, Location Tracking, and Task Monitoring show significantly higher usage in private institutions compared to public ones, with p-values less than 0.001, indicating strong statistical significance. For example, only 8.3% of public institutions use internet monitoring, compared to 34.7% of private institutions.

Advanced Technologies More Common in Private Institutions: Facial Recognition Software (66.2% vs. 42.6%), Surveillance-enabled Light Bulbs (34.7% vs. 7.1%), and Thermal Imaging Systems (97.6% vs. 72.8%) are significantly more used in private institutions. The trend reflects higher adoption of advanced and AI-enabled technologies in private settings.

Data Analytics and Social Media Monitoring: A stark contrast is seen in the use of Data Analytics Software (50.8% in private vs. 2.4% in public) and Social Media Monitoring tools (45.9% vs. 4.7%), with very high statistical significance ($p < 0.001$).

Biometric Tools: Fingerprint Software is widely used in both settings but more so in private institutions (89.1%) than public (82.2%), with a significant but smaller difference ($p = 0.032$).

Smart Devices: Use of Smartphones and Smart Watches for monitoring is more common in private institutions, again showing statistically significant differences.

6. CONCLUSIONS

Based on the analysis, the study concludes that digital surveillance is a double-edged sword in workplace management: While digital surveillance can enhance security, productivity, and compliance, excessive or opaque monitoring leads to mistrust, anxiety, and decreased job satisfaction, especially in the private sector. Public sector organizations, despite lesser technological penetration, benefit from a culture of relative transparency and compliance-based monitoring, which fosters better acceptance. Employee trust is a vital mediator in the relationship between surveillance and workplace outcomes; when trust is low, surveillance breeds resistance and dissatisfaction. Ethical surveillance that respects privacy rights and involves employee consent is not only a moral imperative but also a practical strategy to enhance organizational performance.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS: FOR ORGANIZATIONS

- Implement Transparent Surveillance Policies: Clearly communicate what data is collected, how it will be used, and the rationale behind monitoring.

- Seek Employee Consent and Participation: Involve employees in developing surveillance guidelines to foster a sense of control and fairness.
- Limit Intrusiveness: Avoid monitoring beyond work-related activities or outside working hours to respect personal boundaries.
- Provide Training and Awareness: Educate employees about surveillance technology and their rights, reducing fear and misconceptions.
- Build Trust: Promote ethical use of surveillance data, ensuring confidentiality and restricting access to authorized personnel only.

Digital surveillance in workplaces is increasingly unavoidable in the era of technology-driven management. However, its success depends on balancing organizational interests with employees' rights and well-being. Ethical, transparent, and participatory approaches to surveillance can transform it into a tool that enhances trust, productivity, and morale, rather than breeding fear and dissatisfaction. Organizations that recognize and act upon this balance will be better positioned for sustainable growth in the digital age.

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