

## CYBERBULLYING AND PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTRACT: MEDIATING EFFECT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ADDICTION

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### INTRODUCTION

Mutual beliefs, perceptions, and promises influence the relationship between individuals. The unwritten expectations and obligations between employees and their employers called psychological contract, is becoming re-structured, followed by the unique expectations and dynamics arising from technology integration and the changing nature of work. However, the digital era has transformed how people work, communicate, and interact within organizations, which have significant implications for the psychological contract between employees and employers with the rise of cyberbullying, which affects many young people's mental health and well-being.

The relationship between students and their academic institution is based on exchange. However, we have limited knowledge regarding how many exchanges students perceive, who (or what) the perceived exchange partners are, and what the perceived terms of those exchanges contain. University undergraduates, particularly, are susceptible to cyberbullying due to their frequent use of social media and online communication. Even though many empirical studies have been conducted to investigate the psychological contracts of employees around the world, including the USA, UK, Korea, Italy, and Spain, there is a limited, nevertheless growing body of literature examining students' psychological contracts (Krivokapic-Skoko & O'Neill, 2008). Further, very few studies have been done in Sri Lanka addressing the psychological contract of undergraduates of state universities. To address this gap, the researcher aims to identify the impact of cyberbullying on the psychological contract of students in the academic sector of state universities in Sri Lanka.

**Psychological Contract:** The psychological contract is the set of expectations, beliefs, and obligations that individuals have about their relationship with their employer or institution. A key feature of the psychological contract is that the individual voluntarily asserts to make and accept certain promises as he or she understands them (Krivokapic-Skoko & O'Neill, 2008). As per the psychological contract theory, there are five key assumptions: (1) individuals can have many different psychological contracts, each with a different party; (2) psychological contracts are beliefs; (3) psychological contracts are about exchange; (4) psychological contracts are perceived promises; and (5) psychological contract terms guide attitudes and behaviors (Knapp & Masterson 2017).

**Cyberbullying:** With the advent of the internet in Turkey in the 1980s, cyberbullying was first observed there, and it has since expanded throughout the country (Aparisi et al., 2021). Cyberbullying has three dimensions as emotions, social exclusion, and resilience. According to Adam et al. (2021), Emotions are regarded as affective responses to stimuli frequently characterized by intense feelings associated with a particular thing, circumstance, or individual. Social exclusion is a state in which excluded people or groups cannot fully engage in their society, either as a condition or as a result (Beall & Piron, 2005). Resilience is human actors' ability and natural drive to resist, avoid, and convert unforeseen events and hostile

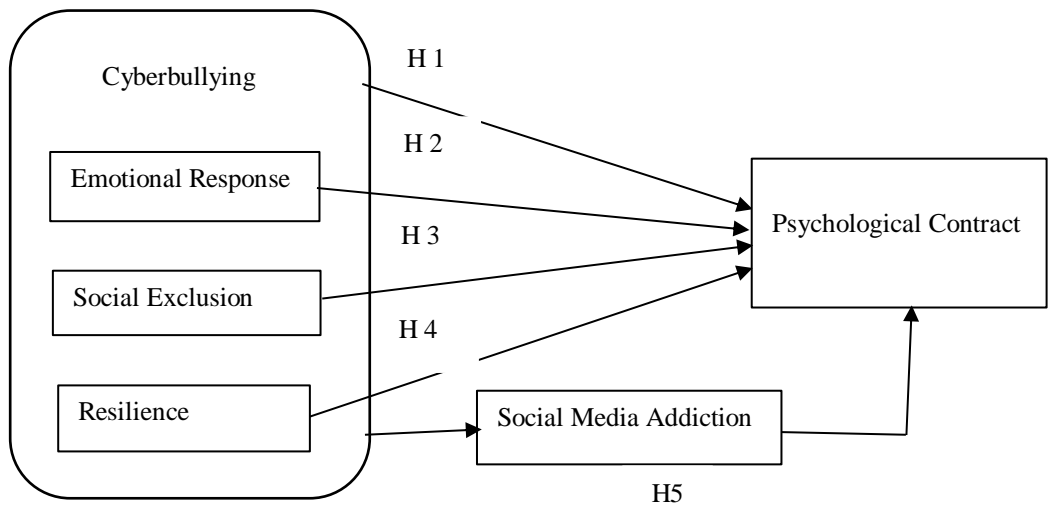
conditions that threaten their self-actualization. It is often defined as maintaining positive adaptation during severe adversity (Siltaloppi et al., 2022).

Social media addiction: Social media addiction is a type of internet addiction; it is necessary to utilize a procedure known as psychometric testing to assess a potential addiction. Given that social media use is fast expanding and that social media addiction is a subset of internet addiction, a technique known as a psychometric assessment of potential addiction is required (Abrak, 2018). Addiction to social media has been related to various interpersonal issues, including the inability to form deep relationships, melancholy, loneliness, and shyness (Thomas, 2018). Social media addiction partially mediates the relationship between cyberbullying and psychological contract.

## METHODOLOGY

**Figure 1**

*Conceptual Framework*



The following hypotheses were developed based on the conceptual framework and the comprehensive literature review.

*H<sub>1</sub>*: Cyberbullying impacts on psychological contract of undergraduates.

*H<sub>2</sub>*: Emotional response impacts on psychological contract of undergraduates.

*H<sub>3</sub>*: Social exclusion impacts on psychological contract of undergraduates.

*H<sub>4</sub>*: Resilience impacts on psychological contract of undergraduates.

*H<sub>5</sub>*: Social media addiction mediates the relationship between cyberbullying and psychological contract of undergraduates.

This study was deductive and quantitative where survey method and mono method was applied. Population of the study was 1200 final year undergraduates of three state universities in Sri Lanka. According to the Morgan table, the sample size of this research is 291 university students (Krejcie & Morgan, 1970), and it was selected based on random sampling technique. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire, having 05, 12, and 03 questions to measure psychological contract, cyberbullying, and social media addiction respectively.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Data were analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) and deployed demographic analysis, reliability test, descriptive analysis, multiple regression analysis. Mediation analysis was operated by plugging Hayes PROCESS Macro application to the SPSS. Study hypotheses were tested by deploying Multiple Regression Analysis (table 1) and Barron and Kenny Mediation analysis (Table 2).

**Table 1**

*Multiple Regression Analysis*

Model	Coefficients <sup>a</sup>				t	Sig.
	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients			
	$\beta$	Std. Error	$\beta$			
1 (Constant)	1.790	0.214			8.377	0.000
Cyberbullying	-0.125	0.059	0.006		0.108	0.005
Emotional Response	-0.095	0.047	-0.190		-3.075	0.005
Social Exclusion	-0.129	0.073	0.031		0.498	0.003
Resilience	0.117	0.054	0.176		3.022	0.004

a. Dependent Variable: Psychological Contract

As per Table 1, unstandardized beta coefficients of cyberbullying, emotional response, social exhaustion, and resilience are -.125 ( $p < 0.05$ ), -.095 ( $p < 0.05$ ), -.129 ( $p < 0.05$ ), and .117 ( $p < 0.05$ ) respectively which mean that cyberbullying, emotional response, and social exhaustion negatively impact on psychological contract while resilience had a positive impact on psychological contract.

**Table 2**

*Mediation Summary Analysis*

Relationship	Total Effect	Direct Effect	Indirect Effect
Cyberbullying->Social Media Addiction-> Psychological Contract	0.679 (0.000)	0.501 (0.000)	0.171

As per the Table 2, total effect of cyberbullying on psychological contract in the presence of social media addiction is 0.6718 ( $p < 0.05$ ), direct effect of cyberbullying on psychological contract is 0.5012 ( $p < 0.05$ ), indirect effect of social media addiction is 0.1706 hence it can be concluded that social media addiction partially mediates the relationship between cyberbullying and psychological contract.

## CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

In this study, five hypotheses were tested on a simple random sample of 291 final-year undergraduates of state university students in order to fulfill the research objectives. In view of literature reviewed and data collected, analyzed and the findings derived. The following conclusions were made: There was a significant negative impact of cyberbullying on psychological contract and partial mediation of social media addiction among undergraduates in state universities in Sri Lanka. Resilience, emotional response is passing the hypothesis test. Correspondingly, recommendations can be drawn to strength the actions and policies to discourage and control cyberbullying behavior of undergraduates while boosting the resilience characteristics of them to enhance the psychological contract with the university.

**Keywords:** Cyberbullying, emotional response, resilience, social media addiction, social exclusion.

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