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ErgoTalks Unplugged: Digital Discourses and Ergonomic Practices Among Remote Knowledge Workers

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ABSTRACT

The mass usage of remote work has precipitated a radical shift in ergonomic education from structured, expert-driven guidance to unstructured, user-generated web-based discourse. This study examines YouTube communities as fluid, informal learning spaces where remote workers actively experiment with ergonomics. Through thematic analysis of high-engagement YouTube videos, the study finds five main thematic pillars: adaptability and personalization, do-it-yourself (DIY) ergonomic solutions, holistic ergonomics emphasizing physical and psychological comfort, peer-generated engagement, and dynamic content relevance. It is apparent from the results that remote workers prefer practical, flexible, and budget-friendly ergonomic approaches over conventional procedures and frequently use everyday objects in innovative ways to optimize their comfort and work efficiency. Quantitative results indicate the best video length of about 20 minutes, finding a balance between depth of information and cognitive load on the audience in the best way. Theoretically, the research applies the Human Factors and Ergonomics (HFE) model to include flexible, peer-mediated informal learning modes. Managerially, the research points out the strategic benefits of integrating informal digital content into organizational ergonomic training programs to foster holistic employee well-being, enhance engagement, and sustain productivity in remote work settings.

Keywords: Human factor, Home ergonomics, Remote work practices, YouTube learning communities

INTRODUCTION

As the distinction between work and home continues to blur, ergonomics is quietly revolutionizing. No longer confined to factory shop floors and office cubicles, ergonomic principles are finding their way into kitchens-turned-workspaces and bedroom desks-cum-offices. This study examines how YouTube panel discussions are emerging as unexpected sites of ergonomic learning. These online forums show what individuals ought to do and what they are doing to remain comfortable, healthy, and productive in their makeshift home workplaces.

Though conventional ergonomic studies have for some time concentrated on official workplace interventions and organized arrangements (Falzon

et al., 2024), there is little knowledge of how humans translate and apply these principles in the home. Literature overlooks the experiential, adaptive, and informal nature of home ergonomics. Moreover, the affordances of platforms like YouTube, where information is combined with communal interaction, remain underexplored (de Nadal, 2024).

The expansion of teleworking, accelerated exponentially by the COVID-19 pandemic, has transformed the nature of knowledge work, placing unprecedented emphasis on ergonomics and the virtual workplace. This study responds to this transformation through critical dialogue among experts, illuminating the multifaceted concerns and developing practices guiding teleworking ergonomics. The shift from traditional office to home settings came with various ergonomic, environmental, and psychological forces, precipitating significant concerns about employee productivity and well-being (Gallagher et al., 2023; Olaleye et al., 2023).

While numerous studies have investigated musculoskeletal discomfort (MSD) and ergonomic risks in telework (Chim and Chen, 2023; Cruz-Ausejo et al., 2023; Kamala et al. (2025)), considerable gaps exist regarding comprehensive strategies to mitigate these risks and the sustainability of remote ergonomic interventions. Research has predominantly addressed short-term adaptations made during emergency telecommuting, with fewer explorations of longitudinal ergonomic adaptations and organizational measures needed for prolonged telework (Manu et al., 2024; Singh and Kumar, 2024). New evaluation methods are also necessary to conduct efficacious ergonomic evaluations at a distance (Diesbourg et al., 2024).

The significance of this research is to bridge these gaps by synthesizing panel expert opinions from the YouTube panel to establish actionable ergonomic guidelines, give comprehensive guidelines for home workstations, and encourage enhanced digital discourse on telework practices. Lastly, this study seeks to contribute to the ergonomics debate by foregrounding the evolving interplay between digital technologies, workspace territories, and occupational well-being to promote sustainable remote workplaces that protect and enhance knowledge workers' productivity and well-being. This study proceeds to literature review of relevant studies and methodology section. The phenomenon was discussed and concluded with reflection, limitation of the study and proposed future study.

REVIEW OF EXISTING LITERATURE ON KNOWLEDGE WORKERS TELECOMMUTING

Telecommuting has grown from a corporate niche strategy to a mass workplace model, greatly accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic. First put forward by Jack Niflies in 1973, telecommuting was theoretically drawn up in general terms as work conducted beyond traditional office settings (Ellison, 2012). It was recognized for having the potential to deliver advantages such as reduced corporate carbon outputs and enhanced worker satisfaction (Ellison, 2012), ergonomic considerations were secondary in corporate thinking until more recent periods.

Pre-pandemic studies focused on serious ergonomic risks intrinsic to working at home, and home-based workers did not shy away from identical health problems observed with their peers in offices (Ellison, 2012). However, such risks peaked when the crisis caused an unpredictable imposition of work-from-home routines. Recent studies reported the highest incidence of musculoskeletal discomfort resulting from poorly planned workplace organization, particularly among women. Inadequate ergonomic settings, particularly inappropriate seat level and screen position, have contributed substantially to mediating differences in gender-differentiated discomfort (MacLean et al., 2022).

This greater focus on ergonomics during COVID-19 indicated significant knowledge gaps concerning employees' adoption and understanding of ergonomic best practices, even with extensive ergonomic awareness. For example, Suresh (2020) points out that although numerous individuals had appropriate ergonomic furniture, they lacked crucial information about correct ergonomic settings, leading to extensive musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs).

Furthermore, Davis et al. (2020) indicated that lack of adequate ergonomic training coupled with excessive use of laptops, fixed seating, and poorly fitting desk setups significantly worsened the health status of workers during the pandemic. The same findings were reported by Chim and Chen (2023), who reported higher risks from prolonged laptop use, leading to neck, upper back, and lower back pain.

Of specific interest, Yeow et al. (2021) utilized qualitative ethnographic methods to contextualize ergonomic concerns further, emphasizing a general agreement among professionals about unergonomic chairs, improper reach distances, and insufficient lighting as the most critical determinants of cumulative trauma disorders and mental stress. By contrast, Cruz-Ausejo et al. (2023) adopted a broader observational approach, emphasizing organizational and individual determinants like physical activity and active breaks as key determinants in avoiding telework-related MSDs and suggesting a multidisciplinary strategy for future ergonomics policies.

Moreover, Kamala et al. (2025) provided new methodological contributions by employing video display terminal (VDT) workspace evaluations and the Cornell Musculoskeletal Discomfort Questionnaire, which showed that ergonomic risks were most common in the neck, hip, and lower back. These findings also align with Tia and Duffy (2024), emphasizing the very important role of ergonomic equipment adjustability in enhancing telecommuter productivity and health.

Another popular stream of literature on telecommuting emphasizes other forms of remote workplaces, such as coworking spaces. Quantitatively measuring these spaces, Robelski et al. (2019) established that, though positively moderate, coworking spaces offered superior ergonomic and psychosocial conditions than typical home offices. This situation provides an intellectual vacuum in researching hybrid and other forms of remote workplaces as future ergonomic solutions in the long term.

Methodologically, contemporary studies have shifted from conventional surveys to ethnographic approaches (Yeow et al., 2021), longitudinal

research designs, multi-domain, multi-cultural comparisons, and more nuanced measurements of remote work ergonomics (Manu et al., 2024). Nevertheless, Diesbourg et al. (2024) compared uniquely remote ergonomic photos with conventional in-person tests and demonstrated high consistency and efficacy, suggesting a logical and creative testing approach that might be applied universally.

Conceptually, the literature broadly agrees on the adverse effects of poor ergonomic practices under telecommuting, particularly during the pandemic. However, there is a divergence in effective mitigation strategies spanning broad institutional actions (Singh and Kumar, 2024; Yeow et al., 2021) to ergonomic training and monitoring at an individual level (MacLean et al., 2022; Davis et al., 2020). More critically, a broader conceptual lack remains to redress ergonomic gender-based inequalities highlighted by MacLean et al. (2022).

DISCUSSION OF RELEVANT THEORIES

Human Factors and Ergonomics (HFE) Theory is grounded in the principle that systems, environments, and tools should be designed to fit human capabilities and limitations, not the other way around. Human factors theory integrates sociology, psychology and ergonomics and it could be applicable to other field that deals with safety, user satisfaction especially when human interact with systems, equipment and organizations (Miller, 2003; Wickens et al., 2004; Milligan, 2007). The knowledge workers today need a positive home working environment, and ergonomics equipment that will help them to work with sound mind, satisfaction and safety. Human factors theory can play a central role of connecting human, equipment, systems and processes to enhance the productivity and safety of knowledge workers. This theory harmonized three components of workers physical, cognitive, emotional capabilities and their limitations while the system takes care of the technology, tools, tasks, and environment they interact with while working. Also, the theory focuses on the outcome which entails the workers performance, safety, comfort and satisfaction. The theory educates the knowledge workers on misfit in terms of poor chair design, high mental workload, and unclear instruction that can results to discomfort and injury, reduced performance, increased errors or fatigue and low job satisfaction. On the other hand, the theory emphasizes the good fit that supports the health and well-being of knowledge workers, sustainability of their productivity and positive user experience (Dul and Weerdmeester, 2003; Wilson, 2000; Karwowski, 2001).

To apply the existing theories to Work-from-Home (WFH) of knowledge workers, the system includes the home office setup (desk, chair, lighting). The technology tools used at home (computer, software, communication gadgets). Work processes and policies includes the deadlines, communication protocols and other pressure from the management while the home environment possess the challenges of distractions, space constraints and noise. Inferring from the theory, if the home-based system is not well-aligned with the knowledge worker's needs and capacities, it can lead to physical strain,

cognitive overload, and reduced performance. For the knowledge workers that adopt WFH, it is essential to assess the system misfits, designing interventions to improve fit and evaluating the outcomes consistently.

Human Factor Ergonomics Theory recognizes the worker as central to system design. In a remote work context, achieving an optimal worker-system fit is vital to mitigate health risks and enhance performance amidst diverse and uncontrolled home environments.

While telecommuting sprang as an environmentally friendly working strategy, it has become a crucial worldwide workplace methodology. The ergonomic issue of telecommuting has consistently been recognized across research studies, but operational gaps in gender-focused strategies and hybrid workspace configurations are still vital areas of future research and development.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopts a qualitative methodology, employing thematic analysis to explore how informal digital discourses, that is, on YouTube, shape ergonomic practices among remote knowledge workers.

The primary objective is to investigate how peer discourse and user-generated content help in facilitating ergonomic adaptation, awareness, and innovation in domestic workplaces.

Thirteen of the most watched YouTube panel debates on ergonomics, published between 2011 and 2024, were purposively chosen for research for this study. The sampling was carried out based on the following inclusion criteria of Popularity (views and likes), Channel impact (subscribers), Video applicability to ergonomic practices in distributed work environments, Video type as panel discussions or expert debates.

This sampling methodology was chosen to capture videos that not only show robust user engagement but also capture dense, discursive data regarding the topic of ergonomics in telework.

Video transcripts were downloaded and manually cleansed of non-verbal filler words, extraneous digressions, and mechanical captioning mistakes. Default video metadata like publication date, duration, subscriber count, views, likes, and word count for the transcript were inserted into a description table to contextualize engagement and depth of content against the sample.

The research employed a two-stage qualitative analysis. Initial basic descriptive statistics were computed to establish the temporal trends and content-performance connections, for example, the connection between video length and viewership (views, likes).

Second, transcripts were open coded to extract recurring themes and narrative patterns. A grounded theory approach was taken to allow themes to emerge from the data without reference to prior structures.

Patterned themes were clustered into five large categories mirroring “human-centric ergonomics”: Adaptability and Personalization, DIY Ergonomic Solutions, Holistic Ergonomic Awareness (body and mind), Peer-led Learning and Engagement and Content Relevance and Evolution.

The coding procedure was recursive and iterative, where transcript readings were done repeatedly to reach saturation and to ensure theme identification consistency.

Given that the research is based on publicly available digital content, no human subjects were directly involved, and ethical approval was not required. Nonetheless, care was taken to anonymize specific video titles and speaker identities to ensure digital research ethics were upheld.

As informal media become default learning spaces, especially for remote workers, this study seeks to illuminate how user-generated ergonomic discourse shapes everyday practice. This research takes qualitative content and thematic analysis of selected YouTube panel discussions on ergonomics. The transcripts were cleaned, coded, and examined for recurrent themes, user-centric advice, and narrative structures. The videos were selected based on popularity, engagement (views and likes), and number of subscribers, providing a window into public interest and perceived usefulness. The analysis identified five thematic pillars of “human-centric ergonomics” discourse consistently concentrated on personalization over perfection.

YouTube since its inception in 2005 has transformed the digital landscape (Ceci, 2025) and remains an underexplored platform for academia (Pearce et al., 2019). It has been a good source of news source due to its freemium and premium mode and it is very popular due to its visual attractiveness over conventional journalism (Newman, 2023). The potential of YouTube for information creation and dissemination has spotlighted it for advance scrutiny (de Nadal, 2024).

Table 1: Descriptive statistics.

No	Year	Subscribers	Like	Views	Video Duration	Word Count
1	2011	28k	4	656	8:26	1321
2	2016	377	0	37	16:13	2102
3	2019	557	132	12,369	20:37	2468
4	2020	359	11	420	38:09:00	6999
5	2020	2,15k	1	81	19:22	3123
6	2020	42	1	80	54:57:00	6499
7	2021	1,87	1	105	11:04	1604
8	2021	3,98k	7	266	50:17:00	8672
9	2022	14	3	63	1:40:56	14,284
10	2023	478	7	824	38:43:00	6328
11	2023	3,03k	4	299	8:25	1203
12	2024	1,48	2	61	1:00:28	9670
13	2024	299	1	8	51:59:00	9052

RESULTS

The descriptive statistics in Table 1 offer baseline data on the study videos’ performance dynamics and content features about 13 years (2011–2024). The data points include engagement metrics (likes, views, subscribers), content features (video length and word count), and temporal distribution

(year of publication), offering a rich insight into audience interaction patterns and production strategies.

The timeline's evolution from 2011 to 2024 depicts irregular content dissemination and audience engagement trends. Early videos, such as the 2011 video, have recorded moderate reach (656 views) with poor social engagement (4 likes) despite the good subscriber count of 28,000, suggesting that early view numbers were driven by past community presence ahead of content virality or amplification by bots.

But then there is the remarkable 2019 flip when a video garnered over 12,000 views and 132 likes on only 557 subscribers. That exception indicates a possible alignment of topicality relevance, search optimization, and engagement-based platform recommendation. That radical shift from previous engagement rates is the beginning of data-driven audience engagement, a phenomenon upon which today's content success rests.

One of the most revealing of these is the difference between video length and activity. Despite suggestions that longer videos provide more watch time and thus better performance, the numbers present diminishing returns for user activity beyond a certain point. For instance, in 2024, a video of nearly 52 minutes and over 9,000 words received only eight views and one like. This finding underscores the imperative necessity for strategic brevity in online storytelling. Conciseness with substance overwhelms verbosity, even in educational or documentary contexts.

Conversely, the 2019 20-minute video with approximately 2,500 words is a "sweet spot" in the dataset. Its compact nature but information-heavy format demonstrates the efficiency of content length optimization regarding digital attention spans. The likes-to-views ratio, in this case, also measures a high conversion of engagement, and it provides an evidence-based framework for video production in the future.

Subscriber metrics depict a fluctuating trend that is not always harmonious with engagement. Certain videos with more subscribers underperformed in likes and views, showing that subscriber number alone is not an absolute determinant of reach or influence. The disparity between passive subscribers and engaged consumers of content can be caused by algorithmic visibility, title/thumbnail appeal, and viewer intent.

In later videos (2023–2024), particularly Videos 11 and 13, performance remains humble while word counts rise and production time increases. These videos should indicate saturation in content type, the amount of novelty lost, or the improper marketing strategies, a hypothesis that needs to be tested further by audience segmentation and behavior analysis.

An emerging theme in this data set is the concept of cognitive load, which is the extent to which information quantity (measured by word count and duration) is associated with user fatigue or disengagement. For instance, videos longer than 8,000 words and 50 minutes consistently had lower viewership, suggesting that the complexity of content, if not correctly scaffolded, might deter long-term audience attention. This result aligns with cognitive theory, suggesting chunked, bite-sized formats for maximum retention.

This qualitative component of analysis not only sheds light on content-watching behavior but critically examines shifting patterns of digital learning preference, production format, and algorithmic architecture's impact on creator popularity.

The qualitative thematic analysis provided five main identified five key thematic pillars characterizing ergonomic discussions within YouTube groups: (1) Adaptability and Personalization, (2) Peer-led DIY Ergonomic Interventions, (3) Wholistic Ergonomic Practices, (4) Peer-led Interaction and Learning, and (5) Evolutionary Relevance in Content. Uniformly, the videos emphasized the importance of personalization over prescriptive ergonomic instructions, prioritizing individual comfort, adaptability within different home contexts, and price.

Most participants improvised (Davis et al., 2020; Chim & Chen, 2023). Participants creatively transformed common household items into ergonomic devices, demonstrating creativity in repurposing common items such as pillows to be used as back supports and books to prop up screens. Discourse of ergonomics also intertwined with broader discussions of mental health, highlighting the inseparable connection between body comfort and mental health.

Engagement of the audience was significantly catalyzed by common stories, empathetic insight from panellists, and vibrant community relations in solutions, demonstrating high degrees of creativity, that is, using pillows as lumbar support and books to change screen levels (Yeow et al., 2021; Cruz-Ausejo et al., 2023). Ergonomics debates were found to integrate with broader themes of mental health, demonstrating the interconnected nature of physical comfort and mental wellbeing (MacLean et al., 2022). Audience interaction was driven especially through relatable anecdotes, panellists' compassion, and lively community conversations in comments, mirroring a collective learning experience (Gallagher et al., 2023).

Data analysis noted salient reported worthwhile insight into content performance metrics, finding pinpointing a "sweet spot" in video length (around 20 minutes, circa 2,500 words), strongly associated with maximum audience engagement. Videos of longer lengths often experienced often had declining returns for viewer retention and engagement, demonstrating the important crucial balance between content intensity and cognitive load (Diesbourg et al., 2024).

DISCUSSION

The results highlight a radical shift in the diffusion of ergonomic knowledge from top-down, from traditional expert-driven approach to bottom-up, peer-driven informal learning. Ergonomic principles traditionally communicated through formal workplace interventions echo through informal, peer-driven learning. Ergonomic principles traditionally propagated through formal workplace interventions now successfully amplify informal, user-generated digital spaces. The study reveals (Kamala et al., 2025). The study illustrates how remote workers improvise with available resources, creatively work

around adapting traditional ergonomic standards, and prefer personalized, pragmatic solutions to prescriptive protocols.

This adaptive and communal learning model has significant implications. First, it redefines ergonomic literacy, illustrating the efficacy of informal, digitally mediated pedagogical practices. Second, the tendency to place ergonomics within general well-being frameworks underscores the merit of multidisciplinary efforts in promoting workplace wellness. Finally, the robust preference for manageable content length has strategic implications for both ergonomics' educators and digital content producers, highlighting concise but substantive educational content to optimize user engagement. The community-based learning model has significant implications. First, it redefines ergonomic literacy by illustrating the potential of informal, digitally mediated learning practices (de Nadal, 2024). Second, placing ergonomics within the framework of general well-being emphasizes the merit of multidisciplinary approaches to occupational health (Singh and Kumar, 2024). Third, clear preferences for short content length offer strategic guidance for ergonomics educators and online content creators, emphasizing the merit of concise but substantive educational content to maximize user engagement (Ceci, 2025).

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study enrich Human Factors and Ergonomics (HFE) Theory by integrating informal online learning communities, particularly YouTube, into ergonomic teaching. Traditionally, the HFE Theory emphasized structured interventions within controlled environments (Dul & Weerdmeester, 2003; Wilson, 2000); however, this research highlights the significant influence of informal peer-to-peer interactions on ergonomic habits (Pearce et al., 2019). Moreover, the overall popularity of DIY and bespoke ergonomic solutions is counter to traditional theoretical positions favoring standardized solutions, suggesting that theory must be able to accommodate flexibility, adaptability, and user-driven innovation as well as formal methodologies (Yeow et al., 2021; MacLean et al., 2022).

From a managerial standpoint, organizations should recognize and leverage informal digital platforms as effective channels for disseminating ergonomic best practices. Collaborating with reputable content creators or developing internal ergonomics ambassadors can enhance the accessibility and relevance of ergonomic education, improving employee adherence and overall workplace wellness (Robelski et al., 2019; Davis et al., 2020; Gallagher et al., 2023). Additionally, ergonomic initiatives should integrate physical ergonomics into broader mental health and well-being programs to promote a comprehensive approach to employee health and productivity (Manu et al., 2024). However, future research must address this study's limitations, including language restrictions, lack of direct outcome measurements, and reliance on user-interaction metrics. Multilingual, longitudinal, and experimental studies, cross-platform comparisons, and algorithmic effects examinations are recommended to enhance understanding of digital ergonomic education's global impact.

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