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Cyberbullying, ostracism and job performance: Organisational climate in IT industry

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Purpose: Workplace ostracism and cyberbullying are widespread issues affecting employee job performance, particularly in the information technology (IT) industry. Based on the social exchange theory, this study investigates the impact of ostracism and cyberbullying on employee job performance, with the moderating role of organisational climate.

Design/methodology/approach: This research gathered quantitative data from 486 IT workers using adapted and validated seven-point Likert-scale instruments via a time-lagged survey. The study analysed demographic variables using SPSS and structural equation modelling with SmartPLS.

Findings/results: The study found a negative relationship between cyberbullying and job performance, as well as a negative relationship between ostracism and job performance. Organisational climate played a positive role in the relationship between ostracism and job performance but had no impact on the relationship between cyberbullying and job performance.

Practical implications: The study helps businesses and organisations that specifically use technologies develop procedures and policies to address cyberbullying and workplace ostracism. To mitigate these issues and enhance organisational cohesiveness and employee well-being, managers should foster open lines of communication and implement targeted policies.

Originality/value: This study addresses a significant gap in global workplace research by examining the combined effects of workplace ostracism and cyberbullying on job performance within Pakistan's IT sector. The results pertain to the challenges encountered by digital technologies worldwide. Grounded in social exchange theory, the study provides HR professionals, policymakers and international organisations with valuable guidance for developing effective strategies to prevent workplace abuse and promote better work environments.

Keywords: workplace cyberbullying; workplace ostracism; employee job performance; organisational climate; social exchange theory.

Introduction

Cyberbullying and ostracism are rising issues that profoundly affect the workplace environment, particularly the information technology (IT) industry (Ergün et al., 2023). Both undesirable practices compromise employee well-being, obstruct collaboration and destroy organisational cohesion. Cyberbullying entails the utilisation of digital platforms to harass or intimidate peers (Busby et al., 2022), whereas ostracism signifies the intentional exclusion of an individual from workplace interactions (Yang & Tan, 2023). These unfavourable behaviours can significantly impair an individual's job performance, resulting in diminished productivity, decreased morale and mental health issues (Michailidou & Mavromoustaki, 2023).

Although children and teenagers are the victims of cyberbullying, its prevalence and effects on adult employees in the workplace are gaining increasing attention from organisations and scholars (Pothuganti, 2024). Examples of the IT industry include the software houses, call centres, web development and other application development organisations. Most IT organisations use online communication tools, such as email and personalised chat software. Employees coordinate with each other and other departments through an online portal, which is the most accessible place for cyberbullying. The negative behaviour related to tasks involving the use of communication and IT, which intrudes on an individual's privacy and is visible to the online population, is termed workplace cyberbullying (WC) (Ismail et al., 2023). The most common examples of WC are

inappropriate texts and emails, spreading rumours online, deleting essential files containing important information and embarrassing targets by sending emails to third parties.

Workplace ostracism (WO), a widespread yet frequently understated phenomenon, involves the exclusion or disregard of an individual in the professional setting, resulting in the feelings of marginalisation and social isolation (Sarwar et al., 2020). Ostracism is characterised by its subtlety, frequently functioning below the level of overt organisational policies and processes (Li & Tian, 2016). Painful experiences can be caused by employees when they perceive themselves as being ostracised at the workplace (Howard et al., 2020). In this technological era, organisations experience ostracism (Yang & Treadway, 2018) and WC (Pothuganti, 2024), which adversely impacts performance.

The organisational climate represents the shared understanding of the workplace and encompasses individuals' interpretations of their organisational experiences (Schneider et al., 2012). A good organisational climate is like a 'resource supplement' that helps employees to recover the mental resources they lost because of negative behaviours like cyberbullying or ostracism. Organisational support in a favourable organisational climate can also help mitigate the damage caused by these negative behaviours, which contribute to the decline in performance. Therefore, creating a supportive and resilient work environment can significantly impact how cyberbullying and ostracism affect employee performance (Chang et al., 2025; Imam et al., 2023; Wang et al., 2023).

Workplace cyberbullying and ostracism increasingly affect employees' job performance; yet, research regarding the moderating effect of organisational climate is limited. The organisational climate significantly influences the experience and performance of employees, with previous research signifying that positive views of senior management might mitigate the impacts of workplace mistreatment (Opiyo, 2022). Nevertheless, most current research has focused on particular businesses or locations, which limits the generalisability of their conclusions. Previous research by Anwar et al. (2022) examined cyberbullying in Pakistan's hotel business, emphasising its detrimental effects on employee work engagement. The research revealed psychological well-being and work meaningfulness as mediators in the correlation between WC and engagement. The research reported here seeks to fill a gap by investigating organisational climate as a moderator within the IT sector setting. This research adopts an innovative strategy by analysing WO in combination with cyberbullying, thereby expanding the scope of existing studies on workplace ill treatment. Moreover, the authors have examined the influence of WO on employee job performance in several studies, including one by Abrar et al. (2022), which found that depressed mood serves as a mediator and political ability as a moderator. The research advocated for additional investigation of multinational corporations (Abrar et al., 2022). Nevertheless, authors gave little consideration to the potential impact of organisational climate on the relationship among ostracism, cyberbullying and job performance within multinational or industry-specific contexts. This study, consequently, expands upon these identified gaps by integrating organisational climate as a moderating variable within the IT sector.

International literature also emphasises the need to comprehend the dynamics of cyberbullying and ostracism across many industries. Ding et al. (2025) identified a reciprocal relationship between cyber-ostracism and depression in youngsters, highlighting the necessity of gender-sensitive strategies and observing that reducing depression may mitigate behavioural consequences. Ergün et al. (2023) demonstrated that Internet addiction intensifies adolescents' vulnerability to cyberbullying and social ostracism. Although both studies emphasise significant psychosocial elements, they are confined to youth contexts, resulting in a lack of exploration of workplace dynamics. Yan et al. (2025) investigated WC and endorsed artificial intelligence (AI)-driven detection and prevention, despite these approaches remaining unexplored in the IT industry, where technology advancements significantly impact workplace behaviour. This study does not evaluate AI integration but emphasises it as a possible avenue for further investigation. Assylbekova et al. (2025) also examined worldwide approaches for reducing ostracism in educational settings; however, such cross-national analyses hardly consider workplace contexts. This study addresses a critical gap by examining the role of organisational climate as a moderating variable in the relationship between workplace mistreatments and employees' job performance, specifically in the IT sector.

Ismail et al. (2023) investigated the impact of WC and psychological distress on job performance in Malaysia, whereas Imran et al. (2023) explored WO in the banking sector of southern Punjab, emphasising the mediating roles of employee silence and voice, as well as the moderating effect of suppression. This research builds upon previous studies by examining WO and cyberbullying within Pakistan's IT sector, with organisational climate serving as a moderating variable. This approach incorporates theoretical perspectives from social exchange theory while providing pragmatic solutions to enhance workplace conditions and employee well-being. This research targets the IT organisations in Islamabad and Rawalpindi. Researchers conducted the study in Islamabad and Rawalpindi, as these cities serve as hubs for individuals travelling from other regions of Pakistan in pursuit of economic opportunities. The flood of individuals coming from different cities and provinces generates a dynamic and diverse workforce, providing a distinctive context to investigate the impacts of WC and WO. As numerous individuals acclimate to new business cultures, organisational climate is crucial in mitigating adverse behaviours. This study examines the challenges encountered by a nomadic workforce, emphasising social integration and job performance within the IT sector of

Islamabad and Rawalpindi. Because of the high-stress environment, IT professionals are vulnerable to workplace harassment. Examining the relationships among ostracism, cyberbullying and job performance can assist organisations in enhancing productivity and engagement while curbing harmful behaviours (Patrick et al., 2022).

The authors organise this study into several main components. Following the introduction, the literature review examines WC, WO, organisational climate and the relationship between these factors and employee job performance. The subsequent section formulates the hypothesis grounded in a theoretical framework. The methodology and results are detailed thereafter. Finally, the conclusion, discussion and future recommendations provide a thorough summary validated by the results.

Theoretical foundation, literature and hypothesis

Social exchange theory offers a framework for understanding workplace relationships and their impact on employee performance (Elahi et al., 2019). It posits that individuals participate in social interactions, anticipating mutual benefits, which underpin interpersonal and organisational ties (Biswakarma & Subedi, 2024). Employees view their connection with the organisation as transactional, offering talents and effort in exchange for salary, recognition, career advancement and a supportive environment (Biswakarma & Subedi, 2024). This theory emphasises the evolution of trust and reciprocal commitment over time (Elahi et al., 2019). Employees who perceive equitable exchanges are likely to demonstrate positive behaviours, including increased job satisfaction, loyalty and improved performance (Cook et al., 2013). Conversely, perceived inequities, such as feeling undervalued or unjustly treated, may result in diminished motivation, dissatisfaction and decreased performance (Rodrigues et al., 2023).

Workplace cyberbullying and ostracism undermine the social exchange between employees and organisations, engendering emotions of inequity and impairing psychological connections. This paradigm rigorously analyses their influence on job performance, with organisational climate serving as a moderating variable in the IT sector. Cyberbullying, characterised as the utilisation of electronic mediums to intimidate or belittle peers (Baheer et al., 2023), includes behaviours such as dispatching disparaging emails, disseminating malicious rumours or engaging in digital ostracism. These behaviours contravene employees' expectations of respect and inclusiveness, fostering a hostile workplace that incites negative emotions and diminishes engagement. Such encounters violate the concept of reciprocity, causing employees to feel their efforts are undervalued, which adversely affects psychological well-being by increasing stress and burnout, ultimately resulting in decreased job performance (Sarwar et al., 2020).

In the context of IT, communication and collaboration, which are also dependent on electronic platforms, notably pose the risk of cyberbullying and ostracism. The rapid and competitive characteristics of the IT business can also foster an environment of stress and anxiety, increasing the probability of these behaviours manifesting. The anonymity provided by online communication may empower offenders, facilitating their participation in harassing or exclusionary behaviour without the fear of prompt identification or retaliation (Raskauskas & Huynh, 2015). Moreover, the remote and distributed nature of many IT workplaces can exacerbate the effects of ostracism, as employees may feel isolated and disconnected from their colleagues, making them more vulnerable to the negative consequences of social exclusion. Workplace ostracism can impact employee performance because other employees may miss out on valuable advice for improving job performance (Samo et al., 2019).

A favourable organisational climate refers to the environment in which these exchanges are possible, fair and equitable, thereby enhancing commitment, satisfaction and performance. When there is cyberbullying and ostracism at work, a supportive organisational climate can help employees' sense of protection and belonging. Social ExchangeTheory (SET) says that when organisations create a favourable working climate by showing support, respect and fairness, employees are more likely to be more engaged and perform better, even when they are being bullied or ostracised. This supportive environment helps employees stay focused on their jobs and maintain their performance, as they perceive the organisation as a trustworthy exchange partner that protects them from the negative impacts of workplace mistreatment (Rasool et al., 2021; Xu et al., 2020).

Workplace cyberbullying and job performance

The extensive integration of technology in contemporary workplaces has extended interactions beyond physical limits, leading to workplace harassment, including cyberbullying (Kowalski et al., 2014). Organisational psychologists and human resource experts highlighted this issue because of its adverse impacts on employees and organisational climate (Pothuganti, 2024). The covert nature of cyberbullying permits offenders to bypass temporal and physical constraints, facilitating harassment across time zones and beyond traditional working hours (Geleta, 2020). Cyberbullying occurs in horizontal forms, characterised by peer-to-peer harassment that undermines team cohesion through rumour dissemination or social exclusion (Martínez et al., 2019; Mills et al., 2019), and in vertical forms, where supervisors employ abusive communication or excessive criticism to introduce fear and diminish morale (Polanin et al., 2022). Both forms create a hostile environment that diminishes motivation, cognitive resources and, ultimately, job performance (Bansal et al., 2024; Zhang et al., 2022). The continuing anonymity and boundless scope of digital harassment intensify psychological suffering, increasing anxiety, diminishing self-esteem and promoting social withdrawal, which subsequently undermine employees' productivity and work engagement (Mushtaq et al., 2022; Ni et al., 2025; Tozzo et al., 2022).

Unlike traditional bullying, the persistent nature of cyberbullying leads to more significant damage, associated with increased absenteeism, turnover and diminished organisational engagement and creativity (Farhadi et al., 2012; Javed et al., 2023; Wong-Lo & Bullock, 2011). These detrimental impacts undermine both individual efficacy and overall organisational productivity. Consequently, organisations have reorganised the promotion of employee thriving, defined by learning and vitality, as an essential element in improving workplace conditions (Elahi et al., 2019). Thriving enhances cognitive functions vital for job performance, such as attention, memory and decision-making (Weber & Kokott, 2024), whereas job crafting fosters pleasant psychological feelings that increase organisational commitment and engagement (Lee, 2022). Cyberbullying, however, compromises employees' psychological safety, consequently obstructing job crafting and reducing job satisfaction and productivity. The emotional stress results in the deterioration of physical and mental health, undermines self-esteem and negatively impacts both individual and organisational performance (Mushtaq et al., 2022). These impacts collectively underscore the necessity for actions targeting cyberbullying to safeguard employee well-being and performance. Therefore, the hypothesis shows that:

H1: Workplace cyberbullying is significantly and negatively associated with employee job performance.

Workplace ostracism and job performance

Workplace ostracism continues covertly, exposing employees to considerable professional and psychological detriments that diminish performance (Quttainah, 2025). This maltreatment, marked by the silent treatment, avoidance and information withholding, causes social distress comparable to physical suffering (Mohammad & Nazir, 2023). Surveys indicate that more than two-thirds of employees have experienced ostracism lasting over 5 years, underscoring its frequency (Xu et al., 2024). Organisations face challenges in addressing ostracism because of its hidden and frequently unacknowledged characteristics (Wang et al., 2023), which diminish trust, motivation and a sense of belonging, consequently impairing job performance (Shinde & Banerjee, 2025). Ostracism adversely affects individual well-being by diminishing self-esteem, impairing perceived control and eroding a sense of purpose (Samo et al., 2019). It reduces job satisfaction and organisational engagement while increasing turnover intentions (Akay & Ahmadi, 2022; Liu & Xia, 2016). Employees who are ostracised often become disengaged, exhibiting diminished effort and initiative, while suffering from stress, emotional exhaustion and burnout, which adversely affect cognitive skills essential for problem-solving and decision-making.

Disengaged employees are reluctant to exceed their official responsibilities because of diminished feelings of belonging and psychological safety (Choi, 2020; Wu et al., 2016). Ostracism limits access to resources, information and social support, hence undermining performance (De Clercq et al., 2019). Perceived ostracism induces emotional pain, leading to disengagement and decreased productivity (Li & Tian, 2016). Because of its extensive influence, organisations must develop inclusive environments that enhance employee worth and engagement, increasing the psychological and behavioural consequences of ostracism (Sharma & Dhar, 2024). Proactive strategies, such as fostering open communication, enhancing interpersonal relationships and implementing anti-exclusion policies, may mitigate the adverse effects of ostracism on job performance (Yaakobi, 2022). Failure to act may lead to ongoing disengagement, diminished performance and increased turnover, thereby undermining overall organisational efficacy (Imran et al., 2022; Morrison & Milliken, 2000). Therefore, the hypothesis shows that:

H2: Workplace ostracism is significantly and negatively associated with employee job performance.

Moderation of organisational climate

Modern organisations increasingly depend on digital communication and complex interpersonal dynamics, presenting both challenges and opportunities for employees' job performance. Workplace cyberbullying and ostracism today represent significant hazards to both individual and organisational outcomes, necessitating comprehensive investigation (Choi, 2020). Both implicit and explicit ostracism diminish employees' sense of belonging, self-esteem and psychological well-being, resulting in decreased job performance (Samo et al., 2019). The collective beliefs of employees regarding organisational climate, encompassing policies, practices and social norms, significantly influence their attitudes, behaviours and productivity (Phina et al., 2021). Digital communication obscures the distinction between professional and personal realms, amplifying the potential for verbal abuse, discrimination and bullying, hence exacerbating stress, anxiety and depression among employees (Patil et al., 2023; Sarwar et al., 2020). The anonymity of online platforms empowers offenders and hinders the identification and reporting of cyberbullying.

Organisations that possess robust ethical cultures and social support systems promote the reporting of bullying and ostracism by employees, thereby empowering managers to proactively tackle these concerns (Patil et al., 2023). Such organisational climates promote psychological safety, enabling employees to express concerns, take risks and request assistance without fear of retaliation (Lee, 2022). In contrast, detrimental or hostile environments inhibit reporting, frequently because of apprehension of retaliation or insufficient managerial support, while also fostering cyberbullying and ostracism. As an important aspect of organisational climate, ethical leadership and transparent cultures mitigate bullying and ostracism, fostering organisations where employees feel protected and supported, hence enhancing attention and job performance (Feng et al., 2019). Organisations can mitigate bullying by implementing rules, providing training and fostering leadership development, while supportive environments facilitate rapid recovery for victims and sustain performance (Zhang et al., 2023).

Psychological safety mitigates the adverse impacts of workplace mistreatment by promoting open communication and mutual respect, hence diminishing the occurrence and consequences of cyberbullying and ostracism (Lee, 2022; Patil et al., 2023). This safety encourages innovation, engagement and resilience, allowing employees to prosper in the face of adversity (Patil et al., 2023). Research indicates that although ostracism adversely impacts performance, factors such as a supportive organisational climate can mitigate or even counteract this effect, enabling impacted individuals to restore confidence and thrive (De Clercq et al., 2019; Ferris et al., 2015). The organisational hierarchy constitutes a fundamental element of climate quality. Well-organised hierarchies with transparent, equitable protocols and employee autonomy promote a favourable organisational climate (Zhu et al., 2019). Conversely, a low hierarchy and ambiguous boundaries foster chaos and inadequate procedural enforcement, prompting employees to react with ostracism and cyberbullying (Schat & Kelloway, 2003; Zhu et al., 2019). Organisations must foster social context characteristics, including interdependence, trust and openness, to effectively combat cyberbullying and ostracism (Valenzuela et al., 2020). Senior leaders play a crucial role in fostering a climate that promotes productivity and flexibility by offering learning opportunities, support services, teamwork and well-defined roles (Akrong et al., 2022; Datta & Singh, 2018). Hence, the hypothesis shows that:

H3: Organisational climate significantly moderates the relationship between workplace cyberbullying and employee job performance.

H4: Organisational climates significantly moderate the relationship between workplace ostracism and employee job performance.

Research model hypothesis

Figure 1 elaborates on the theoretical framework, presenting the hypothesis that workplace cyberbullying and workplace ostracism have an impact on job performance, with the moderating role of organisational climate.

Methodology

Research setting and data collection

This research utilises a quantitative methodology within a post-positivist paradigm to investigate the relationships among WO, cyberbullying, organisational climate and job performance. The post-positivist paradigm recognises an objective reality that academics strive to approximate by systematic empirical examination (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). We measure constructs utilising validated instruments, enable statistical analysis, mitigate researcher bias through consistent data collection and implement temporal separation of measurements to eliminate common method bias (Podsakoff et al., 2003).

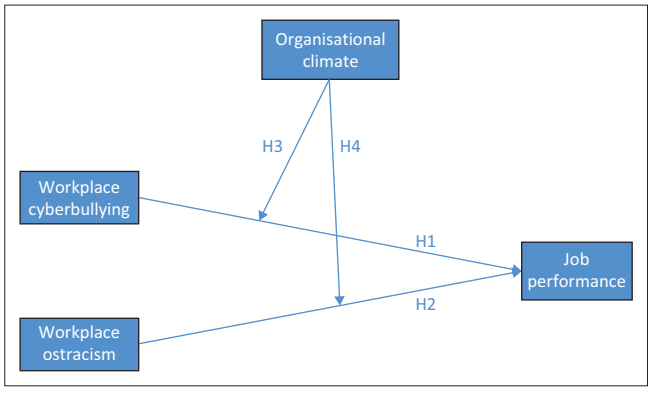


FIGURE 1: Conceptual framework.

We employed purposive sampling to recruit full-time employees from diverse IT organisations in Islamabad and Rawalpindi, Pakistan. The twin cities accommodate more than 160 IT organisations, enabling us to engage responders with relevant skills in both offline and online work exchanges. Participation was voluntary, and we verbally informed respondents of the study's nature and their rights before administering the questionnaire directly at the organisations.

The data collection employed a time-lagged survey design consisting of two stages separated by a 2-week interval. In the initial phase, participants responded to topics regarding demographics, WO and WC using a seven-point Likert scale, ranging from 'Strongly Disagree' to 'Strongly Agree'. After 2 weeks, the second phase gathered data on organisational climate and job performance from the same individuals. This sequential method mitigates technique bias by constraining the impact of singular measurements on perceptions. In the first phase, we obtained 550 completed questionnaires. Because of the unavailability of some employees during the second phase, we excluded incomplete and unmatched responses, resulting in a final sample of 486 valid cases. The sample size exceeds the specified standards, surpassing the total number of questionnaire items (24) and providing between 10 and 30 participants for each independent variable (Fawcett & Garity, 2008; Field, 2013).

The questionnaire comprises five sections, the initial of which collects demographic data. We adhered rigorously to the ethical norms specified in the Declaration of Helsinki and obtained clearance from the Institutional Review Board (IRB (2023-16)). We ensured respondent anonymity by excluding all personal identifiers, including names, email addresses, job titles and contact information. We inferred informed consent for voluntary involvement. The study, utilising anonymous and non-invasive data collection, did not necessitate additional ethical approval concerning human or animal participants. Our purposive sampling technique and rigorous protocol guarantee that the study's findings provide valid, reliable and systematic insights into the complex dynamics of WO, cyberbullying, organisational climate and employee job performance in IT contexts.

Measures

Table 1 shows the remaining parts of the questionnaire. Seven items are in use to measure WC. We used a short version of

Cyberbullying Behavior Questionnaire (CBQ-S) from Jönsson et al. (2017). An example of an item is 'Your supervisor or colleagues are not responding to your emails or text messages'. The next part of the questionnaire concerns the organisational climate, comprising 15 items adapted from Peña Suárez et al. (2013). The item exemplifies 'The relationships with my bosses are good'. The following variable in the questionnaire is WO, which has 10 items adapted from Ferris et al. (2008b). An example of the item is 'Others ignored you at work'. The last part of the questionnaire is about employee job performance, with five items adapted from Janssen and Van Yperen (2004). One example of an item is 'I (employee) fulfil all responsibilities required by my job'.

Table 2 presents the Cronbach's alpha values for all variable measurement scales, which range from 0.817 to 0.860, indicating strong internal consistency, according to the results of the pilot test. Overall, the findings demonstrate that the study design is reliable, feasible and can be implemented on a broader scale, reducing errors and enhancing the quality of the data used in the complete research (Hassan et al., 2006).

Ethical considerations

Ethical clearance to conduct this study was obtained from the Harbin Institute of Technology, Institutional Review Board (IRB) in the School of Management (No. 2023-16)

Results

Table 3 presents a comprehensive analysis of demographics, classified by gender, age, years of experience and educational credentials. The majority of respondents are male, constituting 78.8% (383 individuals). The 26–30 age group is the most populous, comprising 31.1% (151 individuals) of the respondents. The cohort with 6–10 years of experience constitutes the largest segment, accounting for 30% (146 individuals) of the respondents. The educational credentials of respondents show that the most significant share holds a bachelor's degree, representing 34.6% (168 persons). In summary, the demographics suggest a sample dominated by young male professionals with a relatively fair spectrum of experience levels. The majority hold a bachelor's or master's degree; however, individuals with intermediate qualifications still comprise a significant component of the sample. This profile may offer insights into the workforce's educational and career advancement stages.

TABLE 1: Measurements.

Constructs	Items	Source
Workplace cyberbullying	WC1, WC2, WC3, WC4, WC5, WC6, WC7	(Jönsson et al., 2017)
Job performance	JP1, JP2, JP3, JP4, JP5	Janssen and Van Yperen (2004)
Organisational climate	OC1, OC2, OC3, OC4, OC5, OC6, OC7, OC8, OC9, OC10, OC11, OC12, OC13, OC14, OC15	(Peña Suárez et al., 2013)
Workplace ostracism	WO1, WO2, WO3, WO4, WO5, WO6, WO7, WO8, WO9, WO10	Ferris et al. (2008a)

Note: Please see the full reference list of this article: Shao, Z., Gogia, E.H., Khan, M.A., & Meyer, N. (2025). Cyberbullying, ostracism and job performance: Organisational climate in IT industry. *South African Journal of Business Management*, 56(1), a4793. https://doi.org/10.4102/sajbm.v56i1.4793 for more information. We tested the scale on 50 participants reflecting the target population, adhering to guidelines that suggest 10% – 20% of the whole sample or a minimum of 30–50 for pilot testing. We employed Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) to assess the reliability and validity of the scale, thereby confirming its precision before comprehensive implementation (Whitehead et al., 2016).

TABLE 2: Pilot test.

Sr. No.	Variables	No of items	Cronbach's alpha
1	Workplace ostracism	10	0.817
2	Workplace cyberbullying	07	0.826
3	Organisational climate	15	0.830
4	Job performance	05	0.860

Structural equation modelling

After presenting the frequency distribution of respondents, the next part focuses on structural equation modelling (SEM) to analyse the data. Measurement models and path analysis are the two key components of SEM used in this study. To avoid the problem of common method variance, we assure the anonymity and confidentiality of the data, motivating employees to provide honest and unbiased responses. Confirmatory factor analysis, SEM and factor loading methods are also helpful in controlling for common method variance (Podsakoff et al., 2003). The first measurement model was used to analyse and observe data trends, and SEM was used to accept or reject the hypothesis. We analyse discriminant validity, factor loading, reliability and average variance extracted (AVE) in the measurement model. We employed the bootstrapping technique in path analysis as the default process for resampling and estimating standard errors, with a significance level of confidence intervals.

Analysis of measurement model

We measure discriminant validity in the measurement model, dependent on the criteria used in previous research, which

TABLE 3: Demographics.

Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	383	78.8
Female	103	21.2
Age (years)		
20–25	66	13.6
26–30	151	31.1
31–35	115	23.7
36–40	119	24.5
41–45	33	6.8
46–above	2	0.4
Experience (years)		
0–5	118	24.3
6–10	146	30.0
11–15	91	18.7
16–20	106	21.8
21–above	25	5.1
Educational qualification		
Intermediate	113	23.3
Bachelors	168	34.6
Masters	140	28.8
MS or MPhil	60	12.3
Others	5	1.0

MSc, Master of Science; MPhil, Master of Philosophy.

present thresholds of 0.85 and 0.90. This study adopted a value of 0.85, which is the most stringent criterion (Henseler et al., 2016). Table 4 elaborates on the results; all values are less than 0.85, which is considered a valid reading for further analysis.

Factor loading and path coefficient

Table 5 presents the factor loadings of each variable used in this study. Typically, most scholars accept values greater than 0.7 (Hulland, 1999), while values below 0.6 are unacceptable because they can impact the overall results (Hair et al., 2009). All values used in this study are more than 0.6 and considered acceptable. In the study by Rehman et al. (2021), the authors studied the mediated moderation model in relation to the relationship between workplace spirituality and Organisational Citizenship Behaviour (OCB), with WO serving as the mediator. All values were more than 0.6 and considered reliable. Table 5 also provides insights into other reliability matrices, including composite reliability (CR), Cronbach's alpha and AVE. The overall value for reliability exceeds 0.7, and AVE has a value of more than 0.5, indicating that all values are reliable and in line with recommendations (Hair et al., 2021).

Analysis of structural model

Table 6 and Figure 2 elaborate on the findings of SEM, examining the relationships between various factors, including WC, WO and organisational climate (OC), and their impact on job performance (JP). The first hypothesis suggests that WC negatively influences job performance, and the results support this. The beta coefficient of –0.276 indicates a decrease in job performance with increasing cyberbullying, while the high *t*-statistic of 4.384 and a significant *p*-value of 0.000 provide strong evidence for this relationship. With an R^2 of 0.396, cyberbullying explains a substantial portion of the variance in job performance, reinforcing the robustness of this finding. The second hypothesis, which explores the relationship between WO and job performance, also receives support. The beta coefficient of –0.203 indicates that higher levels of ostracism are associated with reduced job performance. The *t*-statistic of 2.108 and a *p*-value of 0.035 confirm the statistical significance of this effect, and the R^2 value of 0.396 further indicates a moderate explanatory power for this relationship.

The third hypothesis, which examines the interaction effect between WC and organisational climate on job performance, receives only weak support. Although the beta of –0.113 suggests a potential negative relationship, the *p*-value of 0.060 is slightly above the standard threshold of 0.05 for significance, meaning the effect is not statistically significant enough to be conclusive. The *t*-statistic of 1.883, while close to the critical value, does not provide enough evidence to support the hypothesis. The fourth hypothesis examines the interaction between WO and organisational climate on job performance. The results support this hypothesis, as indicated by the beta of 0.152, which suggests a positive moderation. A *t*-statistic of 2.347 and a *p*-value of 0.019 provide sufficient statistical evidence to confirm that a favourable organisational climate can mitigate some of the adverse effects of ostracism on job performance. The analysis reveals that WC and WO have a significant negative impact on job performance, while organisational climate plays a vital role in moderating these effects. The interaction between WC and organisational climate, however, does not show a significant influence on job performance.

TABLE 4: Discriminant validity.

Sr. No.	Constructs	1	2	3	4	5
1	JP	-	-	-	-	-
2	OC	0.516	-	-	-	-
3	WC	0.462	0.369	-	-	-
4	WO	0.577	0.759	0.518	-	-
5	OC × WC	0.415	0.515	0.218	0.705	-
6	OC × WO	0.100	0.081	0.205	0.269	0.435

WC, workplace cyberbullying; JP, job performance; OC, organisational climate; WO, workplace ostracism.

TABLE 5: Factor loading and reliability.

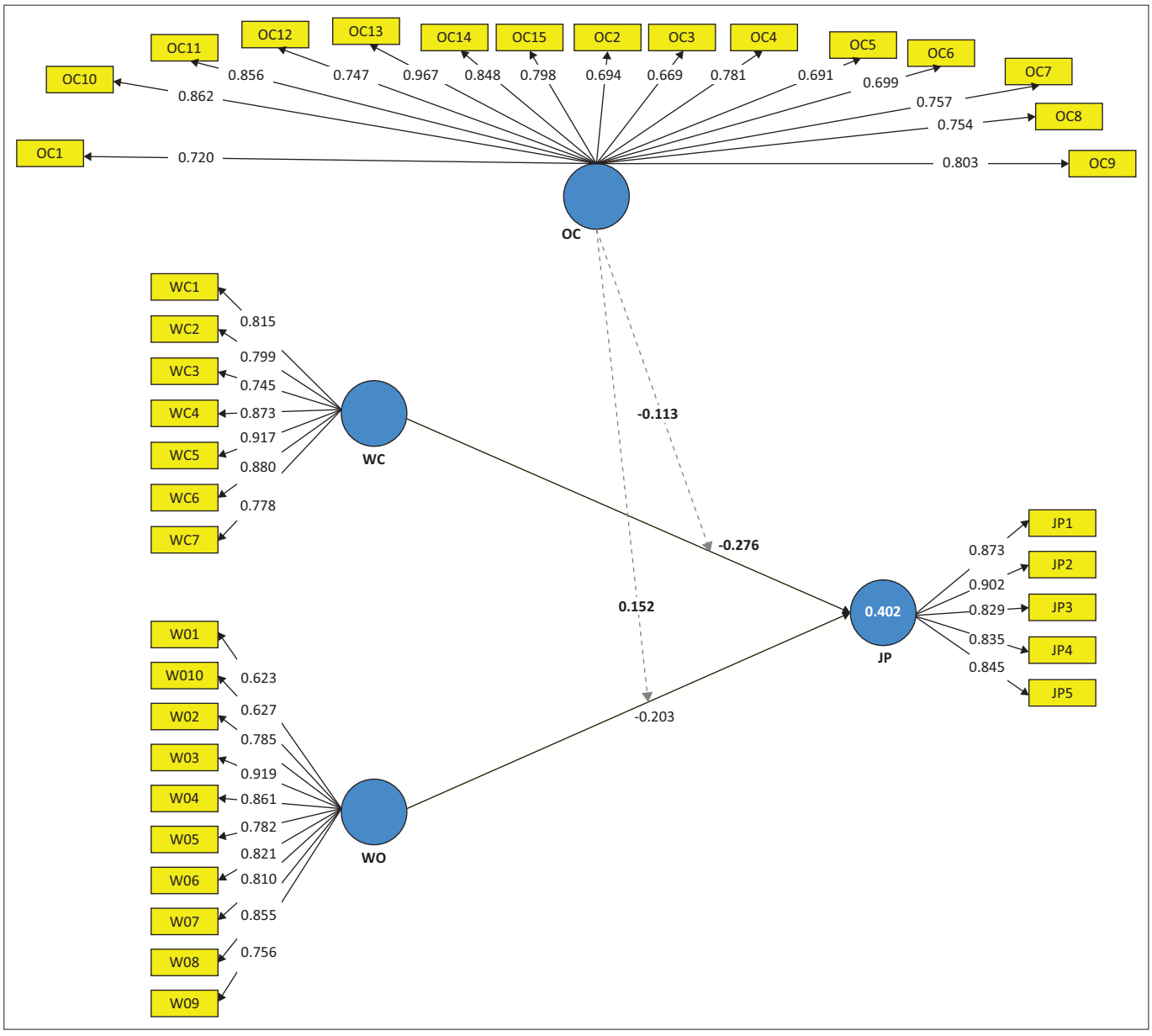
Constructs	Items	Factor loading	Cronbach's alpha	CR	AVE
WC	WC1	0.815	-	-	-
	WC2	0.799	-	-	-
	WC3	0.745	-	-	-
	WC4	0.873	0.941	0.940	0.691
	WC5	0.917	-	-	-
	WC6	0.880	-	-	-
	WC7	0.778	-	-	-
JP	JP1	0.873	-	-	-
	JP2	0.902	-	-	-
	JP3	0.829	0.933	0.933	0.735
	JP4	0.835	-	-	-
	JP5	0.845	-	-	-
OC	OC1	0.720	-	-	-
	OC2	0.694	-	-	-
	OC3	0.669	-	-	-
	OC4	0.781	-	-	-
	OC5	0.691	-	-	-
	OC6	0.699	-	-	-
	OC7	0.757	-	-	-
	OC8	0.754	0.959	0.959	0.609
	OC9	0.803	-	-	-
	OC10	0.862	-	-	-
	OC11	0.856	-	-	-
	OC12	0.747	-	-	-
	OC13	0.967	-	-	-
	OC14	0.848	-	-	-
	OC15	0.798	-	-	-
WO	WO1	0.623	-	-	-
	WO2	0.785	-	-	-
	WO3	0.919	-	-	-
	WO4	0.861	-	-	-
	WO5	0.782	0.942	0.942	0.623
	WO6	0.821	-	-	-
	WO7	0.810	-	-	-
	WO8	0.855	-	-	-
	WO9	0.756	-	-	-
	WO10	0.627	-	-	-

WC, workplace cyberbullying; JP, job performance; OC, organisational climate; WO, workplace ostracism; CR, composite reliability; AVE, average variance extracted.

TABLE 6: Summary of results.

Hypothesis	Standard beta	*t*-stats	*p*	R^2	F^2	Results
WC → JP (H1)	-0.276	4.384	0.000	0.396	0.083	Supported
WO → JP (H2)	-0.203	2.108	0.035	0.396	0.015	Supported
WC × OC → JP (H3)	-0.113	1.883	0.060	-	-	Not supported
WO × OC →JP(H4)	0.152	2.347	0.019	-	-	Supported

WC, workplace cyberbullying; JP, job performance; OC, organisational climate; WO, workplace ostracism.



WC, workplace cyberbullying; JP, job performance; OC, organisational climate; WO, workplace ostracism.

FIGURE 2: Path coefficient and factor loading.

Conclusion and discussion

This study examined the effects of cyberbullying and ostracism in the workplace on employee job performance in Pakistan's IT sector while considering organisational climate as a moderating variable. The main results demonstrate that WC and WO significantly reduce employee job performance. The organisational climate positively modified the relationship between ostracism and job performance although it did not considerably mitigate the relationship between cyberbullying and job performance. The adverse impact of cyberbullying on employee productivity and efficacy is consistent with previous studies (Keskin et al., 2016; Tiamboonprasert & Charoensukmongkol, 2020). Cyberbullying can deplete employees' emotional and cognitive resources, thereby hindering work performance. Employers must use proactive ways to mitigate such habits in the workplace, as they can severely impact both individual performance and organisational outcomes.

Similarly, the adverse relationship between WO and job performance, supported by the previous studies (Zhang & Kwan, 2015), is likely attributable to increased employee disengagement and psychological stress. Workplace ostracism negatively impacts job performance by disrupting social and emotional stability, thereby undermining employees' sense of belonging, self-worth and emotional well-being – essential components for optimal performance (Li et al., 2021). Employers must recognise the harmful effects of ostracism and strive to create a more inclusive and supportive workplace environment. The significant moderating influence of organisational climate on ostracism highlights the importance of a supportive work environment in mitigating stressors and enhancing job performance (Ahmad et al., 2024). This result highlights the importance of a positive and supportive organisational environment in lessening the negative impacts of ostracism. An appropriate organisational climate can help employees mitigate the negative effects of ostracism while maintaining their job effectiveness. This outcome corresponds with the findings of Ahmad et al. (2024), which indicated that the employee paradox mentality and organisational support for innovation are crucial in mitigating the impact of WO on work conduct.

Surprisingly, organisational climate did not significantly moderate the relationship between cyberbullying and job performance. Addressing the repercussions of cyberbullying necessitates individual psychological resilience, digital literacy and occasionally external support structures, in addition to a constructive organisational culture (Samnani & Singh, 2012). The locus of control in reducing the impacts of cyberbullying transitions from the communal context to individual and micro-social dynamics. This suggests that additional characteristics, such as individual resilience or coping strategies, may be more significant in mitigating the effects of cyberbullying, in line with the research of Aziz and Jahan (2021) and Samnani and Singh (2012). Cyberbullying likely operates through mechanisms less shaped by organisational context, highlighting the need for further examination. The study significantly contributes to the dynamics in Pakistan's IT industry by investigating the impact of WC and WO on employee job performance. The results show some critical insights that can guide future research and organisational practices.

This study highlights the necessity for organisations to confront WC and WO to improve employee job performance. The results indicate that although organisational climate can alleviate the impacts of ostracism, additional elements, such as individual resilience, may be essential in countering the adverse consequences of cyberbullying. Later studies should investigate these correlations in different circumstances and study positive organisational variables to achieve a comprehensive knowledge of the interaction between organisational and human factors affecting job performance.

Theoretical implications

The results of the analysis confirm the detrimental impact of WC on employee job performance in IT organisations' settings. The findings align with the tenets of social exchange theory, the baseline of this study, which shows that negative interactions erode the trust and reciprocity necessary for productive organisational relationships. Similarly, WO is identified as a significant detractor from employees' job performance, highlighting the importance of social support and inclusion within organisational settings. Employees feeling ignored or excluded may lack the necessary resources and motivation to excel. This study validates the concept of social exchange by emphasising the concepts of reciprocity and interpersonal relationships.

The results provide detailed insights into the different ways organisational climate moderates the impact of WO and cyberbullying on employee job performance. The organisational climate does not significantly influence the relationship between cyberbullying and performance, suggesting that cyberbullying continues irrespective of the climate and contradicts the social exchange theory. A favourable organisational climate mitigates the detrimental effects of ostracism on performance, hence reinforcing social exchange theory. The authors correlate these results with social exchange theory, which elucidates how reciprocity influences behaviour and outcomes in organisations by equilibrating rewards and costs. Adverse events such as ostracism and cyberbullying disturb this balance and obstruct job performance.

Conducting research in the IT industry in Pakistan also adds contextual relevance to the findings. Rapid technological advancements are a significant requirement of the IT industry, and they are also necessary for a competitive environment where factors such as hierarchical structure, societal norms and organisational culture may influence the prevalence of ostracism and cyberbullying. Based on the findings and contextual nuances, workplace dynamics can unfold within a specific industry and cultural context. Theoretical implications underscore the multifaceted nature of workplace interactions and the importance of fostering positive social exchanges in enhancing employee job performance through improved well-being, particularly in the context of the Pakistani IT industry.

Practical and managerial implications

The research uncovers significant practical and managerial insights. Given that WC and WO significantly damage employee job performance, organisations must cultivate a climate that aggressively discourages such behaviours. Implementing anti-cyberbullying policies, inclusion efforts and training programs focused on respectful communication, dispute resolution and team-building can enhance workplace positivity and job performance. The research indicates that a supportive organisational climate mitigates the adverse effects of ostracism on performance. Consequently, managers should foster an environment in which employees feel appreciated, consistently evaluate the organisational climate through surveys or feedback and encourage a sense of belonging to enhance satisfaction and performance.

Investigations in the IT industry of Islamabad and Rawalpindi indicate that remote communication and digital tools may raise the hazards of cyberbullying and social exclusion. Information technology companies should provide virtual team-building activities and online conflict resolution services. Rooted in social exchange theory, the study highlights the importance of cultivating trust and positive interactions via equitable treatment, transparency and recognition mechanisms. Managers must vigilantly observe workplace dynamics and respond swiftly to indications of cyberbullying or ostracism. Implementing emotional intelligence and conflict resolution training for all personnel, together with integrating explicit anti-bullying measures within HR guidelines, helps foster a safe and supportive environment that encourages employee excellence.

Limitations and recommendations for future research

There are some limitations in the study that other scholars can address in future studies. The study's sample was restricted to IT professionals in Pakistan's twin cities, hence constraining its generalisability to other sectors or geographical areas. Future researchers can replicate the study in other provinces and cities, as well as in different sectors or cultures, to verify the results, particularly in individualistic societies. Other scholars can investigate these relationships in individualistic societies, such as the United States or Western Europe, or in similar contexts. In contrast to collectivist countries such as Pakistan, where group cohesion and social belonging significantly influence employee behaviour, individualistic societies prioritise personal achievement and autonomy. The differences in social norms may alter the impact of WC and WO on job performance, as well as the role of organisational climate in moderating these impacts. Analysing outcomes across cultural contexts will elucidate whether the identified negative effects are universally applicable or specifically arise from collectivist dynamics. This will also enhance the external validity and findings.

Given the existing research, including this study, which focuses on specific industries or locations, future investigations should examine these patterns across various sectors, international organisations and different geographic contexts to enhance generalisability. Comparative analyses across nations and industries, especially outside the IT sector and among young populations, are crucial for enhancing the understanding of workplace mistreatment.

This study does not investigate technical solutions; nevertheless, future research may analyse the impact of AI-driven identification and prevention of cyberbullying, particularly in technology-intensive environments. Utilising experimental or longitudinal designs would provide more robust causal evidence about the effects of workplace mistreatments on job performance and well-being. This research depends on self-reported data; future studies should utilise multi-source methodologies, such as supervisor evaluations and observations, to mitigate bias and enhance measurement validity. Expanding the theoretical frameworks to incorporate the conservation of resources theory or stress–strain models may provide deeper insights into the underlying mechanisms. Future research may also examine further moderating and mediating variables, such as leadership style, social support or psychological resources, and assess specific interventions aimed at mitigating cyberbullying and ostracism, thus promoting a healthier organisational climate and enhancing employee outcomes.

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Authors' contributions

E.H.G. contributed to the conceptualisation and original draft writing of the article. Z.S. was responsible for the supervision. E.H.G. and Z.S. contributed to the literature search and data analysis. Z.S. and N.M. contributed towards the review, and N.M. and M.A.K. were responsible for the revision and funding. All authors contributed to the article, discussed the results and approved the final version for submission and publication.

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Data availability

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author, E.H.G., upon reasonable request. The datasets are being used in other unpublished studies; the datasets for this article are not publicly available.

Disclaimer

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