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An Analysis of "Coffee Badging,"- A Relatively Recent Trend in IT and ITES Companies In India

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Abstract:

"The purpose of this paper is to analyze the recent trend of coffee badging in response to the return-to-office mandate among IT & ITES companies in India. The term 'coffee badging' is applied to employees who briefly appear at a physical office but then leave soon afterward to work the rest of the day remotely. To fulfill the study's objective, secondary data have been collected from various sources such as company websites and online newspapers, and different statistical methods have been used for analysis.

The study reveals that Companies aim to have their employees return to the office to enhance collaboration, improve relationships, promote learning, and build an overall team culture. Nearly 58% of hybrid employees have 'coffee badged,' with men more likely to do so than women. The practice of coffee badging creates an undesirable scenario for both workers and employers, exposing a disconnect between the preferences and needs of employees and the policies and expectations established by employers. This paper describes the reasons and impact of coffee badging. This study also offers a few recommendations to avoid coffee badging which can be possible to implement by employers."

Keywords: *Coffee badging, Return-to-office, Hybrid work, work from home, IT & ITES.*

Introduction:

The latest workplace term gaining popularity with the return to offices is "coffee-badging." This involves employees making brief visits on the days they are required to be back, briefly interacting with colleagues, and then discreetly heading home to complete their work. This trend, viewed as a modern reaction to presenteeism, requires employees to strategically organize their time in the workplace. It entails participating in coffee breaks, engaging in social gatherings, and promptly departing. The notable aspect is the symbolic 'badge' received as recognition for this unconventional approach to attendance. According to *'Forbes'*, a notable trend is developing in the corporate environment referred to as 'Coffee badging,' reflecting the evolving dynamics of workplace culture amid the renewed prominence of physical office spaces.

Based on an August report from *'Resume Builder'* that surveyed 1,000 company leaders, almost 90% of companies intend to enforce return-to-office policies by the conclusion of 2024. Around 30% of the companies indicate that their company is considering termination as a consequence for employees who fail to adhere to in-office requirements. A mere 2% of business leaders mentioned that their company has no intentions of mandating in-person work. The revived effort to phase out remote work corresponds with an

increasing number of CEOs openly expressing their dissatisfaction with the model. They argue that productivity, collaboration, and employee engagement all suffer in the absence of a physical office setting. They may find it more convenient to adhere to the traditional idea that employees are genuinely working when they are visible in the hallway.

With the gradual decrease of the COVID-19 pandemic, there is an increasing trend of companies requesting employees to return to the office. A new workplace trend has emerged: coffee badging. This practice involves briefly appearing at the office for a few hours before promptly departing and is usually adopted by individuals working in a hybrid or flexible model. The purpose is to fulfill the requirement of being physically present on the premises for a short period, often just enough to grab a cup of coffee, and then leave as soon as this task is finished.

Need for the study:

Coffee badging poses an unfavorable situation for both employees and employers, revealing a divergence between the needs and preferences of workers and the policies and expectations set by employers.

Objective of the study:

The objective is to examine the causes of this emerging trend and assess its impact.

Scope of the study:

Exclusively relying on secondary data obtained from various business websites, company platforms, online newspapers, and magazines.

Methodology:

Compared and analyzed secondary data obtained from diverse sources like online business magazines, newspapers, and company websites.

Results and analysis:

With the easing of the COVID-19 pandemic, an increasing number of companies are

encouraging their employees to return to office work. A new workplace practice, known as 'coffee badging,' has emerged. This practice involves briefly showing up at the office for a few hours before promptly departing. Individuals primarily working in a hybrid or flexible model are adopting this trend. The goal is to meet the requirement of being physically present on the premises for a short duration, often just enough to grab a cup of coffee, and then leave as soon as this task is accomplished.



Fig: 1 (source: <https://owllabs.com/state-of-hybrid-work/2023>)

Coffee badging has emerged as a reaction to the increasing prevalence of return-to-office (RTO) mandates, which numerous workers perceive as restrictive and unnecessary. Fig.1 describes that as per the 'Owl Labs survey', 58% of hybrid workers have engaged in coffee badging, and 47% of employees express their intention to resign if obligated to return to the office.

As per the survey conducted by the same 'Owl Labs', the practice of coffee badging is more widespread among men compared to women and among millennials compared to other generations. Although the report does not delve into the reasons for these variations, they could be linked to gendered expectations, preferences for work-life balance, and workplace culture. Men may feel a greater sense of comfort or entitlement towards coffee badging, while women could face more scrutiny or pressure to adhere to conventional practices. Additionally, millennials may exhibit a greater familiarity or openness to flexible work arrangements compared to older generations, who may uphold distinct work ethics or habits.

Causes and impact of coffee badging:

Many workers value the flexibility and independence that come with remote work, expressing reluctance to invest time and money in frequent office visits. Even after the COVID-19 pandemic, some companies have not arranged well-equipped workstations and transportation facilities for rotational shifts.

Some companies vacated their offices during the pandemic and are still not ready to accommodate all their employees. Employees also

report feeling more productive and at ease working from home, where they can sidestep distractions, interruptions, and stress. The stress associated with commuting, daily traffic, and the associated costs encourages individuals to minimize their in-person presence at work. Time spent in coffee badging is undesirable for both employees and employers, signaling a discord between the needs and desires of workers and the policies and expectations set by employers. Furthermore, it underscores a deficiency in trust and communication between the two entities. The practice of coffee badging can lead to adverse effects on both individual and organizational performance, including diminished engagement, collaboration, innovation, and loyalty. Engaging in meaningful conversations with colleagues might contribute to employees feeling more connected and fostering a stronger sense of belonging. At the same time, this choice can negatively impact their professional image. CEOs also defend their demand by asserting that employees achieve greater productivity when working in the office. They argue that being physically present in the office, surrounded by colleagues most of the time, makes it more straightforward to learn, model, practice, and reinforce the work culture. However, few of CEOs concur that there is an increase in business profits when employees work from home.

Conclusion:

Coffee badging serves as an indicator of the evolving dynamics and requirements in the contemporary workplace. It signifies the necessity for both employees and employers to adjust and

harmonize their work practices and policies with the emerging realities and possibilities of hybrid and remote work. Through these adaptations, a more balanced, productive, and fulfilling work environment can be established to benefit everyone involved.

Recommendations:

1. Preventing or dealing with coffee badging involves adopting flexibility, promoting transparent communication, and giving priority to outcomes over physical presence.
2. Employers need to acknowledge both the advantages and challenges of remote work, granting employees greater autonomy and control over their work environment and schedule.
3. Additionally, consistent and clear communication with employees, seeking their feedback on return-to-office decisions, is essential.
4. Employers ought to prioritize assessing and acknowledging employees for their accomplishments and contributions, rather than focusing exclusively on attendance and visibility.

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