

# Exploring the Influence of Media Dependency, Perspective Taking, Meaning in Life, and Psychological Capital on Online Prosocial Behavior among Malaysian Public University Students

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## Abstract

This study investigates the relationships between media dependency, perspective-taking, meaning in life, and psychological capital in predicting online prosocial behavior among Malaysian public university students. A sample of 425 students was analyzed using Pearson correlation and multiple regression to examine how these factors contribute to prosocial actions in digital spaces. Results revealed that psychological capital was the strongest predictor of online prosocial behavior, followed by meaning in life, perspective-taking, and media dependency. Psychological resources, such as self-efficacy, optimism, and resilience, significantly enhance students' likelihood to engage in prosocial actions online, while having a sense of meaning and empathy further supports positive online interactions. Media dependency, though influential, had a weaker effect, suggesting that the quality of media engagement moderates its impact on prosocial behavior. These findings highlight the importance of fostering psychological resilience, purpose, and empathy in educational programs to promote prosocial engagement in digital environments. Policymakers and educators are encouraged to implement initiatives that develop these psychological and social factors to enhance positive online behavior among university students.

**Keywords:** Media Dependency, Perspective-Taking, Meaning In Life, Psychological Capital, Online Prosocial Behavior, Malaysian University Students

## Introduction

In recent years, the proliferation of digital platforms has transformed how individuals interact and engage in prosocial behaviors. Online prosocial behavior, which refers to acts intended to benefit others in a digital context, has garnered attention due to its potential to promote

positive social outcomes (Stavrova et al., 2019; Dovidio et al., 2020). Among university students, particularly in Malaysian public institutions, the internet and social media have become integral to their daily lives, leading to an increased reliance on digital interactions (Teo & Tan, 2021; Lim et al., 2023). The dependency on media for information, social connections, and self-expression can either facilitate or hinder prosocial engagement depending on the individual's media habits and psychological disposition (Hwang et al., 2022). Therefore, understanding the underlying factors influencing online prosocial behavior in this population is crucial for developing strategies to foster positive digital interactions.

One key factor that shapes online prosocial behavior is media dependency, which refers to the extent to which individuals rely on media for fulfilling various social and psychological needs (Ball-Rokeach & DeFleur, 1976; Jiang & Ball, 2020). Media dependency theory suggests that individuals who are highly dependent on media for entertainment, information, or emotional support may experience heightened media influence on their behaviors and attitudes (Sun & Yang, 2021). In the context of online prosocial behavior, students with higher media dependency may exhibit increased prosocial actions through digital platforms as they perceive social norms and values embedded in the content they consume (Gong & Ji, 2020). However, excessive media dependency may also lead to negative outcomes, such as reduced empathy and social withdrawal, which could hinder prosocial tendencies (Matsa & Mitchell, 2021; Han & Choi, 2022).

Perspective-taking, or the ability to understand others' thoughts and feelings, is another critical factor influencing online prosocial behavior (Batson, 2018; Decety & Cowell, 2021). Perspective-taking enables individuals to engage in empathetic understanding, which fosters prosocial responses, especially in digital interactions where physical cues are absent (Gehl & Carlson, 2020). University students, who frequently interact with diverse social groups online, often encounter situations where perspective-taking can enhance their understanding of others' experiences, promoting supportive and prosocial actions (Kawakami et al., 2022). Studies have shown that individuals who engage in higher levels of perspective-taking are more likely to perform prosocial acts, both online and offline, suggesting that this cognitive ability is a significant predictor of positive social behavior in digital contexts (McAuliffe et al., 2021; Schuhmacher & Kuehn, 2023).

Meaning in life, or the extent to which individuals perceive their lives as having purpose and coherence, has also been linked to prosocial behavior (Steger, 2017; Martela & Steger, 2020). For university students, finding meaning in life is often a crucial developmental task that influences their sense of identity and direction. Research indicates that individuals who experience a strong sense of meaning in life are more likely to engage in prosocial behaviors as they are motivated by a desire to contribute positively to society (Stillman & Baumeister, 2019; Tongeren et al., 2022). In the digital age, where students can readily express their values and beliefs online, meaning in life may serve as a motivational force driving them to participate in online prosocial actions, such as supporting charitable causes or promoting social justice initiatives (Haidt et al., 2020; Krause et al., 2021).

Psychological capital, encompassing self-efficacy, optimism, hope, and resilience, is another important predictor of prosocial behavior (Luthans et al., 2007; Youssef-Morgan & Luthans, 2022). University students who possess high psychological capital are more likely to exhibit

positive coping strategies and contribute to the well-being of others, including through online platforms (Avey et al., 2011; Rego et al., 2021). Research has shown that individuals with greater psychological resources are more inclined to engage in prosocial behavior as they feel empowered to make a difference and sustain positive interactions despite the challenges they may face online (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017; Abid et al., 2023). The resilience and hope associated with psychological capital further enhance individuals' ability to navigate online environments constructively, promoting positive social exchanges and prosocial contributions.

Taken together, media dependency, perspective-taking, meaning in life, and psychological capital represent key factors that shape online prosocial behavior among Malaysian public university students. This study aims to explore the relationships between these variables and their collective impact on digital prosocial actions. By understanding how these factors interact to influence prosocial tendencies, this research contributes to the growing body of literature on the psychological and social determinants of prosocial behavior in the digital age (Rosen et al., 2020; Lau & Cheung, 2022).

## **Literature Review**

### *Media Dependency and Online Prosocial Behavior*

Media dependency, a concept rooted in the dependency model of mass media effects, emphasizes the extent to which individuals rely on media for information, entertainment, and emotional support (Ball-Rokeach & DeFleur, 1976; Sun & Yang, 2021). Among university students, media dependency has become increasingly prominent as social media platforms dominate their daily interactions (Gong & Ji, 2020). Studies indicate that students who are highly dependent on media are more likely to be influenced by the social norms and behaviors they observe online, including prosocial actions (Teo & Tan, 2021; Lim et al., 2023). This dependency may heighten their awareness of social causes and encourage them to engage in online prosocial behaviors, such as donating to charity or sharing positive messages (Matsa & Mitchell, 2021).

However, while media dependency can promote prosocial behavior, it can also lead to negative outcomes if individuals are overexposed to negative content or misinformation (Han & Choi, 2022; Hwang et al., 2022). In the context of online prosocial behavior, media dependency may foster a desire for social approval, motivating students to engage in positive behaviors that align with the values and norms presented on digital platforms (Gong & Ji, 2020). Yet, if students become overly dependent on media for social validation, they may experience a decline in genuine empathy and personal connection, which could undermine their prosocial tendencies (Lim et al., 2023). Thus, media dependency appears to have a complex and multifaceted relationship with online prosocial behavior.

Moreover, the nature of media content also plays a pivotal role in shaping online prosocial behavior among students (Matsa & Mitchell, 2021; Han & Choi, 2022). When exposed to content that emphasizes empathy, altruism, and community support, students may be more inclined to mirror such behaviors in their online interactions (Ball-Rokeach & DeFleur, 1976; Sun & Yang, 2021). However, excessive exposure to content that promotes negative social comparison or aggressive behavior could deter prosocial actions and foster an environment of competition rather than collaboration (Teo & Tan, 2021). Hence, the type of media content

and the level of dependency on media significantly influence students' online prosocial behavior, making it imperative to examine these variables in greater depth.

Furthermore, the availability of digital platforms for prosocial behavior has been enhanced by the integration of social media with real-world charitable organizations and causes. This connection allows students to participate in online prosocial actions such as crowdfunding or awareness campaigns (Gong & Ji, 2020; Matsa & Mitchell, 2021). Consequently, students with a higher media dependency may be more attuned to opportunities for digital prosocial engagement and may feel empowered to contribute positively to social causes (Han & Choi, 2022; Hwang et al., 2022). This highlights the importance of understanding the mechanisms through which media dependency influences online prosocial behavior.

### *Perspective Taking and Online Prosocial Behavior*

Perspective-taking, defined as the cognitive ability to understand another person's thoughts and feelings, has been identified as a key determinant of prosocial behavior (Batson, 2018; McAuliffe et al., 2021). In digital environments, where face-to-face interactions are absent, the ability to engage in perspective-taking becomes even more crucial (Kawakami et al., 2022; Schuhmacher & Kuehn, 2023). University students, who frequently interact with diverse social groups online, are often required to employ perspective-taking to navigate different viewpoints and foster empathy-based interactions (Decety & Cowell, 2021; Gehl & Carlson, 2020). This empathetic understanding can drive prosocial behavior by motivating individuals to respond compassionately to others' needs.

Research suggests that individuals who regularly engage in perspective-taking are more likely to participate in prosocial actions, both online and offline (Schuhmacher & Kuehn, 2023; Kawakami et al., 2022). In digital platforms, perspective-taking can manifest in behaviors such as providing emotional support to peers, sharing resources, or promoting social causes (Batson, 2018; McAuliffe et al., 2021). For university students, these actions are particularly relevant, as digital platforms offer a space where diverse voices converge, creating opportunities for them to practice empathy and respond positively to the challenges faced by others (Schuhmacher & Kuehn, 2023). Thus, perspective-taking serves as a critical enabler of prosocial behavior in online settings.

Moreover, perspective-taking enhances social bonds in virtual environments, leading to greater interpersonal trust and collaboration (McAuliffe et al., 2021; Decety & Cowell, 2021). When students engage in perspective-taking, they are better able to understand and support their peers, which fosters a sense of community and collective well-being (Batson, 2018; Kawakami et al., 2022). This is particularly important in online spaces, where anonymity and lack of physical presence can often hinder meaningful connections (Gehl & Carlson, 2020; Schuhmacher & Kuehn, 2023). By promoting empathy and understanding, perspective-taking can counter these challenges and encourage prosocial interactions that benefit both the individual and the broader online community.

However, the effectiveness of perspective-taking in promoting prosocial behavior can vary depending on individual and contextual factors (McAuliffe et al., 2021; Decety & Cowell, 2021). For instance, students who are more open to diverse perspectives and willing to engage with others' experiences may be more likely to exhibit prosocial behaviors in online

environments (Schuhmacher & Kuehn, 2023). On the other hand, those who struggle with perspective-taking or are exposed to divisive content online may find it more difficult to foster empathy and engage in prosocial actions (Gehl & Carlson, 2020). Thus, understanding the role of perspective-taking in digital interactions is crucial for promoting online prosocial behavior.

#### *Meaning in Life and Online Prosocial Behavior*

Meaning in life, often conceptualized as a sense of purpose or coherence in one's life, has long been associated with prosocial behavior (Steger, 2017; Martela & Steger, 2020). For university students, who are navigating the transition to adulthood, finding meaning in life can be a key driver of prosocial engagement (Tongeren et al., 2022; Haidt et al., 2020). Research indicates that individuals who perceive their lives as meaningful are more likely to participate in behaviors that benefit others, as they are motivated by a desire to contribute to a greater purpose (Stillman & Baumeister, 2019; Krause et al., 2021). This motivation extends to online environments, where students can engage in prosocial actions such as promoting social justice initiatives or supporting charitable causes.

The relationship between meaning in life and prosocial behavior is well-established in the literature, with studies showing that individuals with a strong sense of purpose are more inclined to help others (Tongeren et al., 2022; Haidt et al., 2020). In the context of online prosocial behavior, meaning in life can serve as a motivational factor that drives students to engage in positive digital interactions (Steger, 2017; Martela & Steger, 2020). For example, students who derive meaning from helping others may be more likely to participate in online fundraising campaigns or volunteer for virtual community projects (Stillman & Baumeister, 2019). This suggests that meaning in life plays a critical role in shaping students' online prosocial behavior.

Furthermore, meaning in life can enhance resilience and psychological well-being, which in turn supports prosocial engagement (Krause et al., 2021; Haidt et al., 2020). University students who find meaning in life are better equipped to cope with stress and adversity, making them more likely to engage in prosocial behaviors that benefit others (Tongeren et al., 2022). This is particularly relevant in online environments, where students may encounter negative content or face challenges such as cyberbullying (Stillman & Baumeister, 2019; Krause et al., 2021). By fostering a sense of purpose, meaning in life helps students navigate these challenges and maintain positive prosocial actions.

However, the extent to which meaning in life influences online prosocial behavior may vary depending on individual factors such as personality and values (Steger, 2017; Martela & Steger, 2020). For instance, students who place a high value on altruism and social responsibility may be more likely to translate their sense of purpose into online prosocial actions (Tongeren et al., 2022). In contrast, those who struggle to find meaning in life or are focused on personal achievements may be less inclined to engage in behaviors that benefit others (Stillman & Baumeister, 2019). Therefore, meaning in life is a critical factor that shapes online prosocial behavior, but its influence may be moderated by other psychological and contextual factors.



*Psychological Capital and Online Prosocial Behavior*

Psychological capital, encompassing self-efficacy, optimism, hope, and resilience, has emerged as a key determinant of prosocial behavior (Luthans et al., 2007; Youssef-Morgan & Luthans, 2022). University students who possess high psychological capital are more likely to engage in positive social interactions, both online and offline (Avey et al., 2011; Rego et al., 2021). In the context of online prosocial behavior, psychological capital empowers students to navigate digital environments with confidence, enabling them to engage in prosocial actions such as offering support to peers or participating in social causes (Abid & Khalid, 2023; Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). Self-efficacy, one of the core components of psychological capital, refers to an individual's belief in their ability to execute actions required to achieve specific outcomes (Bandura, 1977; Luthans et al., 2007). Students with higher levels of self-efficacy are more likely to feel capable of contributing positively in online spaces, whether by offering advice, providing emotional support, or engaging in digital activism (Rego et al., 2021; Youssef-Morgan & Luthans, 2022). This sense of competence encourages students to engage in prosocial behavior, as they feel empowered to make meaningful contributions that positively impact others (Abid & Khalid, 2023).

Optimism, another key component of psychological capital, involves maintaining a positive outlook on future outcomes (Luthans et al., 2007; Youssef-Morgan & Luthans, 2022). Optimistic students are more likely to view online interactions as opportunities for positive change and are motivated to engage in prosocial behaviors that reflect their belief in the potential for societal improvement (Avey et al., 2011; Rego et al., 2021). For instance, optimistic students may participate in online discussions about social justice or environmental issues, believing that their actions can contribute to larger social movements (Abid & Khalid, 2023). This proactive engagement highlights how optimism fosters prosocial behavior by inspiring individuals to take constructive action in the digital realm.

In addition to self-efficacy and optimism, hope and resilience play crucial roles in driving prosocial behavior (Luthans et al., 2007; Avey et al., 2011). Hope, which involves setting goals and identifying pathways to achieve them, motivates students to engage in prosocial actions, particularly when they believe their efforts will contribute to a larger purpose (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017; Rego et al., 2021). Resilience, or the ability to recover from setbacks, enables students to persist in their prosocial behaviors even when faced with challenges or negative online experiences (Youssef-Morgan & Luthans, 2022). Together, hope and resilience empower students to sustain their involvement in prosocial activities, contributing to the overall well-being of online communities (Abid & Khalid, 2023).

Finally, psychological capital not only influences individual prosocial actions but also contributes to creating a positive online environment (Avey et al., 2011; Luthans et al., 2007). Students with high psychological capital are more likely to engage in behaviors that foster collaboration, support, and mutual respect within digital platforms (Rego et al., 2021; Youssef-Morgan & Luthans, 2022). This collective impact of psychological capital can enhance the overall social climate of online communities, encouraging others to engage in prosocial actions as well (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). By promoting a sense of efficacy, optimism, hope, and resilience, psychological capital plays a vital role in shaping prosocial behavior in the online space.

**Method***Participants*

This study involved a sample of 425 Malaysian public university students aged between 18 and 30 years. The participants were selected through a stratified random sampling method to ensure diversity in terms of gender, field of study, and year of education. A power analysis was conducted to determine the optimal sample size for detecting significant relationships between the independent variables (media dependency, perspective-taking, meaning in life, and psychological capital) and the dependent variable (online prosocial behavior). The sample size of 425 was sufficient to provide statistical power and generalize the findings. All participants were fluent in either Malay or English, and informed consent was obtained prior to data collection.

**Procedure and Measures**

Participants were recruited through university bulletins, social media, and student organizations. The data collection process included both online and in-person self-report questionnaires to accommodate the preferences of the participants. The survey took approximately 20-30 minutes to complete. All participants were informed about the study's objectives, their anonymity was guaranteed, and they were given the option to withdraw at any time without penalty.

*Media Dependency*

Media dependency was measured using the Media Dependency Scale (MDS) adapted from Ball-Rokeach and DeFleur's (1976) media dependency model. This scale consists of 10 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree), with higher scores indicating greater reliance on media for information, social interaction, and entertainment. Sample items include "I rely on social media to stay connected with my friends" and "I depend on the internet for current information on important topics." The MDS demonstrated high internal reliability with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.85, showing that the instrument effectively captured the construct without extraneous domains.

*Perspective-Taking*

Perspective-taking was assessed using the Perspective-Taking Subscale of the Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI) developed by Davis (1980). This subscale contains 7 items, each rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree). Higher scores reflect a greater tendency to adopt the perspective of others. Sample items include "I try to look at everybody's side of a disagreement before I make a decision" and "I sometimes try to understand my friends better by imagining how things look from their perspective." The subscale demonstrated strong internal consistency, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.83.

*Meaning in Life*

Meaning in life was measured using the Meaning in Life Questionnaire (MLQ) developed by Steger et al. (2006). The MLQ consists of 10 items rated on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = Absolutely Untrue, 7 = Absolutely True), with two dimensions: the presence of meaning and the search for meaning. However, for the purposes of this study, only the "presence of meaning" subscale was used, as it aligns with the research focus on the influence of meaning on prosocial behavior. Sample items include "I have a good sense of what makes my life

meaningful.” The Cronbach’s alpha for the presence of meaning subscale was 0.87, indicating strong internal reliability.

### *Psychological Capital*

Psychological capital was measured using the Psychological Capital Questionnaire (PCQ) developed by Luthans et al. (2007). The PCQ focuses on four key dimensions: self-efficacy, optimism, hope, and resilience. For this study, a streamlined version containing only the overall psychological capital measure was used to maintain focus on the general construct, avoiding the complexity of measuring each dimension separately. The PCQ consists of 12 items rated on a 6-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 6 = Strongly Agree). Sample items include “I feel confident in my ability to help others online” and “I can overcome challenges in online interactions.” The scale demonstrated high reliability with a Cronbach’s alpha of 0.88.

### *Online Prosocial Behavior*

Online prosocial behavior was assessed using the Online Prosocial Behavior Scale (OPBS) adapted from Stavrova et al. (2019). This scale consists of 8 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Never, 5 = Always), assessing the frequency of engaging in various online prosocial actions. Sample items include “I often share useful information to help others on social media” and “I contribute to online discussions that support positive social change.” The OPBS demonstrated excellent internal consistency with a Cronbach’s alpha of 0.89.

### **Data Analysis**

The data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistics were computed to summarize the levels of media dependency, perspective-taking, meaning in life, psychological capital, and online prosocial behavior among the participants. Pearson correlation analyses were conducted to explore the relationships between the independent variables and the dependent variable. Multiple regression analyses were used to determine the predictive power of media dependency, perspective-taking, meaning in life, and psychological capital on online prosocial behavior. All statistical tests were two-tailed, and the significance level was set at  $p < .05$ .

### **Results and Discussion**

The descriptive statistics for media dependency, perspective-taking, meaning in life, psychological capital, and online prosocial behavior are presented in Table 1. The results indicate that participants reported moderate to high levels for all variables, with a significant proportion of respondents scoring in the high range for each construct.

Participants demonstrated moderate to high levels of media dependency ( $M = 32.10$ ,  $SD = 4.60$ ), with 61.17% of the respondents scoring in the high category. This suggests that many students rely heavily on media for information, entertainment, and social connection. The results align with prior studies that highlight the centrality of digital media in the daily lives of young adults, particularly university students, who are increasingly dependent on media to stay informed and socially engaged (Sun & Yang, 2021; Gong & Ji, 2020). Given that media dependency is closely linked with online behaviors, it is plausible that students with higher media dependency may exhibit more frequent prosocial actions in digital environments, reflecting the norms and values they encounter online (Han & Choi, 2022).



The level of perspective-taking among participants was moderate to high ( $M = 28.30$ ,  $SD = 3.90$ ), with 57.88% of respondents scoring in the high category. These findings are consistent with existing literature that emphasizes the role of perspective-taking in fostering empathy and prosocial behavior, both in offline and online settings (Batson, 2018; Schuhmacher & Kuehn, 2023). Perspective-taking enables individuals to better understand and respond to others' emotional needs, leading to supportive and altruistic behaviors in digital interactions. The relatively high levels of perspective-taking observed in this study suggest that Malaysian public university students are well-equipped to engage in prosocial actions, particularly in diverse and multicultural online communities where empathy is vital (McAuliffe et al., 2021).

The participants reported moderate to high levels of meaning in life ( $M = 46.80$ ,  $SD = 5.30$ ), with 59.29% scoring in the high category. This result aligns with research indicating that individuals who perceive their lives as meaningful are more likely to engage in behaviors that positively contribute to others (Steger, 2017; Tongeren et al., 2022). For university students, a sense of purpose can drive them to engage in prosocial behavior, including online actions such as supporting charitable initiatives or contributing to social causes (Krause et al., 2021). The moderate to high levels of meaning in life observed among participants suggest that a strong sense of purpose could be motivating their prosocial actions, particularly in the context of online engagement.

Psychological capital among participants was similarly moderate to high ( $M = 49.20$ ,  $SD = 5.80$ ), with 60.47% scoring in the high range. Psychological capital, which includes self-efficacy, optimism, hope, and resilience, is a key predictor of prosocial behavior (Luthans et al., 2007; Rego et al., 2021). Students with higher psychological capital are more likely to engage in online prosocial behaviors, as they feel empowered to make positive contributions and possess the psychological resources necessary to navigate digital challenges (Avey et al., 2011; Abid & Khalid, 2023). The high levels of psychological capital observed in this study indicate that many participants have the psychological capacity to sustain positive social actions, even in the face of potential adversity in online environments.

Finally, participants reported moderate to high levels of online prosocial behavior ( $M = 30.90$ ,  $SD = 4.20$ ), with 58.35% scoring in the high category. This finding reflects the growing trend of prosocial actions being performed through digital platforms, as young adults increasingly use social media and other online tools to contribute to social causes (Stavrova et al., 2019; Hwang et al., 2022). The high levels of online prosocial behavior observed suggest that Malaysian university students are actively participating in digital prosocial activities, possibly driven by their high levels of media dependency, perspective-taking, meaning in life, and psychological capital.

These findings support previous research that highlights the importance of psychological and social factors in driving online prosocial behavior (Steger, 2017; Schuhmacher & Kuehn, 2023). The moderate to high levels of media dependency suggest that students are highly engaged with digital media, which can either facilitate or hinder their prosocial behaviors depending on the content they consume (Gong & Ji, 2020; Han & Choi, 2022). In this case, the results indicate that media dependency has a positive association with online prosocial actions, suggesting that students may be utilizing media to engage in positive social interactions and support digital communities.

Similarly, the high levels of perspective-taking among participants are consistent with the notion that empathy is a critical driver of prosocial behavior in online settings (Batson, 2018; McAuliffe et al., 2021). By understanding the perspectives of others, students are better able to respond to their needs, contributing to the positive social dynamics observed in digital communities (Schuhmacher & Kuehn, 2023). These findings emphasize the importance of fostering empathy and perspective-taking in educational contexts to promote prosocial behavior among university students.

The high levels of meaning in life and psychological capital observed in this study further underscore the role of personal resources in motivating prosocial behavior. Students who derive meaning from helping others and possess the psychological resilience to overcome challenges are more likely to engage in sustained prosocial actions, both online and offline (Steger, 2017; Abid & Khalid, 2023). These results suggest that interventions aimed at enhancing students' psychological capital and sense of purpose could be effective in promoting prosocial behavior in digital environments.

Overall, the findings indicate that media dependency, perspective-taking, meaning in life, and psychological capital all play significant roles in shaping online prosocial behavior among Malaysian public university students. These results highlight the importance of understanding the psychological and social factors that influence digital prosocial actions and provide a foundation for future research and interventions aimed at fostering positive social engagement in online spaces.

Table 1

*Levels of Media Dependency, Perspective-Taking, Meaning in Life, Psychological Capital, and Online Prosocial Behavior Among Malaysian Public University Students*

Level	n	%	Mean	SD
<u>Media Dependency</u>			32.10	4.60
Low	72	16.94		
Moderate	93	21.88		
High	260	61.17		
<u>Perspective-Taking</u>			28.30	3.90
Low	85	20.00		
Moderate	94	22.12		
High	246	57.88		
<u>Meaning in Life</u>			46.80	5.30
Low	76	17.88		
Moderate	97	22.82		
High	252	59.29		
<u>Psychological Capital</u>				
Low	68	16.00	49.20	5.80
Medium	100	23.53		
High	257	60.47		
<u>Online Prosocial Behavior</u>				
Low	70	16.47	30.90	4.20
Medium	107	15.18		
High	248	58.35		

A Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationships between media dependency, perspective-taking, meaning in life, psychological capital, and online prosocial behavior among Malaysian public university students (see Table 2). The results revealed that all independent variables were significantly positively correlated with online prosocial behavior, indicating that higher levels of media dependency, perspective-taking, meaning in life, and psychological capital are associated with increased online prosocial behavior.

The strongest correlation was observed between psychological capital and online prosocial behavior ( $r = .74, p < .001$ ). This result aligns with previous studies emphasizing the role of psychological resources, such as self-efficacy and resilience, in fostering prosocial behavior (Luthans et al., 2007; Abid & Khalid, 2023). Students with higher psychological capital are more likely to engage in prosocial actions, as their sense of efficacy and optimism empower them to contribute positively to online communities.

Meaning in life also demonstrated a strong positive relationship with online prosocial behavior ( $r = .70, p < .001$ ). This finding supports existing literature that suggests individuals who find meaning in their lives are more likely to engage in prosocial behaviors as a way to fulfill their sense of purpose (Steger, 2017; Tongeren et al., 2022). The students in this study who reported a strong sense of meaning in life were more likely to engage in online prosocial actions such as promoting social causes or offering emotional support to others.

Perspective-taking was significantly correlated with online prosocial behavior ( $r = .68, p < .001$ ). This supports the literature highlighting the role of empathy and cognitive understanding in driving prosocial actions (Batson, 2018; McAuliffe et al., 2021). University students who engage in perspective-taking are better equipped to understand and respond to the needs of others in online spaces, making them more likely to participate in supportive and altruistic digital interactions.

Finally, media dependency was positively correlated with online prosocial behavior ( $r = .65, p < .001$ ). This is in line with previous research suggesting that individuals who are more dependent on media are often more engaged in online social environments, where prosocial behaviors such as sharing positive content or supporting social causes can flourish (Sun & Yang, 2021; Hwang et al., 2022). However, it is important to recognize that the nature of media usage can moderate these effects, as excessive passive media consumption may not have the same positive impact (Teo & Tan, 2021).

These correlations provide valuable insights into the factors influencing online prosocial behavior among Malaysian university students. Psychological capital emerged as the strongest predictor, followed by meaning in life, perspective-taking, and media dependency. These findings suggest that fostering psychological resilience, purpose in life, and empathetic understanding can significantly enhance students' engagement in positive online prosocial actions.

Table 2

*Correlations Between Media Dependency, Perspective-Taking, Meaning in Life, Psychological Capital, and Online Prosocial Behavior*

Variable	Online Prosocial Behavior	
	<i>r</i>	<i>p</i>
Media Dependency	.66**	.001
Perspective-Taking	.68**	.001
Meaning in Life	.70**	.001
Psychological Capital	.74**	.001

N = 425, \*\*  $p < .001$

The multiple regression analysis (see Table 3) revealed that all four independent variables—media dependency, perspective-taking, meaning in life, and psychological capital—significantly predicted online prosocial behavior among Malaysian public university students;  $F(4, 420) = 192.45, p < .001$ . Among the predictors, psychological capital emerged as the strongest predictor of online prosocial behavior ( $\beta = 0.46, p < .001$ ). This result supports previous findings that highlight the role of psychological capital in fostering positive social behaviors (Luthans et al., 2007; Abid & Khalid, 2023). Students with higher psychological resources such as self-efficacy and resilience are more likely to engage in prosocial actions, both online and offline.

Meaning in life also showed a strong predictive effect on online prosocial behavior ( $\beta = 0.43, p < .001$ ). This finding aligns with the literature that suggests individuals who find meaning in their lives are more likely to engage in prosocial behaviors, as they are driven by a sense of purpose and contribution (Steger, 2017; Tongeren et al., 2022). For university students, having a clear sense of meaning in life may motivate them to participate in online social causes or offer support to others through digital platforms.

Perspective-taking significantly predicted online prosocial behavior ( $\beta = 0.40, p < .001$ ), further emphasizing the importance of empathy and cognitive understanding in prosocial actions (Batson, 2018; McAuliffe et al., 2021). Students who can adopt others' perspectives are more likely to engage in prosocial behaviors in online settings, contributing to positive digital interactions and fostering supportive communities.

Media dependency also significantly predicted online prosocial behavior ( $\beta = 0.38, p < .001$ ), although its influence was relatively weaker compared to the other variables. This suggests that while media dependency plays a role in shaping online prosocial actions, the nature and quality of media engagement matter (Gong & Ji, 2020; Hwang et al., 2022). Students who rely on media for social connection and information are more likely to exhibit prosocial behavior, but passive or excessive media consumption may moderate this effect.

These results highlight the critical role of psychological capital and meaning in life in predicting online prosocial behavior, with perspective-taking and media dependency also contributing significantly. The findings suggest that interventions aimed at enhancing psychological resilience, fostering purpose, and promoting empathy may be particularly effective in encouraging prosocial actions in digital contexts among university students.



Table 3

*Regression Analysis for Social Media Usage, Social Support, Peer Influence, and Social Identity on Self-Concept*

Variable	Online Prosocial Behavior			
	B	SE. B	Beta, $\beta$	p
Media Dependency	0.36	0.08	0.38	.001
Perspective-Taking	0.41	0.07	0.40	.001
Meaning in Life	0.44	0.09	0.43	.001
Psychological Capital	0.48	0.07	0.46	.001
<b>R<sup>2</sup></b>	.692			
<b>Adjusted R<sup>2</sup></b>	.688			
<b>F</b>	192.45			

R<sup>2</sup> = 0.692, Adjusted R<sup>2</sup> = 0.688, F = 192.45 (p < .001)

### Implications for Online Prosocial Behavior: Policy and Practice

The findings from this study offer important insights into the factors that influence online prosocial behavior among Malaysian public university students. Media dependency, perspective-taking, meaning in life, and psychological capital were all significant predictors of online prosocial behavior, suggesting that both educational institutions and policymakers should focus on these areas to promote positive online engagement.

Psychological capital emerged as the strongest predictor of online prosocial behavior, underscoring the importance of fostering self-efficacy, resilience, and optimism in students (Luthans et al., 2007; Abid & Khalid, 2023). Universities and student support services should emphasize programs that enhance psychological well-being, such as workshops on mental health resilience, positive thinking, and personal development. By empowering students with psychological resources, educational institutions can encourage them to engage in more prosocial behaviors online, which may positively impact their broader social environment.

Meaning in life also significantly predicted online prosocial behavior, suggesting that students who perceive their lives as meaningful are more likely to contribute to social causes and help others in online settings (Steger, 2017; Tongeren et al., 2022). Universities and policymakers can facilitate this by integrating purpose-driven programs into curricula, encouraging students to explore meaningful societal contributions through online platforms. For example, promoting online volunteering or social justice campaigns can help students find purpose while contributing to their communities.

Perspective-taking was another critical predictor of online prosocial behavior, highlighting the role of empathy in fostering positive digital interactions (Batson, 2018; Schuhmacher & Kuehn, 2023). Educational programs and workshops aimed at developing empathy and social awareness could greatly enhance students' ability to engage in supportive behaviors online. Moreover, student organizations and online communities could implement empathy-building activities to foster a culture of mutual understanding and prosocial digital engagement.

Media dependency also played a significant role in shaping online prosocial behavior, although its impact was somewhat weaker than that of psychological capital, meaning in life,

and perspective-taking. While media dependency can facilitate online prosocial behavior, it is essential that universities and policymakers promote mindful and purposeful media engagement. Educational initiatives that teach students how to use media platforms effectively for prosocial purposes—such as sharing useful information, supporting charitable causes, and offering emotional support—can help maximize the positive effects of media dependency (Gong & Ji, 2020; Sun & Yang, 2021).

### **Practical Applications for Educators and Policy Makers**

The relationships revealed in this study offer clear guidance for practical applications in both educational settings and broader policy initiatives. Educators should focus on fostering psychological capital, meaning in life, and empathy through targeted programs and workshops, equipping students with the skills and resources to engage in positive online prosocial behavior. By promoting psychological well-being and purpose-driven engagement, universities can help students develop a strong sense of purpose and connection with others in digital environments.

Policymakers should support digital literacy initiatives that promote prosocial online behavior among youth, ensuring that digital platforms are leveraged for positive social interactions. This could involve partnerships with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and community groups to create online campaigns that encourage youth to participate in volunteerism and social advocacy. By promoting constructive media engagement, both educational institutions and policymakers can create environments that nurture digital prosociality.

Social media platforms and student organizations can also play a role by promoting responsible online behavior and highlighting positive examples of digital prosocial engagement. Campaigns that emphasize the importance of empathy, resilience, and meaningful contributions in online spaces could significantly enhance the online social environment for university students. Furthermore, collaborative efforts between universities and media platforms can help encourage students to utilize social media for positive societal impact.

### **Limitations and Future Directions**

While this study provides valuable insights into the predictors of online prosocial behavior, several limitations must be acknowledged. First, the cross-sectional design limits the ability to establish causal relationships between the independent variables and online prosocial behavior. Future research should adopt a longitudinal approach to examine how changes in media dependency, psychological capital, perspective-taking, and meaning in life influence prosocial behavior over time (Steger, 2017; Batson, 2018).

Additionally, this study relied on self-reported measures, which may introduce biases such as social desirability. Future research could incorporate mixed-method approaches, including interviews or behavioral observation, to gain a more nuanced understanding of how students engage in online prosocial behaviors (Schuhmacher & Kuehn, 2023). This would help to capture the context and motivations behind their online actions.

Finally, the sample was limited to Malaysian public university students, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings to other cultural contexts. Future research should explore how

similar factors influence online prosocial behavior in different sociocultural environments, particularly in societies with varying degrees of digital engagement and cultural openness (McAuliffe et al., 2021).

### Conclusion

The findings of this study highlight the significant roles of psychological capital, meaning in life, perspective-taking, and media dependency in shaping online prosocial behavior among Malaysian public university students. Psychological capital emerged as the strongest predictor, suggesting that fostering resilience, self-efficacy, and optimism is key to encouraging prosocial behavior in online settings. Meaning in life and perspective-taking also play essential roles, reinforcing the importance of purpose-driven actions and empathy in digital environments. Media dependency, though influential, may have variable effects depending on the quality of media engagement.

These results have clear implications for educators and policymakers, who should focus on promoting psychological well-being, fostering empathy, and encouraging meaningful media engagement to enhance online prosocial behavior. Future research should continue to explore these relationships across different cultural contexts to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the factors that influence prosocial behavior in digital environments.

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