



Enhancing Employee Engagement Through Effective Digital Onboarding Practices

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Abstract: This study examines the role of digital onboarding practices in shaping early employee engagement in modern organizations. As workplaces increasingly adopt digital tools and virtual processes, structured onboarding systems have become critical in helping new employees adjust, learn, and feel connected to the organization. To understand this, primary data were collected from employees who recently completed digital onboarding through a structured questionnaire focusing on their initial experience, clarity of role, and sense of belonging during the onboarding phase.

The analysis revealed that most employees are familiar with basic digital onboarding elements such as e-learning modules, online orientation sessions, and digital document submission, while a smaller proportion is fully aware of the deeper engagement-focused practices like virtual mentorship and interactive onboarding portals. Employees who had prior exposure to digital learning platforms reported a higher level of comfort and engagement compared to those with limited digital experience.

It also emerged from the findings that some employees viewed digital onboarding as overwhelming or impersonal due to limited human interaction, suggesting that balanced communication and guided support remain necessary. Overall, the present study provides a baseline view of how digital onboarding influences employee engagement and highlights that structured digital guidance, user-friendly platforms, and continuous support can significantly enhance early employee experiences. The key insights hold practical value for organizations aiming to strengthen engagement, improve retention, and build a more connected, future-ready workforce.

Keywords: Digital Onboarding, Employee Engagement, Productivity, HR Technology, E-Learning Modules, Onboarding Portals.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Employee engagement has become one of the most important factors that influence the success and growth of an organization. When employees feel connected, supported, and involved from the very beginning, they are more likely to stay motivated and perform better in their roles. In today's digital era, many companies have shifted from traditional face-to-face onboarding to digital

onboarding methods, using online tools, training modules, and virtual support systems to welcome new employees.

Digital onboarding helps employees understand their job responsibilities, learn workplace rules, and get familiar with the company culture even before they physically join the workplace. It provides easy access to information, saves time, and creates a smoother experience for new hires. However, the effectiveness of digital onboarding

depends on how well the process is planned and delivered. If employees do not receive proper guidance or opportunities to interact with their team, they may feel confused, isolated, or disconnected.

This study focuses on understanding how digital onboarding impacts early employee engagement and how it shapes their overall work experience. It also looks at the challenges employees face during digital onboarding and how these challenges affect their confidence and long-term involvement in the organization. By identifying these factors, the research aims to offer practical suggestions that can help organizations design better onboarding programs that not only inform employees but also make them feel welcomed, valued, and ready to contribute.

A well-structured digital onboarding process can play a major role in building a positive workplace environment, improving retention, and creating a strong foundation for employee engagement. This study explores these aspects to highlight the importance of effective onboarding in today's digital workplace.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The study “Digital Onboarding and Employee Outcomes: Empirical Evidence from the UK” by Sani, Kareem; Adisa, Toyin; Adekoya, Olatunji; and Orah, Emeka examines how digital onboarding impacted new employees in the UK services sector during the post-COVID shift to remote work. Through interviews with 28 new hires, the researchers found reduced connection, lower wellbeing, and feelings of isolation due to limited personal interaction. Some employees also experienced micromanagement and communication gaps with managers. However, introverted employees reported feeling more comfortable in digital onboarding environments. The study concludes that a balanced, hybrid onboarding approach is essential to combine efficiency with meaningful human interaction.

The study “Enhancing Onboarding for Staff Engagement and Belonging” by Lida Ashley, Nneka George, Josh Hinson, Jamie Kauwell, and Shannon Keith examines how UNC-CH can strengthen its onboarding system to support employee engagement. The authors found that the university's decentralized process caused inconsistent experiences, overwhelming information, and weak mentorship. Interviews and surveys revealed unclear expectations and limited support for new staff. Using Dr. Talya Bauer's 4Cs framework, they recommend a more structured onboarding approach, including centralized toolkits and AI-driven feedback systems. Overall, the study emphasizes treating onboarding as a strategic experience that fosters connection, alignment, and belonging.

The study “A Technology-Driven Employee Engagement Model Using HR Platforms to Improve Organizational Culture and Staff Retention” by Mayokun Oluwabukola Aduwo, Adaobi Beverly Akonobi, and

Christiana Onyinyechi Okpokwu examines how HR technology platforms enhance engagement and retention across industries. The authors found that integrated digital HR systems improve communication, streamline performance management, and increase employee satisfaction. Their findings show a strong link between technology adoption and higher staff retention. These platforms also help employees access information easily, receive timely feedback, and stay connected. Overall, the study emphasizes that investing in the right HR technologies strengthens organisational culture and boosts long-term employee commitment.

The study “Smooth Onboarding of a New Employee: Enhancing Employee Engagement and Retention” by Kaushik Dahiwalé emphasises that onboarding is a strategic HR process that significantly influences how quickly new employees adjust and engage. Drawing on Bauer (2010), the study highlights that well-structured onboarding improves job satisfaction and reduces early turnover. Klein and Polin (2012) also show that planned onboarding builds stronger commitment. The review underscores Bauer's 4Cs model—Compliance, Clarification, Culture, and Connection—as essential for effective onboarding, along with mentorship and cultural integration. Overall, the study concludes that onboarding directly impacts engagement, performance, and retention, but needs adaptation for hybrid and remote workplaces.

The study “The Strategic Imperative and Key Elements of Employee Onboarding” by Kaushik Dahiwalé, Siyu Chen, and Petrilli, Galuppo & Ripamonti explains that onboarding is a key HR process that transforms new employees from outsiders into confident, productive members of the organization. The authors highlight that structured onboarding improves job satisfaction, strengthens commitment, and reduces early turnover. They emphasise Bauer's 4Cs—Compliance, Clarification, Culture, and Connection—as the foundation of effective onboarding, supported by strong relationships, leadership, and communication. The shift to digital and hybrid work has made social interaction and real-time feedback more challenging. Overall, the study stresses that onboarding should be treated as a continuous development journey focused on people and long-term growth.

The study “The Strategic Imperative and Key Elements of Employee Onboarding” by Kaushik Dahiwalé, Siyu Chen, and Petrilli, Galuppo & Ripamonti explains that onboarding is a crucial HR process that transforms new employees from outsiders into confident and productive organisational members. The authors highlight that structured onboarding improves job satisfaction, strengthens commitment, and reduces early turnover. They emphasise Bauer's 4Cs—Compliance, Clarification, Culture, and Connection—as the foundation of effective onboarding, supported by strong relationships, clear communication, and supportive leadership. With digital and hybrid work increasing, social interaction and immediate feedback have become more challenging. Overall, the study stresses that onboarding should be a continuous journey focused on adaptability,

growth, and employee development.

The study “Strategic Onboarding: Key Elements for Success and Adaptation in Digital Environments” by Kaushik Dahiwale, Siyu Chen, and Petrilli, Galuppo & Ripamonti highlights that onboarding is a strategic process essential for helping new employees settle in, engage, and stay with the organisation. The authors emphasise that well-planned onboarding enhances job satisfaction, speeds role adjustment, and strengthens commitment, with Bauer’s 4Cs—Compliance, Clarification, Culture, and Connection—forming its core foundation. They also stress the importance of relationship-building, strong managerial support, and a positive work culture. However, digital and remote work environments create challenges such as reduced social interaction and weaker cultural connection. Overall, the study concludes that onboarding should be a continuous journey offering both practical guidance and emotional support to help new hires thrive.

The study “Onboarding as a Strategic Lever for Employee Retention and Well-being” by Mosquera & M. E. Soares, Siyu Chen, Kaushik Dahiwale, S. Petrilli, L. Galuppo, S. C. Ripamonti, and D. Varshney highlights that onboarding is essential for helping new employees transition from outsiders to confident organisational members. Research shows that poor onboarding increases early resignation, while strong onboarding enhances engagement and retention. The authors emphasise Bauer’s 4Cs—Compliance, Clarification, Culture, and Connection—as the foundation of effective onboarding, along with welcome from the organisation, manager, and coworkers.

Studies also show that good onboarding boosts employee well-being and reduces turnover intention. However, digital environments create challenges such as weaker relationship-building and slower feedback, making balanced procedural and emotional support crucial for new hires.

➤ *Research Objective*

- To evaluate how digital onboarding tools (e.g., portals, e-learning modules, virtual mentorship) improve employees’ initial work experience.
- To identify the role of onboarding in shaping employees’ early engagement and sense of belonging within the organisation.
- To analyse the challenges employees face during digital onboarding and their impact on long-term engagement.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study is to understand how digital onboarding practices influence the early engagement and work experience of newly hired employees. The main research problem is to determine the level of clarity, comfort, and connection employees develop through digital onboarding tools such as e-learning modules, onboarding portals, and virtual mentorship. To achieve this, primary data were collected from employees who

recently went through the digital onboarding process using a structured questionnaire designed to capture their perceptions, challenges, and engagement levels. The study aims to identify gaps in the onboarding experience, understand how digital tools shape employees’ sense of belonging, and highlight the challenges that may affect long-term engagement. Overall, the research provides a baseline understanding of how digital onboarding impacts employee engagement and offers insights for organizations to design more interactive, supportive, and effective onboarding programs.

➤ *Additional Background Information*

Many organisations today are transitioning from traditional face-to-face onboarding to fully digital onboarding systems, driven by the rise of remote work, hybrid work models, and technology-enabled HR processes. Digital onboarding typically involves the use of online training modules, digital documentation, virtual introduction sessions, and dedicated HR portals, all of which play a significant role in shaping how new employees experience their initial days in the organisation. These early experiences are crucial because they strongly influence an employee’s confidence, clarity about their role, work readiness, and overall engagement. As a result, an effective digital onboarding process becomes essential not only for ensuring a smooth integration but also for enhancing long-term employee satisfaction and retention.

➤ *Research Design*

This study follows a descriptive research design to understand how digital onboarding influences employee engagement. The research uses a quantitative approach, collecting primary data from 91 employees who have recently completed digital onboarding. The framework examines digital onboarding tools as the independent variable and employee engagement as the dependent variable, while also considering onboarding challenges as influencing factors. Data is collected through a structured questionnaire and analysed to identify patterns, relationships, and gaps in the onboarding experience.

➤ *Sample Data*

The population for the study consists of employees who have recently undergone digital onboarding in their respective organisations. A sample size of 91 employees was selected using convenience or purposive sampling, ensuring that only individuals who had experienced digital onboarding were included. Data was collected through a structured questionnaire administered via Google Forms, allowing employees to share their onboarding experiences effectively and efficiently.

➤ *Sample Size*

The questionnaire for the study was prepared under the guidance of the project guide to effectively capture employee responses, and data was collected through Google Forms to ensure easy distribution, accuracy, and convenience for the respondents. A total of 91 employees participated in the survey. The questionnaire focused on key aspects of their digital onboarding experience,

including their engagement levels, sense of belonging, and the challenges they encountered during the onboarding process.

➤ *Source Of Data*

The study primarily relies on primary data collected from 91 employees who recently completed the digital onboarding process. Their responses, gathered through a structured Google Form questionnaire, provide direct insights into their onboarding experience, level of engagement, sense of belonging, and the challenges they faced. This firsthand data forms the foundation of the analysis. In addition, secondary data from research papers, articles, and industry reports on digital onboarding and employee engagement was used to support the literature review, frame research questions, and refine the questionnaire design. Together, the primary and secondary data offer a comprehensive understanding of how digital onboarding tools influence employees' early work experiences and overall engagement.

➤ *Data Collection Method*

The questionnaire for the study was prepared under the guidance of the project guide to effectively capture employee responses. Data was collected through Google Forms, ensuring easy distribution, accuracy, and convenience for the respondents. The questionnaire focused on key aspects of employees' digital onboarding experience, including their engagement levels, sense of belonging, and the challenges they encountered during the onboarding process. **Population Definition** All employees who have recently undergone digital onboarding in their organization, including those from different departments, roles, and experience levels.

➤ *Choice of the Tools of Data Collection Instrument*

A structured questionnaire was used to collect primary data through Google Forms, allowing for easy distribution and accurate recording of employee responses related to their digital onboarding experience, engagement levels, and challenges faced during the process.

IV. DATA ANALYSIS

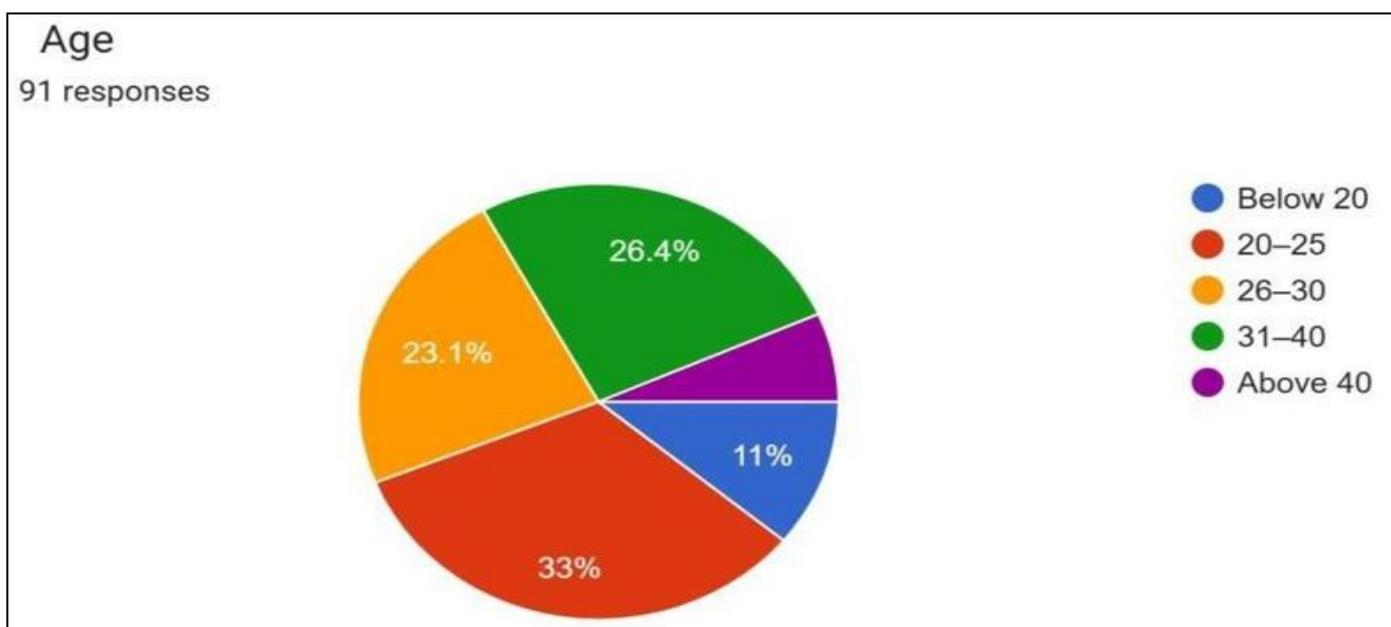


Fig 1 Age

➤ *Largest Group: Age 20-25 (33%)*

This is the biggest segment in the sample. It suggests most respondents are early-career employees or fresh joiners, who are usually more comfortable with digital tools and quick to adapt to online onboarding systems.

➤ *Second Largest Group: Age 31-40 (26.4%)*

A significant number fall in the mid-career stage. This group has enough work experience but may prefer a mix of digital and human interaction. Their feedback is important because they compare digital onboarding with traditional onboarding from past jobs.

➤ *Age 26-30 (23.1%)*

This group is in the early-to-mid professional stage. They are generally familiar with digital platforms but expect more structured onboarding and clarity.

➤ *Below 20 (11%)*

A small portion of very young employees, likely interns or freshers. They are usually tech-friendly but may need more guidance to understand workplace expectations.

➤ *Above 40 (Smallest Group)*

This group has the lowest representation. They may face more challenges with digital tools compared to younger respondents, so their experience can highlight usability issues.

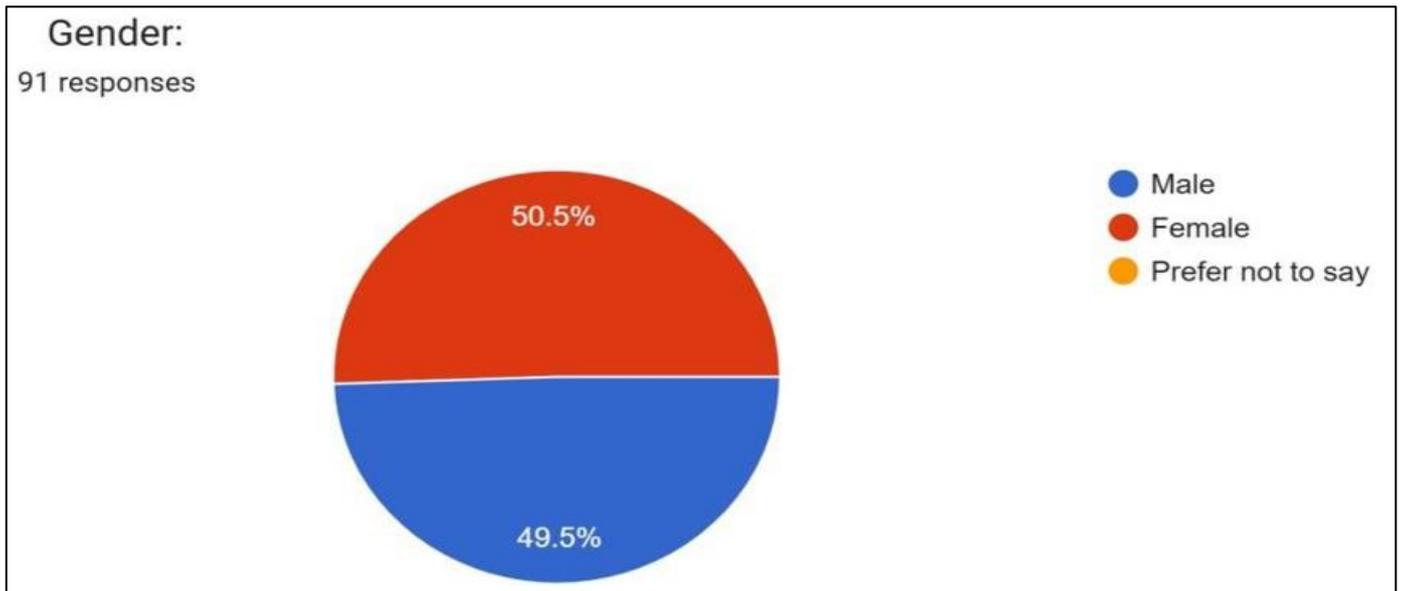


Fig 2 Gender

The gender distribution among the 91 respondents is almost equal.

- Female: 50.5%
 - Male: 49.5%
 - Prefer not to say: 0%
- Key Insights**

➤ *Balanced Participation*

The responses are almost equally split between male and female employees. This balance reduces the risk of gender bias in the findings and makes the results more reliable.

➤ *Equal Representation in Digital Onboarding Experience*

Since both genders are represented almost equally, the study reflects how digital onboarding affects employees regardless of gender. It shows that both male and female employees encounter similar onboarding tools, challenges, and engagement levels.

➤ *No Respondents Selected "Prefer not to Say"*

This suggests that participants were comfortable sharing their gender, which indicates trust and clarity in the survey.

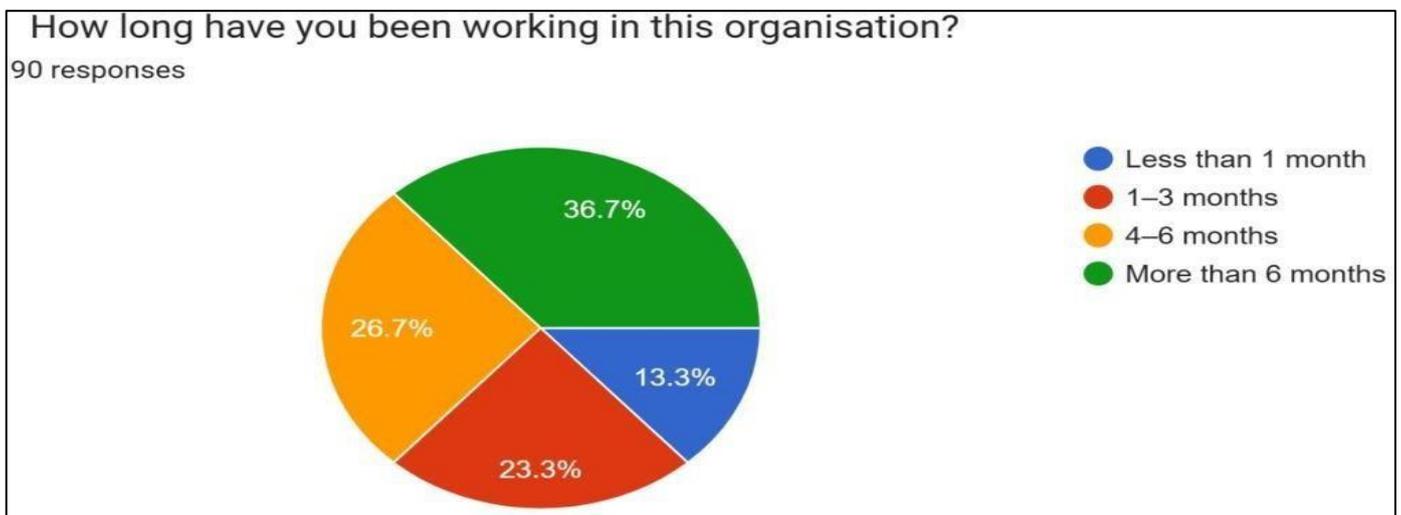


Fig 3 How Long have you Been Working in this Organisation

The chart shows how long the 90 respondents have been working in their current organisation.

• *Breakdown*

- ✓ More than 6 months: 36.7%
- ✓ 4-6 months: 26.7%
- ✓ 1-3 months: 23.3%

- ✓ Less than 1 month: 13.3%

• *Key Interpretations*

➤ *Most Respondents are Not Brand-New Employees*

Around 63% (4-6 months + more than 6 months) have been in the organisation long enough to properly evaluate their onboarding experience. This makes their feedback more

reliable.

➤ *One-Third of Respondents are Experienced Beyond Onboarding Stage*

Employees with more than 6 months experience form the largest group. They can compare the onboarding process with their day-to-day work experience and provide insights on long-term engagement.

➤ *Fresh Joiners Still Contribute Significantly*

About 36.6% of respondents (less than 1 month + 1–3 months) are relatively new. Their perspective shows how

effective the digital onboarding felt in the early days.

➤ *Good Mix of Timelines*

The presence of all four groups shows:

- Immediate onboarding impact
- Short-term experience
- Medium-term adaptation
- Long-term engagement

This makes the study well-balanced.

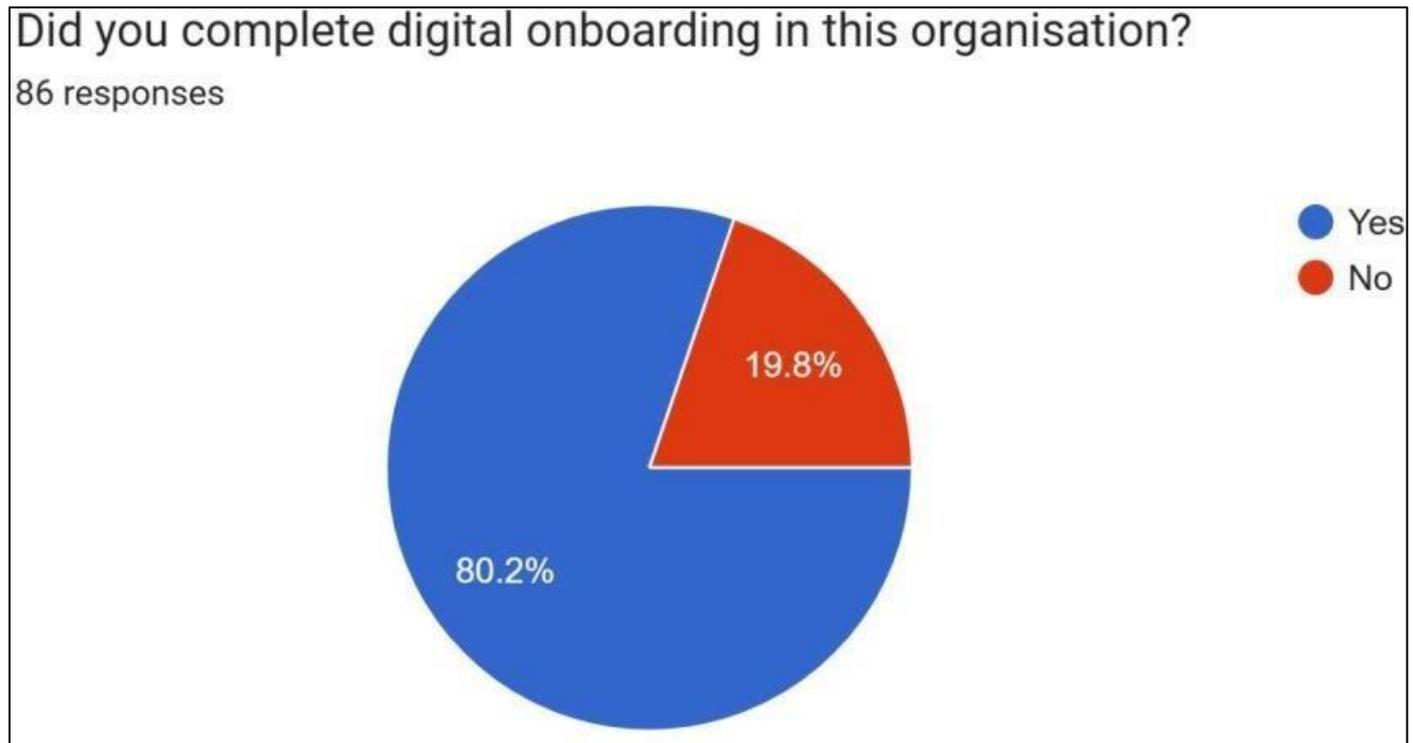


Fig 4 Did you Complete Digital Onboarding in this Organisation

➤ *Interpretation of Digital Onboarding Chart*

The chart shows whether employees completed digital onboarding in their organisation.

V. RESULTS

➤ 80.2% said Yes

➤ 19.8% said No

➤ *Key Interpretations*

• *Majority of Employees Experienced Digital Onboarding*

With over 80% completing digital onboarding, most respondents are directly familiar with digital tools, modules, and processes. This gives your study strong and relevant data.

• *Digital Onboarding is Widely Adopted*

The high number of “Yes” responses shows that the organisation relies heavily on digital methods rather than traditional onboarding. It also confirms that digital onboarding is becoming a standard practice.

- *The 19.8% who did not complete digital onboarding provide contrast*

✓ *These Employees May Have:*

- Had partial onboarding
- Undergone traditional onboarding
- Joined before digital systems were implemented

Their feedback can highlight the differences in clarity, engagement, and challenges.

• *Strong Base for Analysing Engagement*

Because most respondents went through digital onboarding, the study can confidently evaluate:

- ✓ Role clarity
- ✓ Sense of belonging
- ✓ Challenges
- ✓ Comfort and engagement levels

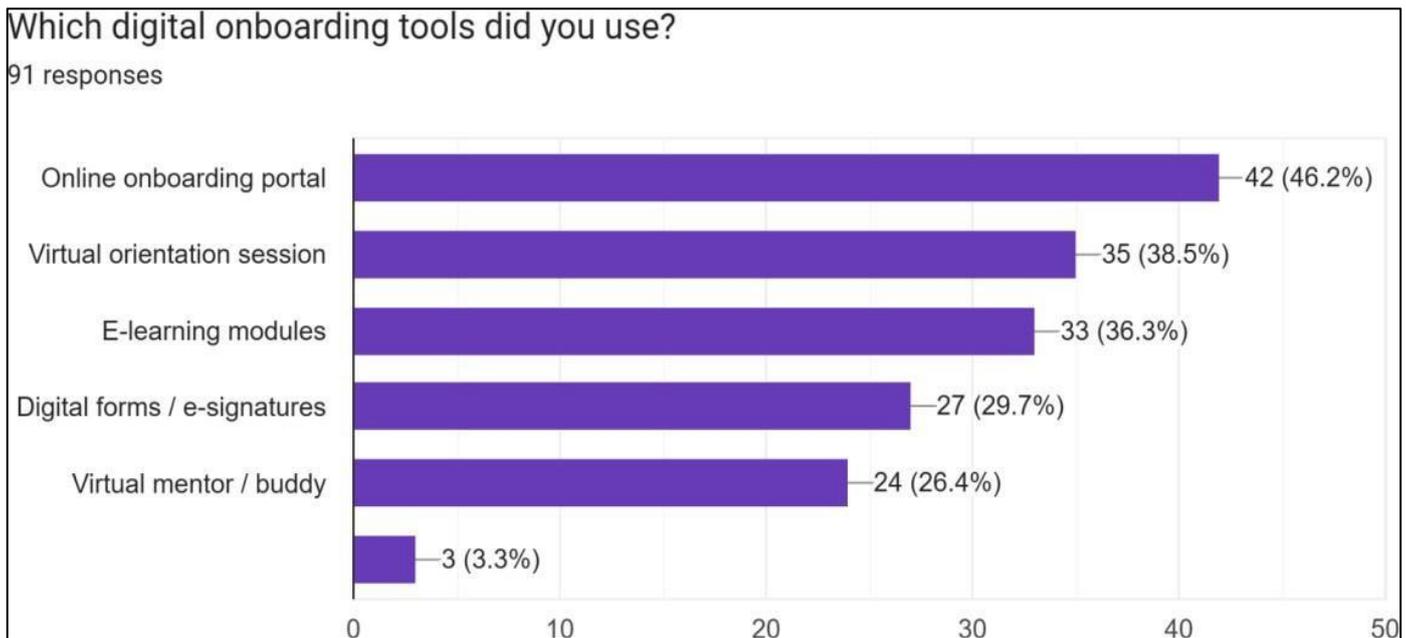


Fig 5 Which Digital Onboarding Tools did you Use

The chart shows which digital onboarding tools employees used during their onboarding process. Respondents could select multiple tools.

➤ Responses

- Online onboarding portal – 46.2%
- Virtual orientation session – 38.5%
- E-learning modules – 36.3%
- Digital forms / e-signatures – 29.7%
- Virtual mentor / buddy – 26.4%
- Others – 3.3%

➤ Key Interpretations

- **Online Onboarding Portals are the Most Widely Used**
With 46.2%, onboarding portals are the most common digital tool. This indicates that companies rely heavily on centralised platforms to deliver instructions, documents, and training.
- **Virtual Orientation Sessions are Also Popular**
Almost 38.5% attended virtual orientation sessions. This shows that organisations still focus on giving employees a structured introduction, even in a digital environment.
- **E-Learning Modules are Used by one-Third of Respondents**
About 36.3% used e-learning modules. This suggests digital self-paced learning is a major part of onboarding, helping employees understand rules and job expectations.
- **Digital Forms and e-Signatures Simplify Administrative Tasks**
Nearly 30% used digital forms. This shows companies are reducing paperwork and moving towards faster, automated onboarding.

- **Virtual Mentorship is Less Commonly Used**
Only 26.4% experienced a virtual mentor or buddy. This is a key finding because lack of mentorship was one of the main reasons employees felt disconnected during onboarding.
- **Very Few Used “Other” Tools**
Only 3.3%, which suggests that onboarding processes are fairly standard across organisations.

VI. FINDINGS

The study found that most employees found the digital onboarding process easy to understand, with the majority rating it between moderate and high clarity. Employees reported that their job roles and responsibilities were fairly well explained, although some still felt the need for more detailed guidance. Understanding of company culture was moderate, showing that digital methods alone are not fully effective in conveying organisational values. A good proportion of respondents felt welcomed during onboarding, but feelings of team connection were comparatively weaker.

Around one-third of employees faced challenges during digital onboarding, mainly related to technical issues or lack of human interaction. The data also shows that employees appreciated structured digital tools but still missed personalised support. Overall, digital onboarding supports clarity and smooth entry but needs stronger interactive and relationship-building components to enhance engagement.

VII. CONCLUSION

The study concludes that digital onboarding plays a crucial role in shaping early employee engagement, job clarity, and overall work readiness in modern organisations. The findings clearly show that digital tools such as e-learning modules, onboarding portals, and virtual documentation processes significantly help employees

understand organisational expectations and role responsibilities. However, despite these strengths, digital onboarding alone is not sufficient to create a strong sense of belonging or emotional connection among new employees. The limited human interaction, lack of personalised guidance, and challenges such as information overload and technical issues reduce the overall effectiveness of the onboarding experience. Employees who received structured, well-planned digital onboarding combined with interactive elements and consistent support exhibited higher engagement and smoother adaptation. Therefore, organisations must adopt a more balanced onboarding approach that integrates digital efficiency with human touchpoints such as mentorship, regular communication, and team interaction. A well-designed onboarding process not only enhances early engagement but also contributes to long-term retention, stronger organisational culture, and improved employee satisfaction, making it an essential strategic function in today's digitally driven workplace.

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