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Article

Decent work in a digital age: a comprehensive review of research and theory

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Decent work in a digital age: a comprehensive review of research and theory

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ABSTRACT

Rapid technological change is transforming work, leading to a renewed focus on 'decent work'. While research on decent work is extensive, its connection to digitalization remains under-explored. This study presents a systematic review using the PRISMA methodology, analysing 110 relevant studies. The result showed that the research on decent work has significantly increased in the past decade, with diverse perspectives emerging. Three key themes were identified: digital work transformation, inadequate compensation, and work fulfilment. The digital shift has impacted how work is designed, accomplished, and experienced, influencing the perception of decent work. The concept and practices of decent work need adaptation to meet the demands of the digital age. Future research should explore decent work through the lens of self-value/psychology, the impact of digitalization on work design, and the integration of management and organizational theories. This study informs researchers and practitioners on promoting decent work in the digital era.

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1. Introduction

Rapid technological change, along with concerns about job quality and increasing expectations of well-being at work, has led to a growing appreciation for decent work (Blustein et al., 2023; Kim et al., 2021; Lenzi, 2019). First introduced in 1999 by the International Labor Organization (ILO) (ILO, 1999), decent work is defined as people's aspirations to work productively under conditions that are free, equal, safe, and fulfil human dignity (International Labour Organization, 2014). This ILO call for widespread decent work has driven research across disciplines (e.g. Duffy et al., 2016; Ferraro et al., 2018; Parker & Jorritsma, 2021; Parker & Zhang, 2016; Rai et al., 2019), highlighting its multifaceted nature. Economists view decent work as a tool for poverty reduction (Milica & Milica, 2019). Stable income from decent work empowers individuals and families to break free from poverty cycles by meeting basic needs, such as food, shelter, and healthcare (Brill, 2021; ILO, 1999). Social scientists view it through a social justice lens, where decent work ensures equal opportunities and treatment (Winchenbach et al., 2019). Psychologists such as Blustein et al. (2016) emphasize the individual perspective, arguing that decent work is shaped by the meaning, worth, and values that individuals derive from their jobs (Duffy et al., 2016; Smith et al., 2020).

Despite this rich understanding, a crucial gap exists: the impact of digitalization on decent work. Previous studies have shown that there is a wealth of research on decent work, with a predominant focus on measurement (Di Fabio & Kenny, 2019; Dodd et al., 2019; Masdonati et al., 2019; Nam & Kim, 2019; Yan et al., 2023) and the examination of sociocultural factors affecting decent work, such as discrimination, societal norms, and economic disparities (Allan et al., 2019a; Douglass et al., 2017; Duffy

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et al., 2019; England et al., 2020). In addition, several studies have focused on measuring decent work on marginalized and low-income populations (e.g. Adriaenssens & Hendrickx, 2019; Cruz et al., 2017; Kozan et al., 2019), and some recent studies have been systematic reviews (e.g. Brill, 2021; Pereira et al., 2019). Brill (2021) critically examined the concept of decent work by offering another perspective from psychology, which is in line with this study. However, the digital aspect is absent from his analysis and defines decent work solely as a work characteristic that may not fully capture the broader concept of decent work. Pereira et al. (2019) focus on understanding the state of the art of empirical evidence in academic journals, but their limited sample size (38 articles) restricts definitive conclusions. Their review prioritized the factors influencing decent work (antecedents) over a critical examination of the concept itself. Therefore, the concept of decent work has not been questioned critically. While existing research on decent work provides a valuable foundation (e.g. Brill, 2021; Ferraro et al., 2016; Pereira et al., 2019), these studies may need to be revisited to ensure their relevance in the digitally transformed workplace.

Digitalization has the potential to enhance productivity and efficiency in organizations but also raises concerns about degrading decent work through deskilling, control, and a return to rigid work structures (Beckmann, 2020; Parker et al., 2017). Studies have revealed the creation of low-quality gig economy jobs with financial instability and stress for workers (Denisov, 2020). Gig workers often face financial instability and poor work experience due to low wages and limited benefits (Denisov, 2020; Goods et al., 2019; Murphy & Turner, 2023; Wei & Thomas MacDonald, 2022). Furthermore, technology can blur work-life boundaries and increase workloads (Charles et al., 2022; Fréour et al., 2021; Schroeder et al., 2021). Therefore, an urgent study is needed to determine how organizations can embrace digital technology while ensuring decent work practices (Parker & Grote, 2022).

Building on the existing body of research, this study presents the findings of a systematic literature review of decent work. We aim to illuminate the current state of knowledge by analyzing key concepts and how they are affected by digitalization in the workplace. Thus, two research questions were addressed in this study. First, how has decent work research developed over time and how should the concept of decent work be redefined or adapted in the digital age to meet challenges and opportunities? Second, what future research directions are most crucial for decent work? This literature review offers a comprehensive analysis of decent work research, equipping academics and practitioners to identify areas of improvement. It explores challenges in the digital age, such as job insecurity, lack of benefits, increased competition, and potential solutions for policymakers, including new regulations and social safety. This enables us to understand how to ensure 'decent work' in digitally transformed workplaces. This study provides a valuable foundation for studying decent work in the evolving digital landscape.

Our systematic literature review offers a novel perspective of decent work from the lens of digitalization. This is particularly timely as the digital transformation of work significantly affects the definition and achievement of decent work. The remainder of this article is organized as follows. First, we review early research on decent work and establish a foundational understanding. Next, we focus on the key findings, theories, and most importantly, the research gaps identified in the existing literature.

2. Methodology

We conducted a systematic literature review to identify, interpret, and synthesize previous research on decent work. Following references from 2013 to 2023, the literature review process used the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) methodology, which includes three stages: (1) selection of articles, (2) screening of articles, and (3) analysis of articles (Moher et al., 2009). The three stages are illustrated in Figure 1. A combination of two keywords was used to conduct literature searches from two databases: SCOPUS and EBSCO Host. These databases are the most commonly used and extensive databases in interdisciplinary literature. The search used 'decent work' OR 'job quality' as the keywords found in the title, abstract, and keywords.

To ensure that the focused analysis aligned with our research objectives, we primarily considered articles from the fields of business, management, accounting, and psychology. This focus allowed for an in-depth exploration of decent work within these disciplines, known for its contributions to the understanding of work and organizational dynamics. The search identified 300 articles, 240 from Scopus and 60 from EBSCOhost. In total, 190 articles were excluded during the screening phase. Reasons for

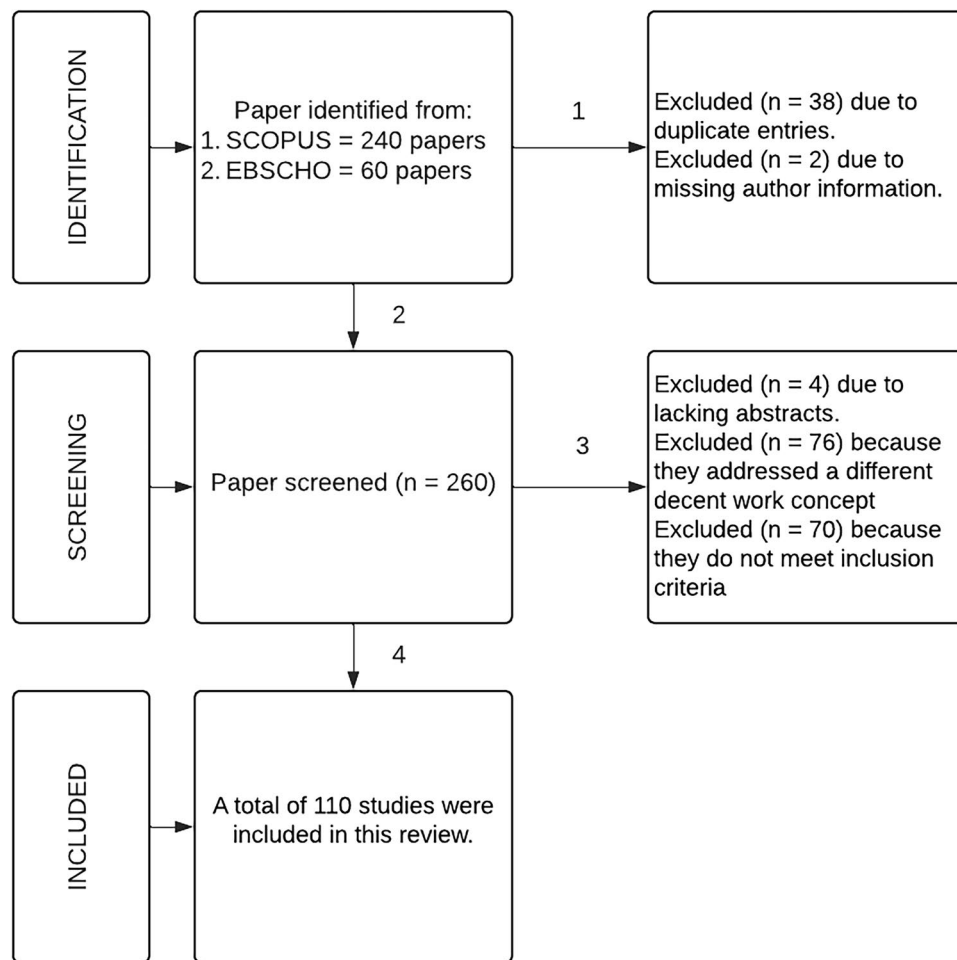


Figure 1. PRISMA flow diagram.

exclusion included duplicate entries ($n=38$), missing author information ($n=2$), lack of abstract ($n=4$), articles without abstracts were difficult to assess for relevance, and different conceptual focus ($n=76$). These articles discussed decent work but not within the specific conceptual framework relevant to our research question. Despite the promising titles and abstracts, a closer examination of the full text revealed that the remaining 70 articles did not meet our predefined inclusion criteria. This rigorous screening process resulted in the selection of 110 articles for further analyses.

3. Results and discussion

This section discusses the results of the analysis. The first section presents a descriptive analysis of the articles included in the review, followed by qualitative and synthetic analyses.

3.1. Descriptive analysis

3.1.1. Publication trends

All articles reviewed in this study were analyzed based on the number of publications per year, field of study, research methods, and key themes of the article. [Figure 2](#) shows the number of articles on decent work published annually. The largest number of articles were published in 2020 and 2021 (both with 20 articles), followed by 2019 (17 articles), 2016 (14 articles), and 2022 (10 articles). This rising interest in decent work research suggests that it remains a critical and ongoing concern in today's workplaces.

[Figure 3](#) categorizes the research methodologies employed in the analyzed articles. This shows that most articles included in this study are quantitative (49), followed by qualitative papers (30), with only a

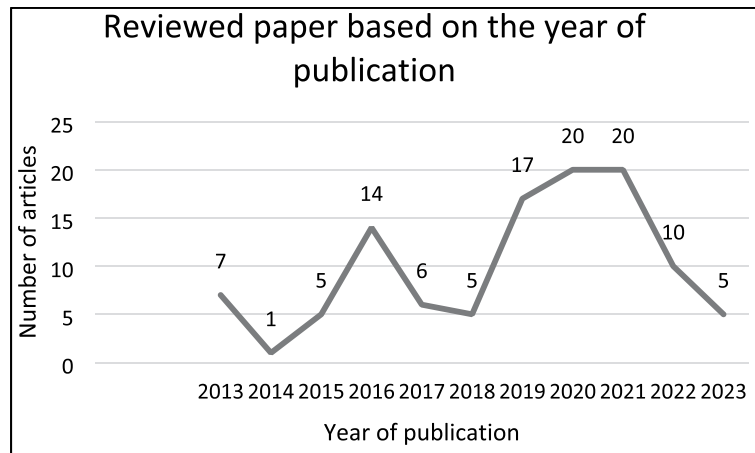


Figure 2. Reviewed papers per year of publication.

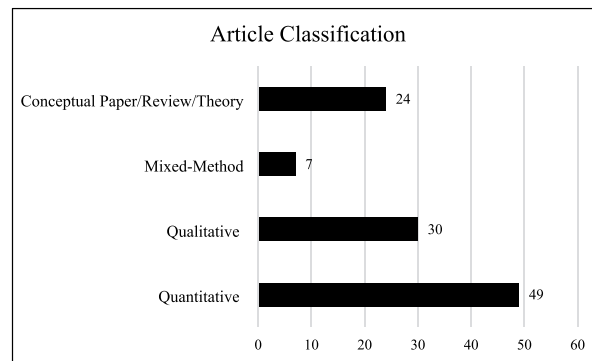


Figure 3. Article classification.

few using mixed methods (7). Most studies on decent work have focused on generalizing the concept (e.g. Braganza et al., 2021; Cheng et al., 2019; Di Fabio & Kenny, 2016; Douglass et al., 2017; Ferraro et al., 2015; Hoque et al., 2017) rather than seeking new thinking and individual perceptions of professional work quality (e.g. Anwar & Graham, 2021; Clarke, 2015; Khan et al., 2019; Masdonati et al., 2019; Myhill et al., 2021). This is most likely because of the wide range of indicators and perspectives on decent work. Consequently, researchers are keen to reach an agreement on what constitutes decent work and the factors that influence it. As a result, most studies on decent work have used quantitative methods to generalize concepts and make predictions.

3.1.2. Theoretical perspectives on decent work

Scholars from various disciplines have approached the concept of decent work from a unique perspective. This section explores three prominent theoretical perspectives on decent work: the economic/macro-level, psychology, and management.

1. Economic perspective/macro level

The ILO's call to support decent work in all countries has led many studies to develop macro-level statistical indicators. For example, Ghai (2003) in his article entitled 'Decent Work: Concept and Indicators', presented four different approaches to measuring decent work in the workplace. The four approaches are related to employment, social security, and human rights social dialog. Mehta (2016) uses employment opportunities, working conditions, social security, and social dialog to measure decent work. Other indicators, such as productive work, employment opportunities, workplace equality, and workplace representation were used by Edralin (2016) to measure the quality of work from the perspective of employees affiliated with labour unions. A similar thing is seen in the work of Khan et al. (2019) who used four pillars from the ILO to measure decent work: job creation, social protection, workplace rights, and social

dialog. Furthermore, a study conducted by Wicaksono et al. (2019) on macro-level decent work in Indonesia deployed employment opportunities, productivity, and income. In general, measures used at the macro level focus on poverty reduction and conformity with what the ILO wants to achieve (Ferraro et al., 2015).

These studies have provided significant growth in research on the practices of decent work in many companies across cultural contexts. Nevertheless, various criticisms have emerged that question the universality of the concept of decent works. First, the indicators used to measure decent work in different countries are difficult to use, because of the different situations in each country. Objective conditions regarding the quality of decent work are challenging to interpret, because they are based only on unidimensionality. Ghai (2003) asserted that measuring decent work using statistical indicators does not have significant practical implications. This finding is supported by the observations of Adhikari et al. (2012). They found that, although Nepal has succeeded in increasing the number of people below the poverty line (one of the indicators of decent work), the Nepalese government is still struggling to meet decent work targets. Regarding work quality, job dissatisfaction with Nepal's economic and political situation remained high. Employees are oriented only towards short-term outcomes. Second, the definition of 'decent work' can mean different things to different groups of people. For example, for employed people, decent work may be associated with higher salaries, whereas for unemployed people, decent work may simply be defined as the opportunity to work. Furthermore, for minority groups at the workplace, decent work may be associated with social acceptance and equality. Third, decent work requires local expertise. As a result, decent work from a macro perspective is generic and cannot be generalized to different contexts.

2. Self-value/psychological perspective

Psychologists also contribute significantly to understanding decent work. Blustein (2006) introduced the concept of decent work from an industrial/organizational (I/O) and vocational psychology perspective. He argued that work plays a vital role in human life, and that organizations should strive to provide decent work for all. Building on the foundation laid by Blustein (2006), Duffy et al. (2016) elaborated on this notion and developed the Psychology of Working Theory (PWT). The PWT framework aims to understand the overall quality of work for individuals, with a focus on disadvantaged groups such as minorities, women, and racial/ethnic groups (Duffy et al., 2016). This perspective emphasizes the interplay of contextual factors with psychological variables that directly contribute to an individual's experience of decent work. The PWT identifies several key components of decent work.

- Physical and interpersonal safety: This encompasses the freedom from physical, mental, and emotional abuse at work.
- Adequate rest and leisure time: Maintaining a healthy work-life balance is crucial.
- Organizational values that support family and social values: Workplaces should promote policies that respect employees' personal lives.
- Adequate compensation: Fair wages are essential for meeting basic needs and financial security.
- Provision of appropriate health services: Access to health care is a key factor in overall well-being.

The psychological perspective of decent work acknowledges subjective experiences alongside objective standards. Previous research using the PWT framework has yielded interesting results. For example, Dodd et al. (2019) found that access to healthcare is less important for decent work in the UK than in Brazil (Ribeiro et al., 2019). Similarly, Masdonati et al. (2019) and Nam and Kim (2019) highlighted the varying importance of factors such as healthcare, pay, and free time across different countries. Beyond PWT, Ferraro et al. (2021) developed another psychological perspective on decent work. The Decent Work Questionnaire (DWQ) measures workers' perceptions based on the International Labour Organization's (ILO) principles. The DWQ covers seven key areas: fair treatment, reasonable working hours, meaningful work, fair pay, social protection, growth opportunities, and health and safety. These studies demonstrate the multifaceted nature of decent work, measurable through both objective data (e.g. income) and subjective experiences (e.g. work-life balance). As shown in Table 1, research on decent work has utilized various dimensions to measure decent work.

Table 1. Decent work dimensions.

| No | Authors | Country | Decent work's dimension |
|----|-------------------------|---------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1 | Dodd et al. (2019) | U. K. | Career development, Job Satisfaction, Effective Management, Work-related benefits, Recognition and status, Job Security, Positive Social Aspects of work |
| 2 | Vignoli et al. (2020) | France | Compensation, quality of work- life, Work-life balance, Personal Development |
| 3 | Masdonati et al. (2019) | Switzerland | Positive employment conditions, Attractive work context, Work security, Valued personal outcomes of work. |
| 4 | Nam and Kim (2019) | Korea | Access to intrinsically rewarding work, the opportunity for self-growth and development, Emphatic work environment, Ethical organization policies and practices, Job autonomy, and Work stability. |
| 5 | Ribeiro et al. (2019) | Brazil | Income, Personal and Social Principles, Objective work context (Work conditions). |
| 6 | Ferraro et al. (2021) | Portugal and Brazil | Fundamental principles and values at work, Adequate working time and workload, fulfilling and productive work, meaningful retribution for the exercise of citizenship, social protection, opportunities, health and safety. |

Table 2. Different emphasis on each perspective.

| Perspective | Emphasis |
|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Economy/ Macro level | Objective working conditions with respect for human rights. |
| Self- value/ Psychology Management | Personal evaluation of the quality of all aspects of work in relation to workers' well-being and meaningful lives. Working conditions that are oriented towards increasing the productivity of individuals, work teams, and organizations. |

3. Management and organizational perspectives

The concept of decent work from management, human resources, organizational behaviour perspectives are often operationalized with 'work quality' (Belardi et al., 2021; Knox et al., 2015; Piasna et al., 2019; Takeuchi & Takeuchi, 2013) or 'good work' (Belardi et al., 2021; Clarke, 2015; Huang et al., 2022; Knox et al., 2015; Parker & Jorritsma, 2021) or 'quality of working life' (Burgess & Connell, 2008; Cheng et al., 2019; Subbarayalu & Al Kuwaiti, 2019) or 'precarious work' (Anwar & Graham, 2021; Ariza-Montes et al., 2021; Goods et al., 2019; Lenzi, 2019; Myhill et al., 2021; Rachmawati et al., 2021; Wan & Cao, 2022). Decent work, understood as a management concept, is the result of employees' evaluation of the content of their daily work and work environment (quality of work), hard and soft factors in work (good work), all aspects of work (quality of work life), and the quality of employment and equality in the work environment (precarious work). If an employee's experience of these things is better than expected, then that employee's evaluation of decent work/quality of work is positive, and vice versa.

Research examining decent work from a management and organizational perspective centres on the role of managers in fostering and implementing decent work practices within organizations. This includes policies that prioritize employee well-being, growth opportunities, and positive work environments (Piasna et al., 2013). Organizations that involve employees in decision-making foster trust and dedication (Parker et al., 2017). Good work design requires a formal decision-making process with skilled manager expertise (Parker and Zhang (2016). Poorly designed work can harm individuals and organizations, whereas job crafting allows employees to change aspects and perform better (Bakker et al., 2020; Oldham & Fried, 2016; Parker & Grote, 2022). A well-designed job increases cognitive capacity and meets basic human needs such as self-determination and personal growth. These experiences are considered to be indicators of good work.

The differences among the three perspectives of decent work are presented in Table 2. Overall, these three perspectives share common aspects of decent work; however, each focuses on different aspects of understanding and implementing the concept. The macro-level perspective emphasizes objective working conditions by considering human rights. The Psychology of Working Theory's self-value perspective emphasizes personal assessment of work quality based on values that influence personal well-being. Meanwhile, from a management perspective, the concept of decent work is directed at the role of management in providing working conditions that are oriented towards organizational effectiveness and efficiency.

3.1.3. Antecedents and outcomes of decent work

Exploring what matters for decent work has also led to many studies looking for antecedents to decent work. Research has explored the various factors that contribute to achieving decent work (antecedents)

and their consequences (outcomes). The antecedent variables varied from a range of factors, including macro, social, organizational, and individual levels. Some studies argue that public policies, social level of society, and marginalization are the main antecedents of decent work (Allan et al., 2021; Douglass et al., 2017; Kim & Kim, 2022). At the organizational level, human resource practices that value employees, such as work-life balance and fair compensation, are also antecedents of decent work. Pay, work-life balance, job security, occupational health and safety policies, and organizational climate are indicators of decent work (Allan et al., 2021; Burgess & Connell, 2015; Gibb & Ishaq, 2020; Smith et al., 2020). Individual characteristics, such as personality, career adaptability, and work volition, also matter for decent work (Wen et al., 2022). Studies such as Kozan et al. (2019) used a multilevel approach, demonstrating positive correlations between factors such as work volition, career adaptability, and social class with achieving decent work.

It has been reported that decent work is associated with positive outcomes for individuals, organizations, and communities. Decent work has been found to improve mental and physical health, job satisfaction, and meaningfulness of work (Charles et al., 2022; Denisov, 2020; Duffy et al., 2020; Kozan et al., 2019; Wan & Cao, 2022). Decent work also leads to increased employee engagement, commitment (Huang et al., 2022), and potentially even charitable giving behaviours. At the community level, decent work improves social cohesion and well-being. Research using the PWT also contributes to the expansion of the understanding of how decent work affects the meaningfulness of work. According to PWT, decent work occurs because an individual's basic needs are met (i.e. survival, connection, and self-determination), which, in turn, increases the meaningfulness of work (Blustein et al., 2019, 2023; Di Fabio & Kenny, 2016, 2019; Duffy et al., 2019; Masdonati et al., 2019)

3.1.4. Sample and research setting

The research sample in the decent work studies was diverse (Table 3). Using the PWT framework, previous studies have attempted to explain the work experience of individuals who are close to poverty, discrimination, and marginalization. Allan et al. (2019), Smith et al. (2020), and Stuart et al. (2016) have examined decent work in sexual minority groups. Gibb and Ishaq (2020) and Kozan et al. (2019) investigated decent work by examining the socioeconomic respondents. Therefore, they included employees with low incomes in their research. Wright and Clibborn (2019) explored why immigrants tend to obtain jobs of low quality and pay. They found that temporary visas limit migrant workers' agencies, leading to low-quality jobs, and that high-skilled migrants face challenges in recognizing qualifications and finding suitable jobs.

Prior research on decent work has employed diverse sampling approaches. Some studies have focused on specific occupations, including dancers, cruise ship workers, potters, and chefs, revealing trends in working conditions (Ariza-Montes et al., 2021; Belardi et al., 2021; Cruz et al., 2017; Saxena, 2021). Others have explored the experiences of traditionally vulnerable groups, such as young people or minorities, but research by Nizami (2019) also found deficiencies in decent work for knowledge workers, such as IT professionals. This highlights the need to move beyond the focus on vulnerable groups. Additionally, with the rise of new technologies and work arrangements, research is increasingly examining decent work in the context of online and platform-based jobs (Berg et al., 2018; Denisov, 2020; Giddy, 2021; Rachmawati et al., 2021; Schroeder et al., 2021). For example, studies by Anwar and Graham (2021) on gig workers in South Africa demonstrate the challenges of long hours and job insecurity within the digital economy. These findings emphasize the need to expand the focus of decent work research beyond traditional vulnerable groups and advocate decent work as a universal goal for all employees across industries.

3.2. Thematic analysis

The literature has revealed several key themes that shed light on the challenges and opportunities faced by individuals in diverse work environments.

1. Digital work transformation

Prior research on decent work encompasses the broad impact of digital technologies on how work is designed, delivered, and experienced by employees, and the nature of employment (Durward et al., 2020; Fréour et al., 2021). Cloud-based tools and mobile devices empower employees with autonomy and

Table 3. Sample and research setting.

| No | Author | Sample | Country |
|----|-----------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------|
| 1 | Kalleberg et al. (2015) | Outsourcing employees | Norway |
| 2 | Cruz et al. (2017) | dancers | The U.K. |
| 3 | Berg et al. (2018) | crowd workers | North America, Europe, Central Asia, Africa, Asia-Pacific |
| 4 | Ferraro et al. (2018) | knowledge workers (lecturers, physicians, lawyers) | Portugal |
| 5 | Cheng et al. (2019) | aged care workers | Australia |
| 6 | Ariza-Montes et al. (2021) | officer and non-officer of the cruise. industry | Miami |
| 7 | Allan et al. (2019) | Sexual minority working adults | USA |
| 8 | Nizami (2019) | I.T. workers | India |
| 9 | Kozan et al. (2019) | low-income workers | Turkey |
| 10 | Smith et al. (2020) | Sexual minority working adults | USA |
| 11 | Gibb and Ishaq (2020) | low-paid sector workers (social care, hospitality, and cleaning) | Scotland |
| 12 | Çolakoğlu and Toygar (2021) | teachers | Turkey |
| 13 | Duffy et al. (2021) | 569 working adults | USA |
| 14 | Braganza et al. (2021) | 232 working adults | UK |
| 15 | Myhill et al. (2021) | gig workers | Scotland |
| 16 | Kashyap et al. (2022) | faculty members working in higher education institutions | India |
| 17 | Saxena (2021) | potters | India |
| 18 | Graça et al. (2021) | lecturers and researchers | Portugal and Brazil |
| 19 | Giddy (2021) | uber drivers | South Africa |
| 20 | Rachmawati et al. (2021) | 'ojeg' drivers | Indonesia |
| 21 | Huang et al. (2021) | 307 full-time employees (study 1) and 568 full-time employees (study 2) | China |
| 22 | Wen et al. (2022) | 368 pre-service female teachers | China |

flexibility, fostering a sense of control that contributes to positive work perceptions (Gallo et al., 2020; Michaelson, 2019). Consequently, work design in the digital era has placed new emphasis on autonomy.

Digital technologies also enable new work models characterized by smaller tasks, projects, and temporary employment (Deng & Joshi, 2016; Gibb & Ishaq, 2020; O'Sullivan et al., 2021; Schroeder et al., 2021). While routine task automation can free workers for higher-order cognitive activities, enhancing purpose and job quality (Parker & Grote, 2022; Schroeder et al., 2021), project-based and temporary work often lacks job security, leading to stress, burnout, and reduced well-being (Bamberly, 2011; Denisov, 2020; Piasna et al., 2013). For instance, the gig economy offers autonomy, but often comes with limited growth opportunities, minimal security, and low wages, raising questions about true job quality (Kaine & Josserand, 2019).

This shift towards a more precarious employment landscape, characterized by job insecurity, temporary positions, and lack of benefits, is a key concern in the digital age (Di Fabio & Palazzeschi, 2016; Giunchi et al., 2019; Kim et al., 2021; Le Fevre et al., 2015; Murphy & Turner, 2023). Globalization, technological advancements, and the gig economy all contribute to this trend, as organizations restructure with a core of permanent employees surrounded by a flexible pool of contract workers (International Labour Organization, 2014). This can negatively impact workers' well-being, job satisfaction, and mental health (Jaiswal, 2019; Nizami, 2019).

The digital economy has intensified this trend. Online activities, such as on-demand logistics, micro-tasking platforms, and online retail, intensify competition for jobs, potentially leading to higher turnover and a decline in long-term employment relationships (Allan et al., 2021; Codagnone et al., 2016). Additionally, government policy changes surrounding labour regulations add another layer of uncertainty to employment stability (Bartoll & Ramos, 2020). This confluence of factors suggests a significant and complex transformation of the employment landscape in the coming years.

2. Inequitable compensation

The literature highlights fair compensation as a critical gap in the concept of decent work (e.g. Codagnone et al., 2016; Çolakoğlu & Toygar, 2021; Kolot et al., 2020). Research demonstrates that adequate pay significantly impacts various aspects of decent work, including access to healthcare, safe working environments, leisure time, and alignment with organizational values (Çolakoğlu & Toygar, 2021).

Beyond these direct benefits, fair compensation is linked to increased employee motivation, job satisfaction, and overall work quality (Gibb & Ishaq, 2020). Importantly, ensuring fair pay extends beyond the workplace, fostering social equity, employee well-being, and a more inclusive and sustainable society (Atitsogbe et al., 2021; Clarke, 2015; Cottini & Lucifora, 2013).

The shift to a gig economy, particularly in platform-based food delivery (Goods et al., 2019), raises concerns about economic security, which is a fundamental aspect of decent work. Gig workers in this sector face precarious situations due to challenges, such as low and unpredictable wages, income fluctuations linked to factors beyond their control, and a lack of benefits and protection that contribute to economic risk (Kolot et al., 2020; Santana & Cobo, 2020). Although digital technologies have undoubtedly opened new opportunities for work and flexibility, they can also come at the cost of greater financial insecurity for those participating in the gig economy.

3. Work fulfilment

The third theme obtained from this review is that decent work forms the foundation of well-being and job satisfaction. This reflects a holistic approach to employment, where both personal and professional needs are met, contributing to work fulfilment. Decent work has a significant positive impact on the well-being of millennial employees, as evidenced by prior studies' findings that decent work positively predicts the well-being of employees (for example, Belardi et al., 2021; Clarke, 2015; Gallo et al., 2020; Kashyap & Arora, 2022). Precarious work affects workers' health in various ways, including their physical, mental, reproductive, and social well-being. Poor working conditions and demanding tasks increase the risk of accidents, anxiety, depression, low birth weight, and challenges related to job security and fair working conditions (Allan et al., 2021; Denisov, 2020).

When employees experience decent work conditions, their well-being is positively influenced by meeting their social contribution and self-determination needs. Drawing on the Psychology of Working Theory (PWT), Duffy et al. (2016) proposed that decent work significantly impacts subjective well-being by fostering the satisfaction of three core psychological needs: survival, social connection, and self-determination. Decent work emphasizes fair compensation, safe working conditions, and access to benefits. These aspects directly address employees' basic survival needs (Autin et al., 2019; Blustein et al., 2019; Duffy et al., 2021b). The PWT recognizes the importance of social connections in the workplace. Decent work environments that promote positive relationships with colleagues and a sense of belonging contribute to social well-being and can counteract feelings of isolation (Allan et al., 2020; Autin et al., 2019; Blustein et al., 2019). Furthermore, decent work that offers autonomy, control, and opportunities for growth and development aligns with a need for self-determination. When employees feel empowered to make decisions, utilize their skills, and learn new things, they experience increased motivation, confidence, and sense of purpose at work (Autin et al., 2019; Blustein et al., 2016, 2023b; Duffy et al., 2020; Messmann et al., 2022). This in turn contributes to greater job satisfaction and overall well-being.

3.3. Future directions for research

As the study of decent work continues to evolve, recommendations for future research can be made by considering theories, indicators, outcomes, samples, and research methods used.

1. More attention to self-value/psychological perspective of decent work

The literature review results show that research on decent work is developing from various perspectives and fields of study, from unidimensional to multi-dimensional and from macro-to micro-level. However, future researchers should consider the perspective that decent work should be viewed based on individual experiences. The universal decent work measurements cannot explain the actual conditions of the work environment. The meaning of decent work differs according to the individual, job, and culture. It argues that the evaluation of decent work starts with employees' psychological feelings and sense of self-value, creating a sense of meaning in the workplace (Blustein, 2006; Blustein et al., 2023b; Martela et al., 2021).

Studying decent work using the self-value approach enhances the understanding of the psychological impact on individuals, as workplace activities are crucial for understanding human behaviour and life experiences. Workplace experience significantly affects the physical and mental condition of workers. Understanding decent work using a person-centred approach will be more informative in presenting

employees' evaluations of their working conditions. For example, previous research has explained how decent work affects employee well-being and positive work attitudes using PWT theory (Allan et al., 2021; Esenaliev & Ferguson, 2019; Huang et al., 2022; Kozan et al., 2019; Navajas-Romero et al., 2019). Based on PWT theory, the presence of all dimensions of decent work in the workplace satisfies employees' basic needs. This satisfaction affects mental well-being and simultaneously leads to positive work outcomes. Therefore, paying more attention to measuring decent work by focusing on workers' subjective perspectives will enable decision-makers to evaluate the quality of work conditions not only from an objective point of view but also from employees' values of their mental well-being.

2. More attention to the effect of digitalization on decent work

Research on decent work has been conducted in various settings and types of work, for example: South Korea (Han et al., 2021; Kim & Kim, 2022; Nam & Kim, 2019), Italy (Di Fabio & Kenny, 2016; Lavagnini & Mennella, 2016), Bangladesh (Hussain & Endut, 2018; Khan et al., 2019), and Nepal (Adhikari et al., 2012), and so on. Research has also been conducted on teachers (Atitsogbe et al., 2021; Bamberly, 2011), chefs (Belardi et al., 2021), knowledge workers (Ferraro et al., 2015; Kashyap & Arora, 2022; Yan et al., 2023), and gig workers (Goods et al., 2019; Pichault & McKeown, 2019; Rachmawati et al., 2021). These studies measured employees' perceptions of decent work and examined the main factors that were important for decent work. However, ongoing technological changes affect production processes, ways of working, how companies organize work, and where work is done. These changes have changed the nature of work and increased the challenge of creating decent work. Today, employees may work more from home and are less likely to meet coworkers or supervisors face-to-face. This may give them greater work freedom, but they may also experience loneliness (Anwar & Graham, 2021) and fatigue due to many videoconference meetings (Beckmann, 2020; Schroeder et al., 2021).

In addition, digitization in organizations has led to the emergence of more varied forms of employment. The emergence of digital platforms allows people to work remotely with shorter forms of employment (Anwar & Graham, 2021; Bartoll & Ramos, 2020; Hussain & Endut, 2018; Pfeiffer & Kawalec, 2020). Charles et al. (2022) and Schroeder et al. (2021) explain that the gig economy has given rise to non-standard employment (e.g. part-time, temporary, project-based, on-call work, and telecommuting). Although this form of employment provides many benefits (such as high work autonomy and greater work opportunities), research has also found that they are prone to poor quality conditions and pay. Berg et al. (2018) find that crowd workers tend to receive lower pay, work at a lower skill level, and do not receive health insurance. These non-standard forms of employment make workers more vulnerable to precarious work (Lenzi, 2019). Beckmann (2020) showed that three main factors make gig workers experience decency in work: the lack of opportunities to learn, the emptiness of the meaning of work for the social environment, and poor career prospects. This is also supported by the findings of Myhill et al. (2021), involving gig workers in Scotland, revealing that gig workers have no hope of career advancement, even though some companies still provide them with training opportunities.

The use of technology with high intensity in the workplace has several negative impacts, such as technostress, low work-life balance, and overload (Beckmann, 2020; Denisov, 2020; Goods et al., 2019). Employees who implement remote work may overlook ergonomic considerations and personal well-being. Thus, although there is a consensus that the issue of decent work is a global problem, future research needs to examine it across all possible occupations. Is there a new meaning for decent work in the era of digitalization?

3. Further attention to the integration of management theory in the development of decent work concepts

Lack of workplace appropriateness can occur due to management's failure to create working conditions and job designs that provide meaning. Organizations are responsible for creating decent work environments and job designs that provide positive psychological experiences. A systematic literature review has demonstrated that the concept of decent work extends beyond a single scientific field. Integrating other theories (including management, human resources, and organizational behaviour) to develop the concept of decent work can be interesting and contribute more broadly to the development of decent work theory and practices in organizations. Blustein et al. (2023) explained how the relationship between decent and meaningful work is seen in HR practices, especially in job design. An enriched job design can provide a positive experience, because employees' self-determination needs are met. A

work environment with communication and high-quality relationships can satisfy employees' social needs and increase their perceptions of decent work. Other examples of how HR practices influence the concept of decent work can be found in the literature. For example, modern jobs require more varied skills that require organizations to provide greater training and development opportunities than before (Charles et al., 2022; Schroeder et al., 2021)

These experiences shape employees' perception of decent work. Furthermore, these experiences are the result of management practices in organizations. Parker and Jorritsma (2021) have shown that there are many ways to create humane working conditions using job design theory. These variables include management interventions, community interventions (social processes), contextual influences (such as industry and national policies), and interventions by employees (e.g. the ability to equip themselves). Through the built model, Parker and Jorritsma (2021) explained that the interventions of these four parties have different impacts, but management interventions deserve attention. The rationale is that employees do not entirely control positive work quality and meaningfulness. In many situations, employees cannot create positive work quality but are gifts from their organization. Assignments, compensation, workload, leader-employee relationships, workplace conditions, and management practices are the authority of management. Therefore, future research should focus on management theory in order to develop the concept of decent work. An example of a possible research question is: Which human resource management practices shape the perception of decent work the most? How do different job designs affect the perceptions of decent work? How can the job design theory be applied to measure decent work in the digital era?

4. Conclusion

This study answers two questions: (1) How has decent work research developed over time and how should the concept of decent work be redefined or adapted in the digital age to meet challenges and opportunities? (2) What future research directions are most crucial for decent work? First, research on decent work has steadily increased over the past decade (2013–2023). This trend suggests a jump in research efforts to understand the emerging trends and potential challenges and opportunities in decent work, particularly with regard to digitalization. The understanding of decent work is undergoing significant transformation. While macro-level indicators remain important, psychological factors measured at the individual level are now recognized as crucial for a holistic picture. This shift is partly driven by the rise of digitalization, which has fundamentally reshaped work patterns and employment structures. As a result, decent work should no longer be viewed as a static set of goals but rather as an evolving concept that adapts to the changing landscape of work.

There are three main themes in the body of research on decent work: 1. Digital work transformation, inadequate compensation, and work fulfilment. The expanding body of research on decent work in the digital age may indicate a search for new solutions and best practices. Studies on decent work still concentrated on vulnerable groups (e.g. part-time employees and minority groups) but involved more diverse professions and groups of respondents, including gig workers and knowledge workers. Research on decent work has also shifted from various perspectives and fields of study, from unidimensional to multidimensional, and from the macro-to micro-level. This shift revealed a significantly growing recognition of how technology impacts the nature of work and the perception of decent work. Thus, there should be an adaptation of decent work concepts and practices in the digital age to meet the current demands.

Second, future research on decent work should move beyond objective standards and explore the self-value/psychological perspective more deeply. Decent work is not only about wages and benefits; it contributes to a sense of purpose, self-worth, and intrinsic motivation, leading to increased engagement and productivity. One way to explore this is by examining the impact of digitalization on work design. Work design and digitalization are intrinsically linked; as technology changes the nature of work, research is needed to understand how to leverage its benefits while ensuring that decent work persists in a digitalized future. Fortunately, management theory plays a crucial role in translating work design principles into actions. Research can explore how management practices can be shaped to foster decent work in digital environments. This might involve strategies for skill development, performance management

focusing on growth and learning, and fostering a culture of collaboration and innovation. By integrating the concept of decent work with the management perspective, research can inform the creation of workplaces that not only meet economic needs, but also prioritize human well-being and ensure a sense of purpose in a digitalized world.

Despite the efforts made in this study, it inevitably suffers from some limitations. One such limitation is the potential for overlooked articles in the literature owing to the databases used. Although SCOPUS and EBSCO Host are widely used and reputable databases, they may not capture all relevant studies on decent work because other databases and sources may contain relevant literature. This could have led to a less diverse and representative set of studies in the analysis, potentially affecting the robustness and applicability of the findings across different contexts. It is hoped that future studies will utilize more established databases, such as Web of Science, PubMed, ProQuest, and other reliable documents beyond journal articles, to include even more relevant and interesting studies and recent findings.

This study has both theoretical and practical implications that are worth mentioning. For researchers, it offers a comprehensive roadmap and highlights key themes for exploring decent work in the digital era, thus providing a foundation for future studies. For policymakers, this review underscores the challenges and opportunities in promoting decent work and emphasizes the need for innovative regulations and practices that support the development of a more equitable and sustainable work environment in the digital era.

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The final version of the manuscript was approved by all authors who agreed to be accountable for all aspects of the work.

Data sharing

The authors agree to make the data and materials supporting the results or analyses presented in this article available upon request. Please contact the corresponding author to obtain access to the data and materials.

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